

Representation of Religious Tolerance in the Origin Story of Kelenteng Jamblang Cirebon

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Abstract

Religious tolerance is a cornerstone of social harmony in Indonesia's multicultural society, yet its consistent practice remains a challenge amid ongoing cases of religious discrimination and intolerance. While Indonesia is often praised globally for its interfaith harmony, there is still a significant gap between the ideal values of tolerance and their implementation in daily life. This study aims to examine how the values of religious tolerance are represented in the local folklore *Kelenteng Jamblang* from Cirebon, West Java, which narrates the harmonious interaction between Chinese and Muslim communities in the past. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis, the research analyzes narrative elements, character actions, and symbolic representations within the folklore text. The findings reveal that inclusive leadership, mutual respect across religious boundaries, and collective action such as *gotong royong* are core reflections of religious moderation within the story. The character of Njo Kie Tjit, who embodies dual cultural and religious identities, serves as a central figure showing that tolerance is practiced through concrete social actions. The conclusion highlights that traditional folklore can serve as a valuable medium for transmitting interfaith values, strengthening the spirit of pluralism and religious moderation. This study implies that incorporating local narratives into education and interfaith dialogue can reinforce inclusive values and contribute to social cohesion in contemporary multicultural societies.

Keywords: folklore; multicultural; society; tolerance

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country rich in cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. In this multicultural context, the value of religious tolerance is the main pillar in maintaining social harmony. The Indonesian government, through various policies such as strengthening religious moderation by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has emphasized the importance of education and internalization of tolerance values in various lines of community life. Indonesia is internationally recognized for its success in managing ethnic, cultural and religious differences, as well as harmoniously juxtaposing religious practices and state life. The harmony shows the harmony between thoughts, feelings, and actions, thus avoiding the society from excessive tension (Salwa & Najib, 2025). In reality, people are faced with the fact that they do not live in a religious space alone; there are other individuals/communities whose presence needs to be appreciated with their willingness to share in a religious space (Wasehudin & Syaefi, 2021).

Unfortunately, although Indonesia is often used as an example of interfaith harmony at the international level, social reality shows that the practice of intolerance still occurs in various regions. This can occur in various forms, including discrimination in the prohibition of worship. The impact of this religious discrimination is social tension, lack of tolerance, and human rights violations (Hakim, 2023). This phenomenon indicates that there is a distance between the idealized value of tolerance and its implementation in everyday life. In the context of Indonesia, religious diversity is a necessity, but this situation can also lead to potential conflicts between religious communities (Haq & Ziaulhaq, 2019). The more plural a society is, the greater the potential for conflict.

The existence of normative values that support harmony in each religion is the foundation for the creation of peace and harmony between religions (Fathullah, 2020). Harmony will be created if the family or community is respectful and loving (Sultan et al., 2023). The harmonization needed is not temporary or political harmonization, but true harmonization based on the teachings of each religion, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Currently, interfaith relations in general can be said to be relatively harmonious from time to time. This is due to the function of

brotherhood inherent in every religion (Kholish & Rahman, 2025). One area that reflects the practice of harmonious interfaith life is Cirebon.

As an area located on the north coastal trade route of Java, Cirebon has long been a meeting point for various cultures and beliefs, including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Chinese beliefs. Cirebon as an area known as the City of Guardians has various stories that are spiritually charged, heroic, tolerance, and customs *alau*. The cultural heritage born from these encounters is not only in the form of architecture and traditions, but also in the form of folklore that contains noble values, one of which is the story of Jamblang Temple. The folklore of Kelenteng Jamblang originates from Jamblang Village, Jamblang Subdistrict, Cirebon Regency, and tells the origin of the establishment of a temple that symbolizes the presence of the Chinese community in the area. This story not only describes local history, but also contains moral and spiritual messages that are closely related to the values of tolerance and diversity. The existence of characters from different religious backgrounds, as well as the harmonious interactions between them, are important representations of the practice of respectful religious life.

On the other hand, tolerance values have actually lived and developed in the local wisdom of Indonesian society, including in the form of folklore. Folklore is not just a form of entertainment or oral literary heritage, but also a medium for inheriting cultural values and moral teachings that apply in society. One of the folktales that contains these values is Kelenteng Jamblang, a local narrative that developed in Jamblang Village, Jamblang Subdistrict, Cirebon Regency. The story tells the origin of a temple founded by the Chinese community and shows the harmonious interaction between ethnic Chinese and the local Muslim-majority community. Through the story, it implies Islamic teachings that reflect tolerance, such as mutual respect, coexistence, and upholding peace.

Previous studies such as Kusuma & Susilo (2020), Hutabarat (2023), (Soffi & Haque, 2023), and (Juhri & Hariani, 2023) generally highlight the importance of interfaith dialogue and the role of religious leaders in building social harmony through formal and institutional approaches. Although they have relevance in the context of religious diversity in Indonesia, these studies have not raised many local cultural sources as a medium for reflecting tolerance values. Therefore, this research takes a different approach by focusing on the representation of religious tolerance in the form of traditional narratives or folklore. This approach is expected to broaden the perspective in understanding how the values of living together are culturally internalized in a pluralistic society.

Based on the above discussion, researchers are interested in studying the folklore of Kelenteng Jamblang because this story represents the practice of religious tolerance in the life of the multicultural Cirebon community. This story is unique because it is rooted in Chinese culture but contains Islamic values that reflect inter-religious harmony. Through this story, it can be seen how interactions across cultures and beliefs can form a local narrative that emphasizes the values of togetherness, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. This research focuses on exploring the representation of the value of tolerance as well as showing the potential of folklore as an educational tool in strengthening religious moderation in a diverse society.

METHODS

This research used a qualitative descriptive approach with content analysis techniques. The descriptive qualitative approach refers to a type of research that aims to present a systematic, precise, and factual description of the facts, characteristics, and interrelationships between the phenomena under study (Furidha, 2024). The main source analyzed is the folklore text entitled “Kelenteng Jamblang”, which tells the origin of a temple in Jamblang Village, Jamblang District, Cirebon Regency.

Data collection was done through literature study and note-taking techniques. Literature study was conducted by reading the story text repeatedly to understand the content, structure, and messages contained therein. Furthermore, researchers recorded parts of the story that were relevant to the values of Islamic teachings, especially those related to the spirit of religious tolerance.

The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself who acts as a human instrument, as explained by (Sugiyono, 2013). In this case, the researcher sets the focus of the study, collects and interprets data, and draws conclusions based on the findings obtained. The

researcher also used tools such as paper and stationery to record important data during the analysis process.

The collected data was analyzed using content analysis techniques. Content analysis is a method designed to identify and interpret meaning in recorded forms of communication by isolating small pieces of data that represent salient concepts, then applying or compiling a specific framework to organize the pieces systematically so that they can be used to describe or explain a phenomenon (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Thus, this technique allows researchers to reveal the values hidden in folklore texts in an in-depth and structured manner.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The folklore of Kelenteng Jamblang which is the object of this research holds various representations of religious tolerance values reflected through the characters, events, and cultural symbols contained therein. Based on the results of content analysis of the story text, a number of Islamic teaching values were found that reflect an open attitude, respect for differences, and peaceful coexistence with followers of other religions. These findings show that this local narrative is not just a historical story, but also contains messages of religious moderation that are relevant in the context of today's multicultural society.

Inclusive and Responsive Leadership of Sunan Gunung Jati

This story illustrates how Islamic leadership in the past had an inclusive orientation and embraced all levels of society, including those of different faiths. Sunan Gunung Jati, as the propagator of Islam in Cirebon, gave a concrete example of tolerance through his speech when inviting the community to build the Great Mosque of Sang Cipta Rasa. However, what is interesting is his response when a young man named Njo Kie Tjit, the bodyguard of Princess Tan Ong Tien Nio who had become a Muslim, raised a question about the rights of non-Muslims to build places of worship:

“Sunan mohon izin bertanya. Bagaimana saudara kami yang bukan beragama Islam? Apakah boleh membangun tempat ibadah juga?”
“Tentu saja, silakan,” jawab Sunan Gunung Jati dengan tersenyum

This statement emphasizes that Islam does not prohibit other people from practicing their faith. In fact, scholarly figures such as Sunan Gunung Jati responded with a positive and open attitude. This is in line with the principle of freedom of religion in Islam, as affirmed in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 256: “There is no compulsion in (embracing) religion.” Freedom of religion is not only an ability, but also a real condition that allows a person to choose and practice their religion without obstacles or coercion. Every individual has the right to think freely, listen, see, express opinions, convey ideas, and choose religion. If freedom of religion is guaranteed and protected by law and human rights, then it provides freedom for all people to embrace their respective religions (Susilo, 2024).

Leaders who are able to respond to diversity wisely and openly will be an important foundation for the creation of social harmony. The role of religious leaders in creating an atmosphere of dialog is decisive in building tolerance in pluralistic societies. The relationship between religious leaders and society can be explained as a relationship in which religious leaders act as role models, coaches, and community leaders, and religious leaders play an important role in dampening the atmosphere and preventing divisions between religious communities, so as to realize mutual harmony in the life of the nation and state, so the attitude of moderation in religion is absolutely necessary (Malau, 2023). Religious conflicts are not only triggered by people's perceptions, but also by the attitudes and behaviors of religious leaders who are not open to other religions. Conflict triggers involve intolerance, religious extremism, negative propaganda, politicization of religion, and lack of interfaith dialogue. The non-open attitude of religious leaders can exacerbate tensions between religious communities, so measures such as education, interfaith dialogue, and promotion of tolerance are important to defuse religious conflicts. Religious leaders must have wisdom in positioning themselves when preaching, especially in a plural society (Dakhi, 2023).

Representation of Solidarity in Cultural and Religious Diversity

The story of Kelenteng Jamblang contains a strong representation of the value of tolerance that transcends the boundaries of religious and cultural identity. Njo Kie Tjit is portrayed as a figure of integrity, loyalty, and has a great commitment to the construction of houses of worship in his community, even though he has embraced Islam. He remained devoted to building the temple as a symbol of respect for the culture and community from which he came. In fact, he chose to carry the wood from the Great Mosque of Sang Cipta Rasa to the location of the temple himself, and eventually died of exhaustion on the way:

"Ia merasa senang sekaligus bertanggung jawab membawa sendiri kayu itu... tapi karena kelelahan sebelum sampai ke tempat yang dituju tepatnya di Sungai Jamblang ia wafat."

The society that learned of the incident not only offered condolences, but also showed great respect:

"Masyarakat setempat memakamkannya secara Islam di belakang kelenteng dan diberi julukan Mbah Goler."

It shows an appreciation for dedication regardless of Njo Kie Tjit's dual identity background as a Chinese and a Muslim. The actions of the community who buried Njo Kie Tjit Islamically behind the temple show that respect for a person does not have to be limited by religious or ethnic identity, but is based on the merit and sincerity of his dedication. According to (Marpuah, 2019), social interaction between community members can be harmonious if it is based on a shared commitment to social norms. This commitment creates a social force that allows people to overcome differences of opinion and interests, so as to form complete social harmony and integrity. Interfaith social engagement includes not only physical activities but also emotional and social dimensions, including principles such as mutual assistance, honesty, cooperation, respect, harmlessness, and polite and friendly speech ((Fazrian & Riswan, 2025)).

In Sen's (2006) view, one's identity is not singular and rigid, but rather plural and contextual. One can belong to a particular ethnic community, embrace a particular religion, and simultaneously have different cultural attachments. Conflicts often occur when people are forced to recognize only one dominant identity, while ignoring the complexity of other identities. However, the story of Njo Kie Tjit shows that the people of Jamblang are able to recognize and respect all dimensions of their identity. This practice shows that traditional Cirebon communities have implemented culturally-based social inclusiveness, not just legalistic or formal. They do not reject differences, but rather embrace them as part of a shared daily life. The acceptance of individuals like

Njo Kie Tjit symbolizes that true tolerance does not stop at acquiescence, but comes in concrete actions that place everyone in an equal and valued position.

Gotong Royong as an Interfaith Social Practice

In the context of religious life, gotong royong is an important means of strengthening solidarity and showing a tangible manifestation of tolerance between religious communities. When cooperation is carried out regardless of differences in religion, ethnicity or cultural background, the value of humanity and diversity becomes the main basis for inclusive social relations.

After the death of Njo Kie Tjit, the community did not let the construction of the temple stop. Instead, they voluntarily and together continued the work by carrying the wood:

"Kayu tersebut secara gotong royong dibawa oleh masyarakat untuk menjadi salah satu bagian atap di kelenteng Jamblang."

The Gotong royong is not done because of religious similarities, but because of the spirit of togetherness. This proves that in traditional Cirebon society, interfaith cooperation has become part of the value of living together. Harmonious coexistence is reflected in concrete practices, one of which is working together when there is a disaster and providing mutual support in various

communal activities. This harmony is a portrait of the success of local communities in building sustainable social cohesion in the midst of diversity (Salwa & Najib, 2025). This finding is in line with the results of (Irmawandi & Hidayat, 2023) which shows that daily practices such as gotong royong and ngobeng in Rehobot Village, Indramayu, are strong symbols of religious moderation. In the study, gotong royong was interpreted not only as technical cooperation, but as a sociocultural practice that reflects the values of solidarity, inclusiveness, and tolerance between religious communities.

Religious moderation is closely related to the concept of pluralism in Indonesia, which is understood as an attitude of building normative awareness both theologically and socially towards religious diversity in social life (As'ad et al., 2021). Pluralism does not teach relativism that equates all religious truths, but emphasizes recognition of differences while adhering to personal beliefs and respecting the beliefs of others (Ramstedt, 2019). In this context, religious moderation aims to foster an inclusive, egalitarian, humanist, professional, and non-discriminatory attitude (Sihombing et al., 2020). Indonesia's diversity is not a barrier, but a great potential to strengthen tolerance and social solidarity if managed through an open and inclusive approach. Therefore, religious moderation and pluralism are complementary value bases in creating a just, peaceful, and respectful social life in the midst of different beliefs.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how the values of religious tolerance are represented in the folklore *Kelenteng Jamblang* within the context of Cirebon's multicultural society. Through a content analysis of the narrative, the research found that tolerance is not merely an abstract ideal but is embedded in local traditions and historical experiences manifested in inclusive leadership, respect for multi-faith identities, and communal cooperation across religious lines. These representations align closely with the broader objectives of religious moderation and pluralism in Indonesia, which emphasize inclusivity, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect.

The findings demonstrate that folklore can serve as an effective medium for transmitting moral and religious values, making it a relevant pedagogical tool for religious and multicultural education. Practically, integrating stories like *Kelenteng Jamblang* into educational curricula, interfaith dialogue, and community-building activities may foster deeper understanding and appreciation of diversity, especially among younger generations.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies with other regional folklores that reflect interfaith harmony, as well as to explore how such narratives are received and interpreted by contemporary audiences. This could expand our understanding of folklore's role in shaping collective identity and promoting social cohesion in increasingly plural societies.

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APPENDIX

KLENTENG JAMBLANG

Pada suatu hari Sunan Gunung Jati mengadakan pidato saat peristiwa rencana pembangunan Masjid Agung Sang Cipta Rasa.

“Rakyat Cirebon silakan membangun masjid di daerah masing-masing. Hidupkan masjid-masjid dengan salat dan mengaji,” ujar sang Sunan dengan suka cita.

Saat berpidato ada yang mengangkat tangan. Nama pemuda itu Njo Kie Tjit . Ia merupakan pengawal pribadi Putri Tan Ong Tien Nio yang berasal dari Kerajaan Tiongkok dan sudah menjadi muslim.

“Sunan mohon izin bertanya. Bagaimana saudara kami yang bukan beragama Islam? Apakah boleh membangun tempat ibadah juga?” tanya pengawal itu.

“Tentu saja, silakan.” Jawab Sunan Gunung Jati dengan tersenyum.

Bahkan Sang Sunan mengatakan bersedia memberikan bantuan rakyat Cirebon dari agama manapun yang ingin membangun tempat ibadahnya.

Pada suatu hari Njo Kie Tjit membutuhkan kayu untuk membangun Klenteng di Jamblang. Mengetahui kebutuhan itu sang Sunan mengizinkan Njo Kie Tjit membawa kayu yang diperoleh dari material pembangunan Masjid Agung Sang Cipta Rasa. Kayu itu sangat besar dan rencananya menjadi tiang penyanggah utama masjid tersebut.

Njo Kie Tjit membawa kayu tersebut. Ia merasa senang sekaligus bertanggung jawab membawa sendiri kayu itu dari Masjid Agung Sang Cipta Rasa ke Klenteng Jamblang. Ia memikulnya, tapi karena kelelahan sebelum sampai ke tempat yang dituju tepatnya di Sungai Jamblang ia wafat. Masyarakat setempat yang mengetahui kejadian itu memakamkannya secara Islam di belakang klenteng dan diberi julukan Mbah Goler. Lalu, kayu tersebut secara gotong royong dibawa oleh masyarakat untuk menjadi salah satu bagian atap di klenteng jamblang. Masyarakat tersebut menyebutnya sesuhunan.