A Critical Lens on Peace: Examining Conflict and Resistance in Indonesian Buddhist Studies[1]

Jesada Buaban[2]

Abstract

This paper offers a critical examination of academic literature on Buddhism in Indonesia by analyzing 30 sources—written in both Indonesian and English—published between 2015 and 2025. Utilizing a critical analysis approach, it conducts a literature review that engages these works in dialogue with one another to identify and address gaps in the field. The central question guiding this study is: what remains overlooked when scholars primarily interpret religion

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[2] Ph.D. candidate in the Inter-Religious Studies Program, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, Email: jesada.tee@gmail.com

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as a force of harmony and peace? The analysis reveals that framing religion solely as peaceful leads to three major oversights: (1) an emphasis on unity that ignores underlying conflicts; (2) a neglect of hegemonic power dynamics and forms of resistance; and (3) a focus on religious leaders at the expense of recognizing other actors involved in shaping religious identity. This research suggests that to fully grasp the complexity of religion—beyond its peaceful dimensions—scholars should incorporate perspectives from outside Buddhist studies, as these can offer valuable insights into underexplored aspects of religious formation.

Keywords: Buddhist Studies; charismatic authority; Indonesia; pluralism; religious conflict

1. Introduction

The resurgence of interest in Buddhist studies in Indonesia can be traced back to the nineteenth century, aligning with the broader revival of Buddhism in the region. Historically, Buddhism declined following the fall of the Majapahit Kingdom in the early 16th century (Priastana, 2014). However, recorded evidence indicates that Buddhism began to reemerge in the 17th century, particularly with the arrival of the Chinese diaspora. Jack Meng-Tat Chia (2020) notes that the Jin de Yuan Shrine, now known as Vihara Dharma Bhakti, was established in Jakarta in 1650 and became temple to eighteen Mahayana monks. Nonetheless, according to Jinarakkhita—Indonesia's first Theravada monk—Mahayana monks who were previously in Indonesia primarily engaged in ritual activities rather than educational pursuits (Juangari, 2022). As such, the formal study of Buddhism in Indonesia is often considered to have begun in 1883 with the founding of the Theosophical Society in Pekalongan, Central Java (Yulianti, 2020). This organization aimed to explore Eastern religions broadly, encompassing not only Buddhism but also Islam, Hinduism, Chinese religious traditions, and other spiritual practices.

Although the Theosophical Society aimed to study Eastern religions in general, the first organization specifically dedicated to Buddhism in Indonesia is considered to be the Java Buddhist Association (JBA), founded by Dutch scholars Josias van Dienst and E.E. Powell. Due to its strong ties with the International Buddhist Mission in Myanmar, the JBA was inclined toward the Theravada tradition. In addition to organizing lectures, the association also

published a magazine titled *Nama Buddhaya* to educate the public about Buddhism. Five years later, in 1934, Buddhist journalist Kwee Tek Hoay established the Batavia Buddhist Association (BBA). Unlike the JBA, the BBA aimed to promote Chinese religious traditions—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism—arguing that Chinese Indonesians should be given the opportunity to learn about and preserve their cultural and religious heritage, rather than focusing solely on Theravada Buddhism. To support this mission, Kwee Tek Hoay published two magazines: *Moestika Dharma* and *Sam Kauw Gwat Po* (Brown, 2004).

The arrival of Narada, a Theravada monk from Sri Lanka, in Java in 1934 significantly transformed the Buddhist landscape in Indonesia. Motivated by Narada's presence and teachings, various Buddhist groups began to collaborate more closely, and the Indonesian Buddhist community became increasingly acquainted with the Theravada tradition. This growing popularity of Theravada Buddhism likely contributed to the emergence of focused Buddhist studies and influenced Tee Boan-an, a Chinese Indonesian, to pursue ordination as a Theravada monk, later known as Jinarakkhita (1932–2002). Jinarakkhita's founding of the Indonesian Laymen and Laywomen Brotherhood (*Persaudaraan Upasaka Upasika Indonesia, PUUI*) in 1955 marked a pivotal moment in the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia. Through this organization, lay practitioners received training in both Buddhist doctrine and ritual practice, enabling them to take on leadership roles within their local communities (Buaban et al., 2024).

The Indonesian government has historically influenced the practice of Buddhism, particularly during Suharto's New Order era (1965–1998) when assimilation policies were enforced. For Buddhism to gain official recognition by the state, it was required to interpret the concept of *Adi-Buddha*, or the Primordial Buddha, as Supreme God. Moreover, core teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, karma, reincarnation, and the Bodhisattva ideal were highlighted and incorporated into school curricula (Suryadinata, 2014). Buddhist groups that failed to comply with these state-imposed standards faced exclusion from the National Buddhist Federation (*Perwalian Umat Buddha Indonesia: Walubi*), as seen in the expulsion of Nichiren Shoshu Indonesia (NSI) in 1989 and the Buddhayana group, led by Jinarakkhita, in 1995 (Kimura, 2013 and Chia, 2018).

These cases demonstrate that religious freedom in Indonesia is constrained. A notable example occurred in 2018, when Meliana, a Buddhist woman in Sumatra, was sentenced to 18 months in prison for complaining about the volume of a mosque's loudspeaker (Al Jazeera, 2019). Rather than prioritizing the protection of human rights, the Indonesian state emphasizes a form of religious pluralism that discourages criticism of other faiths or alternative interpretations of religious teachings. This approach is enforced through Article 156(a) of the Criminal Code, which criminalizes blasphemy (Hasan, 2017). Such an atmosphere may also influence the way Buddhism is taught in schools and universities. This paper aims to examine the characteristics of Buddhist Studies in Indonesia by asking: when scholars, operating under the mandate to promote religious

pluralism, present religion as a tool for fostering peace, what perspectives or issues tend to be overlooked in their analyses?

2. Research Methodology

This research project employs critical analysis as its primary method. A total of 30 academic papers and books on Buddhism, published between 2015 and 2025, were selected for review. To avoid redundancy, only a few representative works were chosen from the large number of publications that focus on descriptive accounts of Buddhist teachings—such as loving-kindness, the Four Noble Truths, and similar topics—since many of these texts are highly repetitive. It should be emphasized that this study is not intended as a survey of the state of knowledge in Indonesian Buddhist Studies over the past decade. Rather, its aim is to highlight what has often been overlooked when scholars approach religion primarily as a source of peace. For this reason, documents addressing Buddhism in relation to peace or conflict are selected for analysis. Furthermore, this paper does not suggest that the cited works are weak or lacking in strength; instead, it seeks to demonstrate what might be added in order to reveal other dimensions of Indonesian Buddhism, particularly its political and social aspects.

Many articles used in this research come from journals published by Buddhist institutions themselves, such as Subhasita: Journal of Buddhist and Religious Studies (Smaratungga Buddhist College), Jurnal Pendidikan Buddha dan Isu Sosial Kontemporer (Bodhi Dharma Buddhist College), Kajian & Reviu Jinarakkhita: Jurnal

Gerakan Semangat Buddhayana (Jinarakkhita Buddhist College), and Jurnal Nyanadassana: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan, Sosial dan Keagamaan (Kertarajasa Buddhist College).

In Indonesia, Buddhist Studies remains an underdeveloped academic field. Buddhism itself experienced a modern revival only in the 20th century, and most Buddhist higher education institutions primarily aim to train school teachers rather than scholars. As a result, Buddhist knowledge is taught under faculties of Buddhist Education (*Jurusan Pendidikan Keagamaan Buddha*), rather than in departments explicitly dedicated to Buddhist Studies. Consequently, much of the academic output from these institutions tends to focus on applied aspects of Buddhism—such as Buddhism-based schooling and temple management—while lacking engagement with social, political, or theological dimensions, including critical hermeneutics.

This paper adopts a critical analytical approach not simply to summarize existing works, but to place them in dialogue with one another in order to highlight and address gaps in the study of Buddhism in Indonesia. As Norman Fairclough (1995) explains, Critical Discourse Analysis encourages readers to read between the lines in order to understand why certain issues are emphasized while others are omitted. It interrogates the contexts within which facts or truths are represented and constructed. To enrich the analysis, specific theoretical frameworks are applied. For instance, Emile Durkheim's (1893) theory of social solidarity, is revisited, especially given its frequent use in interpreting Buddhist rituals. Likewise, Max Weber's (1978) concept of charismatic authority is incorporated to engage

with studies emphasizing the influential role of Buddhist leaders. Additionally, James Scott's (2009) theory of suppression and resistance is employed to examine the interactions between Buddhists and the state, internal Buddhist dynamics, and to emphasize individual agency alongside the presence of charismatic leadership.

3. Results and Discussion

After scrutinizing the documents, this section categorizes the key themes that scholars have emphasized or overlooked into three main issues. (1) *Unity "with conflict swept under the rug"* – this perspective highlights how religious rituals are often interpreted through the lens of social solidarity. As a result, scholarly work tends to focus on unity within communities, frequently neglecting underlying conflicts. (2) *Oppression "but full of resistance"* – when religion is viewed primarily as a source of peace, its ties to political power are often ignored. Even when suppression is acknowledged, the forms of resistance it inspires are commonly underexplored. And (3) *Leaders "who are not separate from their communities"* – studies of religious leadership often place too much emphasis on the charisma or symbolic power of leaders, overlooking the broader social and communal context that shapes their roles. In each section, notable scholarly works are included to address these gaps.

3.1 Unity "with conflict swept under the rug"

Religious rituals are often seen not only as rites of passage—such as transitions from childhood to adulthood or from sinner to

the sinless—but also broadly described as "activities of unity" that bind members of society together. This view echoes Emile Durkheim's (1893) concept of social solidarity. However, ignoring the complexity of rituals often leads to simplified conclusions, suggesting that such rituals inherently reflect social cohesion.

For example, Yulianti (2017) describes the celebration of Waisak (Vesak for international) at Borobudur as a manifestation of Buddhist unity. Despite the diversity among Buddhist groups (*majelis*), they are able to participate together. However, according to Jesada Buaban (2021), a closer analysis reveals imbalances in power within the event. Leadership in ritual design, ceremony performance, and keynote speeches tends to fall to Thai Buddhist monks, who are closely connected to state officials through the Indonesian Buddhist Federation (Walubi). Other organizations play supporting roles, and several groups such as Buddhayana and Sangha Theravada Indonesia, choose not to participate, instead holding their own events at different venues but on the same day and time. This reveals that the Waisak celebration at Borobudur also reflects underlying tensions among religious organizations.

Another example is the pilgrimage project launched in 2023, in which monks walked from Thailand through Malaysia and Singapore to Indonesia to attend the Waisak celebration at Borobudur. Along the way, the event was widely covered by television, often showing images of Muslims standing by to watch, applauding, or offering water to the monks. Religious scholars such as Jayanti Chandra (2024) and Suroyo & Bima Putra (2024) interpreted this as interfaith

engagement. From the perspective of inter-religious dialogue or relations, such interpretations may be valid. However, other dimensions also warrant investigation—such as who these monks are, the objectives behind the initiative, and who stands to benefit from it.

It has been observed that both the organization of Thai missionary monks and Walubi have faced frequent criticism for consolidating power with the state. New initiatives like walking pilgrimage or *Thudong* help generate interest and draw participants to Walubi's Waisak celebration. The image of monks walking thousands of kilometers serves to highlight the dedication and asceticism of Thai monks, in contrast to local Indonesian monks (Buaban, 2020). This suggests that while Indonesian monks from Buddhayana and Sangha Theravada Indonesia engage with urban lay communities, Thai monks from forest-tradition temples emphasize intensive meditation practice and undertake long-distance pilgrimages—walking thousands of kilometers to Indonesia. These journeys are not solely spiritual or missionary endeavors; they also serve as acts of identity construction, network-building, and as a means for the organizers—despite being foreigners—to assert their legitimacy as leaders of a significant national event. Moreover, those scholars tend to overlook other tensions, such as the statement by Cholil Nafis, head of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia: MUI*), who advised Muslims not to allow monks to rest in mosques, suggesting instead that they be hosted in homes or community halls (Nur, 2024). For Cholil Nafis and many Muslims, the act of Thai monks walking to Borobudur is not inherently problematic. However,

concerns arise when these monks interact with Muslim followers, particularly within Islamic spaces. Such interactions are perceived by some as an expression of excessive pluralism, potentially triggering fears of syncretism—an idea that is generally rejected by many Muslim leaders. As a result, the Thai monks' pilgrimage is not viewed solely in a positive light.

Indonesian scholars—both Buddhist and Muslim—often share a common perspective on peace, which is framed not in terms of religious freedom or embracing difference, but rather as the importance of maintaining social harmony and avoiding offense. Achmad Rosidi (2015) argues that marriage between individuals of the same faith (*samasaddha*) leads to a happy and harmonious household. This interpretation of the Pali canon reflects prevailing Indonesian practices, where a marriage is only legally recognized once it has been performed according to the couple's religious tradition. Religious leaders, however, are generally intolerant of interfaith marriages, and one partner is typically expected to convert. This practice aligns with Indonesia's Law Number 1 of 1974, which does not legally recognize interfaith marriages. While human rights advocates view this as a form of state-imposed discrimination (Firdaus, 2023), many scholars argue that conforming to religious and state norms ensures long-term harmony and a stable life.

The 2011 protest against Vihara Tri Ratna in Tanjung Balai, Sumatra, where authorities eventually ordered the removal of a rooftop Buddha statue, is illustrative. Natalia Tawalujan et al. (2022) argue that the conflict arose because the Buddhist community

failed to consult or seek approval from local Muslims before erecting the statue—even though it was within temple grounds. Their study includes Buddhist interviewees who said, "we accept that this is the result of our own karma—it is natural that we are being protested because we did something wrong."

Similarly, Santacitto Sentot & Aryanto Firnadi (2022) analyze the case of Meiliana, a Buddhist woman from Medan, who was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months in prison in 2016 for blasphemy after complaining about the volume of a mosque. The scholars interpret this as her personal fault for criticizing another religion. Sentot, a Theravada monk trained in Sri Lanka, argued that Buddhists should deepen their understanding of teachings such as the Noble Eightfold Path to live harmoniously and respectfully with people of other faiths. These two examples demonstrate how Buddhist scholars tend to frame conflict in terms of individual spiritual failings—such as ignorance or karma—rather than addressing issues of social justice. In contrast, many Muslim scholars have called for greater religious neutrality from the Indonesian state and have criticized the misuse of laws to punish dissent, as seen in the work of Al Makin (2016) and Philip Chia (2021) who assert that the Indonesian government and Islamic organizations should not use blasphemy law to discriminate against the minority.

Another significant contribution to the field of Buddhist Studies in Indonesia is the book Wacana Buddha Dharma (Buddhist Teaching Discourse) published by Wijaya-Mukti (2020). Intended as a textbook for undergraduate students, this work represents a notable scholarly

effort within the Indonesian context. Although Wijaya-Mukti is affiliated with the Buddhayana tradition, the book has been widely circulated and adopted across various Buddhist denominations. Drawing on an extensive knowledge of Buddhist history and consistently referencing the Pali Canon, the text plays an important role in shaping and standardizing both Buddhist doctrine and the academic study of Buddhism in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the book is not without its limitations. Reflecting his role as an advocate for Buddhism, Wijaya-Mukti presents an idealized view of the religion—for instance, asserting that Buddhism is inherently peaceful and has never been associated with war. This perspective overlooks historical and contemporary events, such as the genocidal violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka and the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar. Scholars like Lehr, Lehr, and Roughley (2019) as well as Fuller (2021) have demonstrated that violence can indeed be perpetrated in the name of protecting Buddhism, challenging the notion of its purely peaceful character.

3.2 Oppression “but Full of Resistance”

Another key limitation of the notion that religion equals peace is its tendency to overlook the dynamics of oppression. Even when domination is acknowledged in some scholarly works, the element of resistance within religious institutions is often ignored. This is partly because oppression often appears subtle or is masked as development, correctness, or standardization.

Religion in Indonesia has long been subject to state intervention, particularly between 1965 and 1998, when the government actively suppressed Chinese cultural identity. Despite this, many scholars tend to overlook the issue. For instance, Ismoyo, Lisniasari, and Boniran (2021) argue that Buddhist education—rooted in the teachings of the Buddha—contributes to the development of ethics, social harmony, and nation-building since the Buddha's time. Rather than addressing the historical suppression of Buddhism by the state or how such suppression influenced the formation of Buddhist education curricula, these works focus on portraying Buddhism as a positive force for national development. This perspective raises important questions, such as whether the concept of a 'nation' even existed during the Buddha's time, making such claims historically debatable.

While many studies on Buddhism in Indonesia overlook this issue, Leo Suryadinata (2014) stands out by addressing it directly. He notes that Chinese-language schools were shut down and Chinese shrines were pressured to rebrand themselves as Buddhist temples (*vihara*), often adopting Pali or Sanskrit names. In addition to documenting state suppression, a smaller number of research explores how Chinese Indonesians resisted or adapted to these constraints. Notably, Setefanus Suprajitno (2019) sheds light on the diversity within Chinese Buddhist identities. He shows that Chinese communities observed major Buddhist holy days (*uposatha*) while incorporating ancestral rites that combined Buddhist and traditional Chinese ritual elements. This syncretic practice allowed them to maintain cultural traditions under the framework of Buddhism.

Similarly, Phao Krishnaputra, a Buddhist leader in Medan, confirmed that many temples continued to perform Chinese-Mahayana rituals, often with Theravada monks participating (Racheman, 2011).

Missionary work of Buddhayana in Lampung, South Sumatra, during Suharto's regime, studied by Putro Zaenal (2020) reveals that a lot of its population belonged to Buddha Jawa Wisnu and Sam Kaw Hwee (Chinese tradition) and later converted to Buddhayana (mostly Theravada) in 1964. Assimilation policy in the 1970s did not stop Buddhayana from missionary work. When Mahayana and Chinese tradition were restricted, promoting Theravada is another choice employed by Buddhayana to attract new members especially during the 1960-70s. This happened in many areas including Lombok (Nilsson-Ladner, 2019) until Buddhayana followers nowadays are familiar with Theravada rituals the most. Newly-converted Buddhists in Lampung and Lombok chant in Pali and Indonesian translation, moreover, the meditation method based on Jawa Wisnu has been replaced by the Theravada technique.

In her research on Javanese Buddhists, Yulianti (2012) observed that the standardization of chanting texts in the twentieth century—especially after the publication of *Paritta Suci* by central Theravada authorities—allowed rural communities to conduct Sunday rituals on their own, even in the absence of monks. This aligns with the findings of Prihadi Hatmono (2019), who noted that Buddhayana followers also used the standardized *Paritta* distributed by the central organization. In his study, he found that, in addition to group chanting, laypeople were able to organize sermon

sessions led by trained lay leaders (*romo or pandita*) who had been trained by Buddhayana to support their local communities. These researches suggest this could empower laypeople, who were previously heavily dependent on the monastic sangha. However, one may still question whether laypeople chanting on their own constitutes true "laity empowerment." After all, monks merely allowed the lay community to chant when monks were not present. When monks did attend, they continued to lead chants, meditation, and deliver sermons. Thus, the distribution of chanting books seems more like a move toward standardization than real empowerment. Similarly, narratives about the rise of lay leadership in modern Buddhism should be critically examined—are these lay teachers speaking in their own right or as disciples of monks?

The distribution of standardized chanting books has been seen as a positive step. Nonetheless, Soorakkulame Pemaratana (2020) argues that the growth of print media in Sri Lanka led to the widespread use of standardized chanting texts, replacing handwritten versions in local temples that might contain errors. While this improved accuracy, it also diminished local variations and erased regional chanting traditions—effectively extending the reach of a centralized Buddhist orthodoxy to local communities.

Adinda Eka Sukma et al. (2025) found that Javanese Buddhists at Vihara Giri Surya in Yogyakarta chanted local moral songs alongside *Paritta* verses provided by their Buddhayana organization. Though the study argues that local melodies such as *Dandanggula* and *Asmarandana* enhance concentration and

comprehension due to their use of local language, the more striking insight is that laypeople are actively adapting and reshaping Buddhist practice while remaining within institutional structures. Interestingly, these melodies are also used in Islamic boarding schools *(pesantren)*, and the *Asmarandana* was composed by Raden Ngabei Yasadipura (1729–1802), with lyrics echoing Qur'anic themes, such as God's mercy and the divine creation of humanity (Insiyah & Sofyan, 2022). This suggests that local practitioners may not be overly concerned about strict religious boundaries, while central Buddhist institutions continue trying to impose a distinct religious identity.

Internal conflict or resistance within Buddhist organizations can sometimes result in organizational splits. Taufik Hidayatulloh (2015) examined the Javanese Vajrayana Buddhist group, *Kasogatan,* in West Borneo and found that such disputes often stemmed from issues of leadership and administration. Notably, the group interpreted doctrinal concepts such as conflict not only through the lens of impermanence (*anicca*), using it to explain institutional decline, but also through the idea of rebirth (*punabbhava*), perceiving organizational separation as a potential for renewal and spiritual development rather than as a failure. Another key strength of Hidayatulloh's study lies in his detailed documentation, particularly of interreligious tensions. For instance, in 2010, a Buddha image was burned by a Christian priest, and a Buddhist student at a Christian school was pressured to convert to Catholicism—events that triggered religious tension.

3.3 Leaders "Who Are Not Separate from Their Communities"

The scholarly emphasis on religious leadership often portrays religious leaders as if they are the sole founders and architects of their traditions. In reality, religious organizations are shaped collectively—by leaders, organizers, and lay followers who may appear passive, but in fact play a key role in shaping religious forms to suit their needs. James Scott (2012) argues that charismatic leaders are not unique thinkers; rather, they rise to prominence by articulating what their communities already feel, believe, or want to hear. This perspective helps us better understand religious organizations as collaborative and responsive entities. When it comes to peace, then, it is not simply the product of a leader's wisdom, but emerges from broader social dynamics.

In Indonesia, one popular definition of peaceful Buddhism is a Buddhism that is adaptable and open to local culture. Buddhayana is frequently cited as an example of this kind of Buddhism—it is seen as a uniquely Indonesian form of Buddhism. While studies of Buddhayana often focus on its founder, Jinarakkhita, as the sole visionary, this overlooks the collaborative nature of the movement. Founded in 1955, Jinarakkhita was a Chinese-Indonesian who had received novice ordination in the Mahayana tradition and monk ordination in Theravada. Buddhayana promotes non-sectarianism, allowing Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana monks to coexist and lead rituals interchangeably, offering followers exposure to all three traditions without hierarchy. Scholars such as Anjani et al. (2023), Lestari et al. (2023), Renaldi et al. (2023), and Chia (2020)

often credit Jinarakkhita with creating this vision alone. Chia (2020) does discuss the political context of the time, but as previously stated, Buddhayana was developed by various members. For example, the formulation of the term for 'Adi-Buddha' as Supreme God in Buddhism—to satisfy state policy requirements was not solely Jinarakkhita's idea, but a collaborative effort involving scholars like Phao Krishnaputra.

In terms of ritual practice, Buddhayana ceremonies have continued to evolve and are no longer fixed in the form established by Jinarakkhita over the past seventy years. For instance, at Vihara Sakyawanaram in Bogor, the *Jumat Kliwon* chanting ceremony now features monks from all three major Buddhist traditions, each taking turns to lead a part of the ritual. This inclusive format was introduced to preempt criticisms of syncretism (Buaban, 2025). Additionally, Buddhayana scholars like Wijaya-Mukti (2020) promote incorporating doctrinal explanations into each ritual to help participants better grasp core Buddhist teachings. This reflects the rationalist orientation of contemporary Buddhism, where the sermon often takes precedence over ritual performance (Tan, 2020). Such developments illustrate that Buddhayana's identity is a collective creation, shaped by many contributors beyond just Jinarakkhita.

The same principle applies to Thai missionary monks in Indonesia, particularly those operating in Muslim-majority areas where temple construction is often met with resistance. In Purwakarta, one compromise was the establishment of Kebun Persahabatan (Friendship Garden), avoiding the term vihara (temple). Interviews

reveal that monks negotiated with Muslim religious leaders officially, but more importantly, built relationships with local residents—buying from Muslim-owned shops, hiring Muslim workers, and opening the garden for community use (Buaban, 2024). Thus, peace is not simply achieved through interfaith agreements at the leadership level but is co-constructed through daily, lived interactions.

Buddhist members of the Sangha Theravada Indonesian face similar dynamics. While monks may control major ceremonies such as Vesak, Magha Puja, Asalha Puja, and the Kathina robe offering, smaller village-level rituals—especially those conducted in Javanese—are often designed and led by laypeople without monastic involvement. Roberto Rizzo (2024) documents the revival of Javanese rites such as *gombak* (a child's hair-cutting ceremony symbolizing maturity) and *tingkeban* (a prenatal blessing ritual). These rituals have been "Buddha-ized" with added Pali chanting and are led by respected village laypersons. Rizzo argues that the more villagers incorporate Javanese elements into their rituals, the more Buddhist they become—especially in contrast with Christianity and Islam, which often resist such local adaptations. This blending of Buddhism and Javanese culture contributes to the widespread perception that Buddhism in Indonesia is inherently peaceful.

Satria Adhitama (2023) examines Hindu and Buddhist pagodas and concludes that the blending of statues and architectural elements from both religions in a single space reflects societal religious harmony. This type of research emphasizes the king's role as a central figure of peace, suggesting that a tolerant ruler leads to

a tolerant society. However, this perspective is somewhat pragmatic, as it assumes that people simply follow the beliefs of their ruler. Moreover, the presence of combined Hindu and Buddhist deities may not necessarily indicate religious tolerance. As Lars Fogelin (2015) argues, in the past, people may not have adhered to strict religious identities. Instead, they likely worshipped deities based on their perceived influence on daily life, rather than out of loyalty to a specific religious organization. In that context, religion was not about belonging to Buddhism or Hinduism, but about reverence for gods considered effective or beneficial.

It is worth questioning why the academic study of Buddhism in Indonesia—initially shaped by Western scholars such as the Theosophical Society and later continued by influential Chinese intellectuals like the journalist Kwee Tek Hoay during the colonial period, as discussed in the Introduction—has in recent times taken on a largely normative character. Contemporary scholarship often portrays Buddhism primarily as a source of peace and happiness, while giving limited attention to issues of social justice and political power. One possible explanation lies in the nation-building period, during which Buddhism in Indonesia was both restricted and supported by the state.

Additional factors include the application of blasphemy laws, frequently enforced by Islamic organizations, which have been used to suppress minority groups offering alternative interpretations of the teachings. As a religious minority, Buddhists have tended to align themselves with government policies, a tendency reflected in

the annual national Waisak celebrations, where the official message regularly emphasizes national unity (Buaban, 2021). As a result, critical perspectives are more often produced by scholars outside Indonesia, such as Chia (2022), Suryadinata (2014), Kimura (2003), and so forth.

4. Conceptual Analysis

Emile Durkheim's (1893) theory of social solidarity has significantly influenced Buddhist Studies, particularly in the analysis of rituals. Generally, students tend to interpret this theory through the popular understanding of 'social solidarity'—as rituals or festivals that bring people together and promote communal unity. As a result, many scholarly works, such as those by Yulianti (2017), Chandra (2024), and Suroyo & Bima Putra (2024), tend to emphasize the positive role of rituals as tools for conflict resolution. However, a less explored aspect of Durkheim's theory is his distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, in which the second one highlights the importance of individual diversity and autonomy within a society. By engaging more deeply with this distinction, scholars can critically examine not only how solidarity functions in Buddhist contexts but also its limitations—opening space for discussions on tension and conflict within ritual practices.

In discussions on the relationship between the state and religious organizations, many scholars tend to highlight cooperative or supportive dynamics, often overlooking the forms of suppression that occur—whether through direct state policies and laws or more subtle structural and cultural mechanisms. Suryadinata's (2014)

work stands out for its critical examination of state control over Buddhism, while Suprajitno (2019) explores how Chinese Buddhists respond to such suppression. Furthermore, when focusing on religious leadership at the micro level, there is often an assumption that members within a denomination are homogenous, obedient to their leaders, and that the leader singlehandedly shapes religious identity and ritual. Such assumptions deserve further scrutiny, as they obscure internal diversity, agency, and possible tensions within religious communities.

This perspective is often grounded in Max Weber's (1978) concept of charismatic authority. However, James Scott offers a contrasting view. In *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), Scott emphasizes that suppression and resistance often coexist within the same space. In *Two Cheers for Anarchism* (2012), he further argues that a charismatic leader is not necessarily someone who thinks differently from the masses, but rather someone who articulates what others feel yet hesitate to express. Such a leader is deeply embedded in the same socio-cultural context as their followers and emerges from it, rather than standing above it. Importantly, Scott suggests that these leaders do not construct religious identity from above; instead, they respond to the collective needs of their communities. Consequently, when analyzing religious groups, it is essential to consider the broader socio-political context and the diverse roles and agency of individual members. The studies by Hidayatulloh (2015) and Rizzo (2024) exemplify this more nuanced approach.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

This paper argues that when scholars portray religion primarily as a force for peace, they often highlight only its positive aspects—emphasizing its role in fostering communal unity and interfaith harmony. However, this perspective has three significant limitations: (1) it focuses on unity while overlooking underlying tensions and conflicts; (2) it fails to address power relations and forms of resistance within religious contexts; and (3) it privileges religious leaders, neglecting the contributions of other individuals in shaping religious identity. Drawing on Durkheim's concept of organic solidarity and Scott's reinterpretation of Weber's idea of charismatic authority, this paper highlights the complexity of religion beyond its peaceful image. A more nuanced understanding of Buddhism could emerge if scholars engaged more deeply with sociological theories, allowing for more critical and multidimensional interpretations of religious phenomena.

This research project focuses on the outcomes of academic works in which authors approach religion as a means for building peace, aiming to uncover the perspectives that may be overlooked in this framework. Future studies could explore the underlying reasons behind such perspectives, including how Buddhism is taught and studied within academic institutions, as well as how the social and cultural environment—particularly the experience of being a religious minority in Indonesia—might influence or constrain scholarly expression. Furthermore, as Buddhist colleges in Indonesia have established networks with universities abroad, future research should also examine the transnational circulation of religious ideas

and how these exchanges shape their interpretations, practices, as well as academia.

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