

## Identity Negotiation of Cina Benteng Community in Building Tolerance

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to examine the negotiation of religious identities within the community of Kalipasir, Tangerang, using data obtained from in-depth interviews of a resident, head of RT and RW. Kalipasir is a religiously divided community, yet there has not been any conflict. The results showed that the negotiation of Buddhist-Confucian identity uses the local language, diverting economic activities with the potential for conflict, tolerance, contributing, and participating in celebrating Islamic rituals. Identity negotiation in the Islamic community is accomplished through ensuring minorities are protected from oppression, avoiding disrupting rituals, utilizing acculturative architecture, and refraining from performing missionary activities. Meanwhile, Christian identity is being negotiated by maintaining distance and only engaging in missionary operations among Buddhist-Confucians. This indicates the assimilationist model attained through communication can be used to build tolerance in Indonesia through multiculturalism.*

**Keywords:** *Identity Negotiation, Benteng Chinese, Kalipasir village, Tolerance.*

### Introduction

Religious intolerance has resulted in fanaticism, violence, and hostility in various parts (Jain, 2011; Singh, 2016). This causes disruption and harms sectors of life such as trade, education, and health (Odey, 2019). For this reason, religious leaders, as well as government and various groups in society, are trying to campaign for tolerance in various outreach activities.

Religion is an element of an individual's identity, which can be negotiated socially. Individuals search for ways in which their religious identity might be shared with other people (Rizzo et al., 2020). Identity negotiation theory argued that people from all cultures want

recognition. Individuals have multiple self-images influenced by cultural, social, and personal identities (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Satisfactory identity negotiations will lead to feelings that they are understood, valued, and supported (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Good identity negotiations are carried out to emphasise the importance of integrating cross-cultural knowledge, motivation, and skills to communicate satisfactorily, appropriately, and effectively (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Negotiations do not necessitate radical lifestyle changes or the practice of many religions. It can be realized by acting moderately without crossing the rigid boundaries that have been outlined by each religion.

Negotiation of religious identity is known to have a positive impact on acceptance in society (McCaslin, 2015), increasing social cohesion and participation (Lam, 2016) and decreasing prejudice (Carrim & Paruk, 2021). Therefore, this study presents the conditions and mechanisms that describe how negotiating the religious identity of a pluralistic, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic community can positively impact building an attitude of tolerance. Negotiating one's religious identity lays a solid foundation for public acceptance, making it easier for a more fundamental religious identity to emerge and be tolerated by the community. The assimilation theory was rejected, which stated that tolerance is built by understanding each other under moderate conditions in identities that interact in ongoing negotiations. On the other hand, the theory of multiculturalism was supported, which declared that tolerance is built by accepting sharp identities that are isolated from one another (Lam, 2016). A case study was provided for the people of Kalipasir, Tangerang, whose ethnic diversity (Chinese and non-Chinese) and religions (Buddhist-Confucian, Muslim, and Christian) can build a tolerance to maintain harmony between communities. The study questions include:

1. How do the people of Kampung Kalipasir (Kalipasir Village) socially construct their religious life?
2. Has religious life resulted in the negotiation of Buddhist-Confucian, Muslim, and Christian identities?
3. How do the people of Kalipasir Village describe religious tolerance due to the negotiation of religious identity?

## **Method**

Data were collected through qualitative methods in Kalipasir Village. The purpose is to uncover the religious life as well as its identity negotiation and tolerance forms in the community.

The analyzed data stem from audio-recorded and transcribed interviews. Furthermore, individual in-depth interviews were held with three participants. The first participant is a Chinese man who has spent the entire life in the village. This man runs a small ketchup factory, and at the age of 50s, he has seen all the ups and downs in this village. The second participant is a neighbourhood leader (RT – Rukun Tetangga) who has led for several periods. RT is the smallest community unit in Indonesia, managing up to 40 families. RT leader is selected democratically, and the leadership period is five years; before 2018, an RT head can lead indefinitely. Meanwhile, the third is a community leader (RW – Rukun Warga). RW is the second smallest community unit, managing several (usually a dozen) RTs. There are several RWs in this village. The second and third participants are males, 50s years old, Muslim, and of non-Chinese ethnicity.

The analysis follows a grounded-theory approach (Morse et al., 2016), and the voice records were open coded. Furthermore, common thematic categories among all the participants were created and linked to more comprehensive structural elements.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Social Construction of Religious Life of the Kalipasir Village Community**

The people of Kampung Kalipasir construct their religious life socially in many ways. They build religious colonies with a clear geographical scope at the RT and RW levels. Both Chinese and Muslim sources refused to refer to Chinese citizens as Cina Benteng. They call themselves neutral, namely the citizens of Kalipasir.

The community is also segregated by religion through educational institutions. There are special schools for Buddhism-Confucianism, Islam, and Christianity, although these specialities' status is informal. They have a collaborative organization that builds activities between ethnic and religious groups, namely Karang Taruna.

This segregation seems to be caused by a segregative common heritage, namely the Jami' Kalipasir Mosque and the Boen Tek Bio Temple. These two ancient houses of worship confirm that the identity of the residents of Kalipasir is one of Islam or Buddhism-Confucianism. This aligns with the multiculturalism thesis, where harmony is formed by groups that still maintain their collective sociocultural identity (Nomnian, 2018). The multicultural situation in Kalipasir is relatively different from many places in Indonesia, where the thesis that emerges is the assimilation (melting pot) type. The source of harmony does not come from differences between groups but similarities (Byrne et al., 2019).

### **Buddhist-Confucian Identity Negotiation**

The Buddhist-Confucian society is the most negotiated community of identity in Kalipasir. This community has a native Peranakan (Chinese) ethnicity, consisting of Buddhists and Confucians. The

Confucian place of worship is a temple, and the Boen Tek Bio Temple is one of the cultural heritages in this village. However, since the study sources refer to the Chinese community as a Buddhist society, Buddhism and Confucianism as two paired religions are juxtaposed. As a result of the non-exclusivity of Buddhism, the majority of Chinese adhere to these two religions concurrently or embrace Tao alongside Buddha. Therefore, they are referred to as the Tridharma religion.

The Buddhist-Confucian community is free to hold religious events in Kalipasir Village. However, they speak Sundanese rather than their mother tongue, Chinese. Some community members did not consider Muslims when opening a pork satay stall business. This is immediately corrected through the participation of community leaders individually and internally.

They also have no problem with the sound of the call to prayer coming out of the mosque, even though a legal umbrella gives them the right to protest against extremely loud sounds. Instead, they are happy with the existence of Muslim religious events and participate to the extent permitted. Participation in religious negotiations among the Buddhist-Confucian community is generally shown by contributing to food donations, specifically fruits, at Muslim religious events such as birthdays. In Padang, West Sumatra, a past study has also uncovered instances of non-Muslims assisting Muslims, such as constructing a mosque (Sefriyono, 2018).

The Buddhist-Confucian community's willingness to use Sundanese instead of their home tongue, to be joyful and donate to the Maulid (an Islamic

celebration), and to not be bothered by the sound of the call to prayer is an example of voluntary identity negotiation (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Previous study found that ethnic Chinese in Madura adopt the Madurese language for regular speech (Hidayat & Farid, 2021). The same thing was observed in other areas in West Java, such as Cirebon (Darheni, 2018) and Bandung (Rizaldi, 2018). Adoption is an essential aspect of identity because it has its roots in the language (Zhao & Ebanda de B'beri, 2022). This shows that the adaptation of the Buddhist-Confucian society to the local culture can be understood as an acculturative adjustment of identity negotiation (Kumar et al., 2015). In this case, the Chinese community is in a situation of integration: adopting a new culture but still retaining some aspects of their heritage.

### **Moslem Identity Negotiation**

The Muslim community of Kalipasir is the majority group, and they are protectors of the Chinese minority. The community negotiates its sociological and physical identity as a protector by guarding the pagoda's place of worship. It also ensures that the religious ceremonies performed in mosques, such as Friday prayers, do not disturb non-Muslim communities. Even when there are disturbances, they are caused by crowds that travel outside this village. The mosque's architecture also adopts the Chinese style, although most users are non-Chinese. The existence of a mosque with Chinese-style architecture shows a cultural and historical meaning which is the ideological self of Kumar et al. (2015) for the Muslim community of Kalipasir as a layer that influences their identity.

Another important factor in asserting its negotiable identity is the absence of missionary activity (da'wah) to non-Muslims. For Muslims, this da'wah activity is relatively easy because it can be conducted passively by the presence of Muslim figures of Chinese ethnicity in Kalipasir Village. However, this is not the case, even though it existed in the past. Buddhists-Confucian also converted to Islam to marry someone from outside this village. In this case, the Muslim community accepts but with feelings of empathy for the decline of Buddhists-Confucian. However, there is no friction with the Buddhist-Confucian group.

Muslim communities adopt a separation model that only retains their own culture because they are the majority (Yoo, 2021; Zhao & Ebanda de B'beri, 2022). There are elements of identity in higher cross-cultural domains (Piwoni, 2020) where other cultures are recognized.

### **Christian Identity Negotiation**

There is Christian missionary activity in Kalipasir but not in Muslim areas. Many ethnic Chinese who were Buddhist or Confucian converted to Christianity due to this campaign. The reason commonly expressed is that Confucian Buddhism costs much money. Economic reasons, not faith, push the Buddhist-Confucian community to convert to Christianity. Fewer Confucian Buddhists converted to Islam because the teachings were challenging to implement. This shows that cultural reasons prevent Buddhist-Confucian people from converting to Islam, even though the cost efficiency may be comparable to or cheaper than Christianity.

The model adopted by the Christian missionary group is separation, where they do not try to interfere with Chinese or Islamic culture (Kumar et al., 2015). This characterizes the lack of social integration in the relationship between Christianity and Islam (Rahman & Akram, 2020). However, this only applies to missionaries. Integration remains a strong norm in society for the Chinese community who converted from Buddhist-Confucianism to Christianity. Therefore, the identity negotiations conducted by the native Christian Chinese of Kalipasir are identical to Buddhist-Confucian Chinese.

### **Religious Tolerance**

The people of Kampung Kalipasir describe religious tolerance in three themes. First, presently, there has not been much of a disturbance among the various religions. This is seen as a consequence of the existence of harmony. Second, tolerance is built internally for people in Kalipasir who already know each other. Outsiders who marry residents of the Kalipasir colony will be accepted as extended family members, even though they come from different religions and live in other territories. Third, Kalipasir is hailed by the local administration for its depiction of religious unity and other cultures because of the absence of racism.

These findings generally indicate that religious tolerance in this village is different from what is observed in Western countries. Religious tolerance expresses itself in secretive spiritual and mystical faiths in Western countries, particularly in urban regions populated by well-educated residents (Aune & Guest, 2019). On the other hand, religious tolerance in Kalipasir is manifested in

open religious activities. It is celebrated together to the limits of their respective religious norms. This is because tolerance is built internally and not forced by the government.

The above conditions show the prioritization of the multiculturalism theory rather than assimilation (melting pot) (Lam, 2016). The behavior and identity of the Buddhist-Confucian society have a sharp difference from the followers of Islam. They are isolated in different areas but can build tolerance through identity negotiations on certain aspects that are historical (the existence of multi-religious cultural heritage), linguistics (Sundanese), and economics (donations, labour). This extra-religious identity negotiation supports inter-religious tolerance to practice their worship safely.

### **Conclusion**

This study discovers that Buddhist-Confucians negotiate religious identities by employing local languages, redirecting economic operations that have the potential to conflict with the interface area, and tolerating, contributing, and participating in Islamic religious ceremonies. Muslims negotiate religious identity by socially and physically protecting minorities, avoiding rituals that do not interfere with others, using acculturative architecture, not holding da'wah activities for Buddhist-Confucians, and feeling empathy but accepting when Buddhist-Confucians convert to Islam. Furthermore, Christians are negotiating their religious identity to distinguish themselves from Muslims and focus their efforts only on Buddhist-Confucian outreach. The findings are novel from previous study because the

multiculturalism model can create tolerance between religious communities. The intercultural communication factor is the key to the success of this model in the Kalipasir Village community. Therefore, in analyzing diversity and ethnic minorities, this finding has theoretical importance since it provides evidence that identity negotiations amongst all religious groups can influence the global religious tolerance environment.

This study shows that religious identity negotiation in a community can affect global tolerance. This means negotiation between majorities and minorities within religion is essential when there is tolerance. This finding can have practical implications for the religious policies and programs that include the prevention of racism and commotion through the participation of all elements and the development of internal tolerance.

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