
THE HARMONY OF CUSTOM AND RELIGION IN THE RIAU MALAY TRADITION AS A MODEL OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION

Khairiah

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia
E-mail: khairiah@uin-suska.ac.id

Annisa Darma Yanti

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia
E-mail: annisadarmay@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Khairiah

Article history: Received: December 21, 2025 | Revised: February 17, 2026 | Available Online: March 15, 2026.

How to cite this article: Khairiah, Khairiah., and Annisa Darma Yanti. "The Harmony of Custom and Religion in the Riau Malay Tradition as a Model of Religious Moderation". *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 16, no. 1 (2026): 89-111. DOI: 10.15642/religio.v16i1.4010.

Abstract: This study examines the harmony between custom and religion in Malay tradition as a model of religious moderation based on local wisdom. The principle of "custom is based on sharia, and sharia is based on the Quran" reflects the dialogical relationship between Islamic values and cultural practices. Nevertheless, globalization and social change pose challenges to the sustainability of this relationship. This study aims to analyze the form of harmony of custom and religion and its potential as a model of religious moderation in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach through library research with descriptive-analytical methods. The results show that the harmony of custom and religion is a dynamic process that is constantly being negotiated. This harmony is reflected in practices such as deliberation, *kenduri* (communal gathering), and mutual cooperation, which serve to build social cohesion, instill moral values, and resolve conflicts. The values of balance, tolerance, and solidarity within these practices align with the principles of religious moderation. Nevertheless, tensions also arise due to differences in religious interpretation and the influence of modernization. This research confirms that religious moderation is a contextual social construct, so that Malay tradition is relevant as an adaptive model of moderation in a multicultural society.

Keywords: Custom; Local wisdom; Malay tradition; Religious moderation.

Introduction

The discourse on religious moderation in a global context has been a crucial issue for maintaining social harmony amidst increasing identity polarization, radicalism, and religious-based conflict.¹ A large number of studies have shown that a purely normative theological approach is insufficient to foster an inclusive and harmonious religious life, especially in diverse societies. Therefore, a model of religious moderation is needed that is not solely based on religious doctrine but also rooted in local wisdom lived and practiced by the community.²

From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, religious moderation emerges from the interaction between religion and local culture. Clifford Geertz explains that religion does not exist in isolation but is integrated with the systems of meaning that exist within society. He argues that religious practices are always influenced by cultural symbols. Therefore, moderate forms of religiosity often develop through a process of negotiation between religious teachings and local traditions. This approach suggests that religious moderation results from the dynamic interaction between religious values and the social structure of society.³

In Malay society, the relationship between custom (*adat*) and religion has a strong and interrelated role. The principle of “custom is based on sharia, and sharia is based on the Quran” (*adat bersendi syarak, syarak bersendi Kitabullah*) reflects the existence of a historical process between Islamic values and local traditions that form a harmonious social and cultural system.⁴ Traditions such as *tepuk tepung tawar* (a traditional Malay blessing ritual which involves the use of symbolic flour), feasting, and exchanging rhymes are not only cultural activities, but also ways to instill religious values such as togetherness, respect, social solidarity, and good communication.⁵ Thus, Malay

¹ Luthfia Rosidin et al., “Strategies for Harmonization of Science, Religion, and Social in Strengthening Religious Moderation in Indonesia,” *Courtesy: Journal of Islamic Education* 3, no. 4 (2025), 1000–1009.

² Muhammad Ghifary and Ramadan Mallo, “Building Inclusive and Dialogical Religious Practices: A Study of Normative Theological Approaches,” *Ism: Journal of Islamic Studies and Multidisciplinary Research* 3, no. 1 (2025), 27–34.

³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Basic Books Inc, 1973).

⁴ M. Mahyuddin, *Adat dan Agama dalam Budaya Melayu* (Pekanbaru: Balai Adat Melayu Riau, 2015).

⁵ Annisa Darma Yanti, Tuti Andriani, and Fauzan Azima Syafiuddin, “Tolerance and Tolerance: A Study of Riau Malay Culture in the Dynamics of

customs can be understood as a practical space for implementing religious moderation based on culture and community context.

However, in the era of globalization and rapid social change, the separation between custom and religion is increasingly apparent. Some groups consider custom to be heretical or lacking a strong religious basis. Even some customary practices are also beginning to lose their sacred value and religious significance.⁶ This situation can weaken the social structure of Malay society and diminish the values of moderation traditionally maintained through customs.⁷ In addition, the process of modernization and cultural standardization has contributed to the increasing marginalization of local traditions as sources of social and spiritual values.

This situation reveals the gap between the discourse on religious moderation, often discussed at the policy level, and the reality of community's cultural life. Yet, the historical experience of Malay society demonstrates that the harmony of custom and religion has long been an effective social practice for fostering tolerance, balance, and the application of religious values in daily life. Thus, Malay tradition has the potential to serve as a source of knowledge for developing locally based models of religious moderation.⁸

Within the *wasatīyah* framework in Islam, religious moderation revolves around the principles of balance, justice, and tolerance. However, much research still focuses on normative approaches and state policies, whereas studies examining local traditions as the basis for practicing religious moderation are still limited.⁹ Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between custom and religion in Malay tradition as a model of religious moderation based on local

Multiculturalism,” *Tolerance: Scientific Media of Religious Communication* 16, no. 1 (2024), 13 <https://doi.org/10.24014/Trs.V16i1.29500>.

⁶ Kunawi Basyir, *Menyapa Masyarakat Madani di Bumi Seribu Pura* (Surabaya: Global Aksara Pers, 2023).

⁷ Badrus Sholeh and Khaeron Sirin, *Ormas Islam dan Gerakan Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia* (Depok: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2021).

⁸ Alimuddin Hassan Palawa and Mahyudin Syukri, “Integration of Islam and Malay: Studies in the Southeast Asia and the Archipelago,” *Nusantara: Journal of Islamic Studies of Southeast Asia* 20, no. 1 (2024), 1–13.

⁹ Muhammad Arif Luthfi, “Religious Moderation in an Islamic Perspective: Maintaining Harmony in Diversity,” *El-Makrifah: Journal of Islamic Studies and Education* 2, no. 2 (2025), 1–14.

wisdom. This research uses an approach from the anthropology of religion, inculturation theory, and the concept of *wasatīyah*.

In a global context, the issue of religious moderation is increasingly important due to increasing identity polarization, radicalism, and religious conflict in various countries. Many studies have shown that a purely normative theological approach is insufficiently effective in building an inclusive and harmonious religious life, especially in culturally and ethnically diverse societies.¹⁰ Therefore, alternative approaches are needed that can connect religious teachings with the social and cultural realities of society. One approach that can be used is local wisdom as a medium for instilling the values of religious moderation.

In this context, the Malay community of Riau provides an interesting example of the relationship between custom and religion. The principle of “custom is based on sharia, and sharia is based on the Quran” is often used as a basis for understanding the link between Islamic values and local cultural practices. Nevertheless, this relationship is not always simple and harmonious. There are processes of adjustment, reinterpretation, and even differences of opinion among various religious and cultural authorities. Therefore, to understand Malay tradition as a model of religious moderation, an approach that not only explains but also critically analyzes the dynamics that occur is necessary.¹¹

Previous studies often portray Malay traditions as ideal examples of a harmonious relationship between custom and religion. This narrative typically emphasizes unity and togetherness but pays little attention to the potential tensions within these traditions. For example, there are differing views between traditionalists and reformists regarding the understanding of certain customary practices. Therefore, research is needed that is not merely descriptive but also examines in greater depth how these cultural practices are understood, negotiated, and maintained amidst current social change and developments in religious thought.

¹⁰ Arief Subhan and Abdallah (eds.), *Konstruksi Moderasi Beragama: Catatan Guru Besar UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta* (Jakarta: PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2021).

¹¹ Tiara Trirahmayati and Yasnel, “The Way of Life of the Riau Malays: A Sustainable Cultural Heritage,” *Multidisciplinary Indonesian Center Journal (MICJO)* 2, no. 1 (2025), 376–84. <https://doi.org/10.62567/Micjo.V2i1.409>.

Theoretically, this study utilizes the perspective of the anthropology of religion and inculturation theory, which view religion as a phenomenon that constantly interacts with local culture. This approach helps us understand that religious practices are not singular and fixed but are shaped through complex historical and social processes. In addition, the concept of religious moderation, often associated with the principle of *wasatīyah*, is understood not only as a normative teaching but also as a social practice evident in everyday life. Thus, this study aims to re-examine the relationship between custom and religion, not merely as a normative ideal, but as a dynamic social phenomenon that adapts to the societal context.

This research employs a library research method, examining various relevant academic literature on the relationship between custom and religion in Malay tradition. Through a critical analysis of these sources, this research aims to identify forms of harmonization and examine the limitations and challenges in practice. This approach was chosen to provide a strong conceptual foundation and broaden theoretical understanding of local wisdom-based religious moderation.

To date, studies on religious moderation have focused primarily on normative approaches, formal education, or state policy, while research that bases local traditions on models of moderation remains limited. Furthermore, studies on Malay custom often emphasize anthropological and historical aspects but have rarely directly linked these to the concept of religious moderation, thereby indicating a gap in research that needs to be bridged by integrating religious studies, cultural studies, and moderation discourse within a single, comprehensive analytical framework.

Based on such a background, this research is crucial in examining how the relationship between custom and religion in Malay tradition can be developed as a model of religious moderation that is appropriate to the cultural context and easily applicable. This research is expected to contribute not only theoretically but also to offer a practical model that can be used to strengthen social harmony in diverse societies. Thus, this research has significant academic and social value in formulating religious moderation that is rooted in local traditions and remains relevant to global challenges.

The Integration of Customary and Religious Values in Malay Society

The integration of traditional and religious values in Malay society is an important foundation in shaping social structures, value systems, and daily practices.¹² In the Malay community's perspective, custom and religion are not considered as two opposing entities, but as elements that support each other and create balance. The principle of "custom is based on sharia, and sharia is based on the Quran" highlights that customs obtain their normative basis from religious teachings, while religion is manifested in social life through custom.¹³ Thus, custom acts as a cultural medium for translating religious values into practices that are appropriate to the societal context.

Such integration is the result of a long and complex historical process. In the body of literature on this subject, the relationship between custom and religion is not seen as something natural, but as the result of a social process involving interactions between Islamic teachings and local values. This process takes place through adaptation, selection, and reinterpretation, resulting in a form of religiosity that is appropriate to the context. In this respect, a custom is not only a complement to religion, but also an important means of implementing religious teachings in everyday life.¹⁴

Historically, the relationship between custom and religion in Malay society evolved with the arrival of Islam in the region. Islam did not eradicate existing customs, but rather adapted and transformed them.¹⁵ Local traditions that did not conflict with the principle of *tawhid* were then accepted into Islamic teachings and formed a distinctive religious culture,¹⁶ demonstrating that Malay society has a way of adapting religious values to social conditions, thus creating an inclusive and moderate religious pattern.

¹² Hardianto Ismail Rahman, *Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya Dasar Islam* (Sinjai: Latin, 2017).

¹³ Choirun Niswa et al., "Islam dan Stratifikasi Sosial di Dunia Melayu Transformasi Struktural di Tengah Globalisasi," *J-Ceki: Journal of Scientific Scholars* 4, no. 3 (2025), 185–90.

¹⁴ Hasse Jubba et al., "Social Construction of Islamic Local Tradition in Malay Community, Indonesia," *Islamic Realities: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (2023), 139 https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v9i2.7551.

¹⁵ Candra Kirana, et al., "The Development of Malay Islam and Nusantara Islam: History, Culture, and Social Influence," *Educational: Journal of Education & Teaching Innovation* 5, no. 4 (2025), 1371–79.

¹⁶ Nur Khalik Ridwan, *Gerakan Kultural Islam Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Jamaah Nahdliyyin Mataram, 2015).

In daily life, such integration is evident in various social practices. In communal life, traditions such as *kenduri* (communal gathering), village deliberations, and mutual cooperation reflect the values of brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), solidarity, and concern for others, which align with the Islamic teaching of mutual assistance (*ta'āwun*).¹⁷ During important events like births, marriages, and deaths, Malay customs combine cultural elements with religious practices such as prayers, blessings (*salawāt*), and moral advice, demonstrating that customs not only serve as a cultural identity but also serve as a means of instilling spiritual values in community life.

This integration is also evident in the traditional Malay leadership system. The leadership structure, which involves a *penghulu* (headman), *ulamā'* (clerics), and community leaders, demonstrates cooperation between customary and religious authorities. Important decisions are usually taken through deliberation, taking into account both customary rules and sharia principles, evincing a decision-making process that aligns with values of religious moderation, such as balance, justice, and the common good.¹⁸ Furthermore, values such as politeness, respect for elders, and polite speech in Malay culture reflect Islamic moral teachings that are deeply embedded in custom. The Malay language, rich in expressions and proverbs, also serves as a means of conveying ethical and religious values to the younger generation. In this regard, custom serves as an educational medium for shaping a society that adheres to religious and cultural values.¹⁹

In the integration of custom and religion in Malay society, custom functions not only to establish social norms but also as a means of resolving cultural and religious conflicts.²⁰ The practice of deliberation and mutual agreement that prioritizes peace demonstrates that Islamic values have been implemented within the customary system. This aligns with the Islamic concept of *islāh*, which underscores the importance of peace and the restoration of social

¹⁷ Bahdar, *Ketika Islam Menyapa Tanah Kaili: Kisah Perjumpaan Agama dan Budaya Lokal* (Palu: Maestro Lere Palu Barat, 2023).

¹⁸ Marlina, "Nilai Kearifan Lokal dalam Tunjuk Ajar Melayu," *Diksi* 8, no. 2 (2020), 199–209.

¹⁹ Fatimah Depi Susanty, "Affective Education in Riau Malay Customs: Structure, Values, and Identity Formation," *Nusantara: Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.24014/Nusantara.V20i1.38563>.

²⁰ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985).

relations.²¹ Thus, the relationship between custom and religion produces a method of conflict resolution that focuses not only on legal regulations but also considers ethical and social aspects. In this context, custom serves as a means of guiding religious practices so that they do not become exclusive or extreme but remain within the boundaries of balance and tolerance appropriate to societal conditions.

This situation can be explained through the perspective of inculturation, namely the process of interaction between religious teachings and local culture that produces forms of religiosity appropriate to the societal context.²² In Malay society, the incorporation of Islamic values into customs does not occur directly or automatically, but rather through a process of selection and reinterpretation adapted to basic religious principles. This demonstrates that customs are not merely passive entities, but also active spaces for interpreting and adapting religious teachings to social life. In other words, this integration reflects the form of religiosity experienced in real life, wherein religious teachings are understood and practiced within the cultural framework that exists within the community.²³

Furthermore, in the context of the relationship between customary law and religious law, this integration evinces a complementary and adaptive partnership. Custom helps implement sharia norms into social practices that are readily accepted by the community, whereas religion provides the basis and legitimacy for the implementation of customary law. However, this relationship is not always without challenges. In some circumstances, differences arise between the desire to purify religious teachings and long-established customary practices. Nevertheless, Malay society typically manages these differences through dialogue and cultural adjustment, thus mitigating conflict without eliminating either party.²⁴

²¹ Shita Dwi Asriani, "Implementing the Principles of *Musyawarah* and *Ishlah* in Islamic Organizations," *Lentera Peradaban: Journal on Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2026), 52–67.

²² Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1986).

²³ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁴ Maskur Rosyid and Dhani Dwi Afrizal, "Integration of Customary Law in the Reform of Islamic Family Law in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Jurisprudence*,

From the perspective of religious moderation, integration demonstrates a significant contribution as a model based on local wisdom. Values such as *wasatīyah* (balance), tolerance, and respect for differences have not only become normative discourse but have also been internalized in the customary systems and social practices of the Malay community.²⁵ It confirms that religious moderation in the Riau Malay context was not constructed using a top-down approach, but rather grew out of a long cultural process through the integration of custom and religion.

One crucial aspect of integration is the role of social institutions, such as the family, customary institutions, and religious leaders, in conveying these values. Through the process of socialization, traditional and religious values are instilled simultaneously, forming a societal habitus that tends to view the two as one. However, in the modern context, the role of these institutions is challenged by changes in social structures, urbanization, and the increasing influence of digital media. This has resulted in the weakening of traditional authority in conveying values, while also opening up space for the emergence of new interpretations of religious teachings.²⁶

Furthermore, integration of custom and religion is also influenced by differing perspectives within society. Tradition-oriented groups tend to view custom as an essential part of religious practice, whereas reformist groups emphasize purifying religious teachings from cultural elements deemed to lack a clear basis in religious texts. This difference shows that integration is not a fixed end result, but rather a space for open discussion of diverse perspectives. In this context, the integration of values can be a source of unity, yet it can also give rise to potential conflict.²⁷

In a broader context, the integration of custom and religion in Malay society can also be understood as a way to maintain social

Economic and Legal Theory 3, no. 2 (2025), 1792–1812.
<https://doi.org/10.62976/Ijijel.V3i2.1170>.

²⁵ Azyumardi Azra, *Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Context* (Jakarta: Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

²⁶ Putri Grace et al., “National Integration through the Role of Traditional and Religious Leaders in Sidorejo Hilir Village,” *JICN: Journal of Intellectual and Scholars of the Archipelago* 2, no. 5 (2025), 8216–20.

²⁷ Suminar et al., *Integrasi dan Disintegrasi dalam Perspektif Budaya* (Jakarta: BUPARA Nugraha, 2003).

balance. Such values as tolerance, politeness, and solidarity help create stability in society and serve as the basis for the practice of religious moderation. However, the success of these values depends heavily on the community's ability to maintain them amidst changing times. Globalization, for example, brings new values that can enrich culture, but it can also shift existing local values.²⁸

It is important to note that the sustainability of this model faces various challenges in the modern era, such as globalization, changes in social structures, and the emergence of religious understandings that focus more on texts. These challenges can affect the balance between custom and religion if not addressed adaptively. Therefore, the relationship between custom and religion in the Riau Malay tradition must be understood as a continuously evolving process that requires reinterpretation to remain relevant to current conditions.

Thus, the integration of custom and religion in Malay society not only strengthens social relations but can also serve as a foundation for developing a model of religious moderation appropriate to the context. In this regard, the Riau Malay tradition can be seen as a concrete example of a harmonious relationship between custom and religion, capable of creating an inclusive, flexible, and mutually supportive society. Therefore, the Malay tradition can serve as a reference for developing a model of religious moderation based on local wisdom that is relevant to diverse communities.

Forms of Harmony of Custom and Religion in Malay Tradition

The harmony between custom and religion in Malay tradition is evident in various social practices and cultural rituals that incorporate religious values into custom. This integration is not merely symbolic but also shapes life patterns, where religion serves as a source of values, and custom serves as a means of implementing them in social life. Thus, custom functions as a cultural space that translates religious teachings into practices that are appropriate to societal conditions and easily accepted.²⁹

²⁸ Choirun Niswah Asiana and Saipul Annur, "The Role of Customs and Values in Islamic-Based Malay Culture on the Formation of Social Identity in the Modern Society Era," *Journal of Educational Theory and Development* 9, no. 2 (2025), 13–23.

²⁹ Ramli Ramadhan, Neila Susanti, and Ismail Marzuki, "The Symbolic Meaning of Bale in the Religious Rituals of Malay Muslims Tanjungbalai: A Phenomenological Study," *Islamika: Journal of Islamic Sciences* 25, no. 2 (2025).

One example of this harmony is the tradition of *tepuk tepung tamar*, performed at important moments such as weddings, circumcisions, the inauguration of leaders, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. This ritual includes prayers and blessings conveying hopes for safety and well-being. Culturally, this tradition symbolizes purification and the hope for the common good, while this practice religiously reflects an effort to seek blessings and pray to God.³⁰ This fusion of cultural symbols and religious practices shows that custom serves as a means of expressing spiritual values in Malay society.

Another form of harmony is seen in communal feasts or thanksgiving ceremonies, which are an important part of community life. These feasts not only serve as social activities to strengthen relationships between individuals, but also as a form of communal worship through prayer, *tahlil* (the recitation of the phrase affirming *tawhīd*), and *ṣalawāt* (blessings upon the Prophet). The values of togetherness, solidarity, and caring embodied in these feasts align with Islamic teachings on brotherhood and mutual assistance. Thus, feasts become spaces that combine social and spiritual aspects.

In the field of religious education, the ceremony of completion of the Quran (*khatm al-Qur'ān*) also exemplifies the relationship between tradition and religion. It is not only considered a personal achievement but also celebrated with family and the community. The use of traditional attire, processions, and communal prayers demonstrate that religious values are conveyed through cultural symbols. This tradition serves as a way to foster a love for the Quran while strengthening the religious identity of the Malay community.³¹

Harmony is also evident in the customary deliberation system, which involves traditional leaders and religious figures in decision-making. This deliberation takes into account both customary rules and sharia principles, ensuring that decisions are focused on the common good. It reflects the values of justice, balance, and respect for religious morals. In terms of religious moderation, this type of deliberation serves as a means of conflict resolution that prioritizes dialogue and mutual agreement.

³⁰ Jamaluddin Arsyad, "Akulturasi Islam dengan Budaya Melayu: Studi terhadap Upacara Adat Perkawinan Jambi Melayu" (PhD diss., UIN Raden Fattah, Palembang, 2019).

³¹ Agus Triyono et al., *Komunikasi, Religi, dan Budaya* (Yogyakarta: Asosiasi Pendidikan Ilmu Komunikasi Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah, 2017).

Beyond rituals and social structures, harmony is seen in Malay language and literature, such as proverbs, *gurindam* (traditional poems), and poetry containing moral and religious messages. These expressions serve as a means of conveying values such as honesty, courtesy, responsibility, and mutual respect. Thus, Malay literature functions as a pedagogical instrument that combines moral and religious values in a beautiful and easily understood form.³²

Another form of harmony is evident in Malay social etiquette, such as respecting elders, honoring guests, speaking politely, and being humble. These values align with Islamic moral teachings, so that custom serves as a social system that helps instill religious moral values. In daily life, Malay society does not separate customary behavior from moral behavior, as both are considered part of faith.³³

From the perspective of religious studies, these forms of harmony demonstrate the process of inculturation, the incorporation of religious values into local culture. Malay tradition demonstrates that the relationship between religion and culture not only shapes a distinct religious identity but also encourages an inclusive and moderate way of practicing religion. Practices that emphasize togetherness, deliberation, and balance help create a tolerant society and reduce the potential for conflict.³⁴

Conceptually, various Malay cultural practices such as *tepuak tepung tawar*, communal gathering, and the ceremony of completion of the Quran are often used as main examples of the relationship between custom and religion. In many studies, this practice is understood as a way to convey Islamic values through local cultural symbols, indicating a relatively successful inculturation process. Nevertheless, most studies only describe this relationship in general terms without critically examining the differences in religious views within society.

Currently, these practices have also drawn criticism from groups seeking to purify Islamic teachings. On the one hand, reformist groups consider them heretical or inconsistent with the pure

³² Fadlin Muhammad Takari, *Memahami Adat dan Budaya Melayu* (Medan: Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2019).

³³ Raudatul Ulum et al., *Religiosity and Social Piety* (Jakarta: Press Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

³⁴ Sumanto Al Qurtuby and Tedi Kholiludin (eds.), *Agama & Budaya Nusantara Pasca Islamisasi* (Semarang: eLSA Press, 2020).

teachings of Islam.³⁵ These reformist groups highlight the importance of returning to the teachings considered original. On the other hand, traditional groups see them as part of the expression of Islamic culture. These differing views demonstrate that what is referred to as “harmony” is actually the result of an ongoing process of dialogue and adjustment between various religious views.

Compared with previous research on the relationship between Malays and Islam, discussions typically emphasize successful integration without adequately addressing the tensions within the community. Many studies portray Malay society as moderate and harmonious, but little attention is paid to how modernization, globalization, and transnational Islamic movements have influenced changes in local religious practices. Therefore, literature-based research needs to go further, not simply repeating previous findings but also critiquing established assumptions.

From a more analytical perspective, the relationship between custom and religion in Malay tradition cannot be separated from the long process of Islam’s arrival in the region, which occurred through an adaptive cultural approach. This process not only conveyed religious teachings but also transformed the meaning of symbols within local cultural practices.³⁶ Thus, the resulting harmonization resulted from a process of selection and reinterpretation. Customary elements that aligned with Islamic values were retained, while those that did not were adapted or abandoned. This suggests that the relationship between custom and religion in Malay society is the result of a constructed social process, not a natural occurrence.

It is, however, important to note that such a form of harmony does not always occur without obstacles. Several studies have shown that certain customary practices, such as feasting and *tepuk tepung tawar*, are often the subject of debate among Muslims. Reformist groups emphasizing the purification of religious teachings tend to view these practices as innovations lacking a strong basis in religious texts, whereas traditional groups view them as part of a legitimate expression of Islamic culture. This distinction suggests that the

³⁵ Maulana, Achmad Ghozali, and Sjuai Sarifandi, “Tradisi Tepuk Tepung Tawar dalam Budaya Melayu Riau: Sebuah Analisis dalam Perspektif Hadis,” *Nusantara: Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies* 20, no. 2 (2024), 86–93.

³⁶ Ibrahim Chalid, “Peradaban Melayu Sebagai Khasanah Peradaban Nusantara,” in *Revitalisasi Peradaban Melayu dalam Kekinian* (Banda Aceh: Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam, 2008).

relationship between custom and religion is not a single entity, but rather open to various interpretations.³⁷

Furthermore, this harmony must also be considered within the Malay social structure, which places custom and religion as two complementary authorities. In practice, customary leaders and religious figures often work together to maintain social balance through deliberation. Nonetheless, in the modern context, this role has changed with the development of formal state institutions. This has shifted the role of custom from being the primary source of rules to being more symbolic, which in turn affects its ability to instill religious values in society.

In ritual practice, the relationship between custom and religion functions not only as a spiritual means but also as a way to maintain social life. Rituals such as completion of the Quran and communal gathering not only strengthen individuals' relationships with religion but also strengthen bonds between individuals. However, in an increasingly diverse and changing society, this communal function faces challenges, particularly when community participation begins to diminish or its meaning changes. Therefore, the sustainability of these traditions cannot be taken for granted but must be viewed within the broader context of social change.³⁸

Culturally, the relationship between custom and religion is also evident in the use of language and literature as a means of instilling values. However, in the modern era, the role of traditional literature has begun to be displaced by digital media and changing communication methods, suggesting that forms of harmony using traditional media need to be adapted to remain relevant in conveying religious values today.

Furthermore, analysis of the relationship between custom and religion also needs to take into account generational differences. Younger generations, who are more influenced by globalization and external understandings of religion, often have different views on traditional practices. In some cases, on the one hand, this can weaken the role of customs as a means of instilling religious values. However,

³⁷ Achmad Fedyani Saifuddin, *Proceedings of the 60th Anniversary Conference of Indonesian Anthropology: Reflections on the Contribution of Anthropology to Indonesia* (Jakarta: Center for Anthropological Studies, Faculty of Anthropology, University of Indonesia, 2017).

³⁸ Zikri Mawardi Darussamin, *Integrasi Kewarisan Adat Melayu-Riau dengan Islam* (Jakarta: LKiS Printing Cemerlang, 2014).

on the other hand, this situation also opens up opportunities to reinterpret customs to better suit the needs of the times.³⁹

Thus, the relationship between custom and religion in Malay tradition needs to be understood as a constantly evolving process. This relationship not only demonstrates a unity of values but also contains the possibility of conflict, dialogue, and change. With this approach, the understanding of custom and religion becomes more comprehensive and does not become merely descriptive or overly emphasize ideals. Moreover, in the context of religious moderation, traditional Malay practices show inclusiveness, openness to dialogue, and a focus on communal living. However, it is important to view this within the broader context, that is, moderation is not an established condition, but a continually evolving and negotiated process. In other words, religious moderation in Malay society is not something that automatically exists, but is shaped through historical interactions between local culture, Islamic teachings, and social and political dynamics.

Therefore, the relationship between custom and religion in Malay tradition needs to be understood more critically as a dynamic cultural construct that is not free from tension. This relationship forms the cultural basis for religious moderation because it creates patterns of religiosity that are contextually appropriate, open to dialogue, and oriented toward the common good. Thus, Malay tradition can be seen as a relevant practical model for developing religious moderation in a diverse society.

Malay Tradition as a Model of Religious Moderation

Malay tradition possesses cultural characteristics that reflect the values of religious moderation, such as balance, tolerance, deliberation, and respect for differences. These values are not only normative but are implemented in everyday life.⁴⁰ Therefore, Malay tradition can be seen as a model of religious moderation based on local wisdom, as it harmoniously integrates religious commitment with social realities. This section examines Malay tradition as an arena in which religious values and cultural practices interact, negotiate, and

³⁹ Novian Widiadharna et al., *Gagasan Resonansi Agama dan Budaya Robby Habiba Abror* (Yogyakarta: Q-Media, 2025).

⁴⁰ Dawami, "Local Wisdom in Religious Moderation Education: An Analysis of the Philosophical Value of the Symbolic Meaning of Tepak Sirih," *Journal of Instructional Development* 8, no. 2 (2025), 449–57.

sometimes even debate. Therefore, the term “moderation model” is not something final and uniform, but rather the result of a constantly changing and evolving social process.

Conceptually, religious moderation in the Malay tradition is rooted in a way of life that places religion as a moral guide and customs as social rules. The principle of *wasafiyah* can be seen in the way the Malay people carry out religious teachings without neglecting cultural contexts. Religious practices are not carried out in a rigid or closed manner, but through an open approach and adapting to the social environment, suggesting that Malay traditions have the ability to reduce the potential for extremism and religious conflict.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it is important to note that much previous research tends to ideally depict the Malay tradition as an representation of moderation without critically examining the changes and challenges it faces.

In social life, the value of religious moderation is clearly evident in the culture of deliberation and collective agreement, which serves as the main method for decision-making. Deliberation not only functions as a social process but also as a form of implementing the values of justice, equality, and respect for differences of opinion.⁴² It aligns with the principles of religious moderation, which underscore dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. Furthermore, deliberation provides a space for the open and fair exchange of opinions. However, in current circumstances, the effectiveness of deliberation is not always ideal, particularly due to changes in social authority structures and the growing influence of religious understandings that focus more on sacred texts.

The tradition of mutual cooperation and feasting demonstrates social solidarity that involves all members of society regardless of status. These activities help strengthen social cohesion and prevent closed or exclusive attitudes. In the context of religious moderation, social solidarity is crucial for fostering openness and empathy toward others.

Religious moderation in Malay tradition is also reflected in ethics and social etiquette, such as politeness, humility, respect for elders, and respect for guests. These values align with Islamic moral

⁴¹ Zhila Jannati, Risanrusli Rusli, and Anisatul Mardiah, “Konsep Islam Melayu dan Islam Nusantara,” *Wardah: Journal of Da’wah and Society* 22, no. 2 (2021), 16–35.

⁴² Raudatul Ulum et al., *Religiosity and Social Piety*.

teachings, which emphasize balance between relationships with God (*ḥabl min Allāb*) and with fellow human beings (*ḥabl min al-nās*). In this regard, custom serves as a social system that helps instill religious moral values in daily life.⁴³

From a cultural education perspective, Malay tradition uses language, literature, and cultural symbols as a medium to convey the value of religious moderation. *Gurindam* (traditional poems), poetry, and proverbs convey messages of justice, honesty, and tolerance, delivered in a beautiful and easy-to-understand manner. The delivery of these values is more persuasive than patronizing, making it more effective in shaping the character of a moderate society. Nevertheless, in the modern era, the role of traditional media needs to be readjusted due to changes in the way the younger generation communicates and learns.⁴⁴

Previous research on the relationship between Islam and the Malays tend to emphasize harmony and integration without addressing differences or conflicts. This research seeks to complement them by viewing Malay tradition as a space for dialogue between local values and various Islamic schools of thought, including views that emphasize the purification of teachings. Thus, the emerging model of moderation is not singular, but diverse and contextually appropriate.

Malay tradition also shows a form of religiosity that is open and accepting of differences. Historically, Malay people have lived side by side with various ethnic and cultural groups, fostering open and adaptive attitudes. The relationship between Islamic and Malay identities has resulted in a religious practice that is not exclusive but adheres to fundamental religious principles.

As a model of religious moderation, Malay tradition demonstrates a balance between normative religious teachings and the socio-cultural realities of society. Religious values are conveyed through a cultural approach, thus presenting them contextually and easily understood. In social practice, dialogue mechanisms such as

⁴³ Reza Pahlepi, Badarussyamsi, and D.I. Ansusa Putra, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Kearifan Lokal: Studi Pada Seloko Adat Jambi," *Kalam: Jurnal Agama dan Sosial Humaniora* 11, no. 2 (2023), 137–56.

⁴⁴ Ismarani Junia Putri, Saipul Annur, and Choirun Niswah, "The Relevance of Malay-Based Islamic Education in the Era of Social Media: The Integration of Manners and Technology," *Journal of Community Service and Educational Research* 4, no. 2 (2025), 12702–9 <https://doi.org/10.31004/Jerkin.V4i2.4242>.

deliberation and mutual agreement are the primary means of resolving problems. This tradition also strengthens social cohesion through solidarity and cooperation and instills moral values through customs and literature as a means of character building.⁴⁵

The implications of this model suggest that religious moderation can be developed through a cultural approach aligned with local wisdom. Malay tradition shows that the relationship between religion and culture not only creates social harmony but also strengthens an inclusive and tolerant religious identity. This model is relevant for a multicultural society like Indonesia since it can bridge differences through dialogue and community participation.

More broadly, Malay tradition as a model of religious moderation also needs to be viewed within the context of social change and the global dynamics of Islam. Globalization, digital media, and the spread of religious ideas across borders have brought new perspectives that do not always align with local practices. In this context, Malay tradition functions not only as a guardian of values but also as a space for adapting and negotiating the relationship between local values and global religious thought. Thus, religious moderation in the Malay context is not a static entity, but rather a process that continues to evolve with changing times.⁴⁶

Malay traditions need to be understood not only as objects of cultural study, but also as epistemological sources for developing context-appropriate approaches to religious moderation. Malay local wisdom can be seen as a form of social knowledge that provides ways to maintain balance, manage conflict, and strengthen social relationships. However, the effectiveness of this approach is highly dependent on the community's ability to maintain and adapt these values amidst modern challenges, such as changing authority structures, shifting values among the younger generation, and increasing individualism.

In addition, it is important to underline that not all practices that are categorized as Malay traditions automatically reflect religious moderation. Some practices may be reinterpreted or even rejected, depending on the religious perspectives of particular groups.

⁴⁵ Samsul Hidayat, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama* (Yogyakarta: Selfitera Indonesia, 2025).

⁴⁶ Dafit et al., *Moderasi Beragama: Multi Perspektif Pegiat dan Penstudi Rumah Moderasi Beragama Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palangka Raya di Kalimantan Tengah* (Yogyakarta: K-Media, 2021).

Therefore, models of moderation based on Malay traditions need to be understood selectively and critically, taking into account the social, historical, and ideological contexts behind them.

With this approach, Malay tradition is seen not merely as a symbol of harmony, but as a complex social practice, in which there is a relationship between stability and change, as well as between agreement and difference. It demonstrates that religious moderation based on local wisdom is a constantly evolving process and needs to be understood in accordance with changing contexts. Thus, Malay tradition can be understood as a practical model of religious moderation that is not merely normative but also embedded in the social and cultural life of the community. The relationship between custom and religion in Malay tradition suggests that religious moderation can grow naturally through the interaction of religious values and local wisdom. This model not only contributes to academic studies but also has practical benefits for strengthening culture-based religious moderation in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the relationship between custom and religion in Riau Malay tradition results from a dynamic interaction between Islamic values and local culture. The principle of “custom is based on sharia, and sharia is based on the Quran” emphasizes that religion is the source of values, while custom serves as the medium for implementing them in social life. That being said, this relationship is not fixed, but rather constantly evolving through processes of adjustment and differing interpretations. Various practices, such as deliberations, feasts, *tepuk tepung tawar*, and the use of oral literature, demonstrate that the integration of custom and religion helps build social cohesion, strengthen shared identity, and open space for dialogue. However, these practices also face challenges, particularly from those seeking to separate customs from religious teachings.

Theoretically, this research highlights that religious moderation is not something that automatically exists, but is shaped through historical processes, cultural interactions, and negotiations between religious authorities and local traditions. Therefore, harmony must be understood as a continuously evolving process within a specific social context. From a practical perspective, this research contributes to the

development of a model of religious moderation based on local wisdom. Values in Malay tradition, such as deliberation, balance, and social solidarity, can be used for religious education, strengthening traditional institutions, and resolving conflicts, showing that a cultural approach can complement a normative approach in a multicultural society.

This research is limited by its reliance on desk research, which does not fully reflect conditions on the ground. Future research should combine qualitative approaches and field studies, such as ethnography, with comparative studies across communities to broaden understanding. Thus, the harmony of custom and religion in the Riau Malay tradition is not only a cultural heritage but also offers a relevant framework for developing a contextual, dialogical, and adaptive form of religious moderation.

References

- Ammerman, Nancy T. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Arsyad, Jamaluddin, “Akulturasi Islam dengan Budaya Melayu: Studi terhadap Upacara Adat Perkawinan Jambi Melayu.” PhD diss., UIN Raden Fattah, Palembang, 2019.
- Asad, Talal. *The Idea of An Anthropology of Islam*. Washington: Center For Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986.
- Asiana, Choirun Niswah, and Saipul Annur. “The Role of Customs and Values in Islamic-Based Malay Culture on the Formation of Social Identity in the Modern Society Era.” *Journal of Educational Theory and Development* 9, no. 2 (2025).
- Asriani, Shita Dwi. “Implementing the Principles of *Musyawarah* and *Ishtlah* in Islamic Organizations.” *Lentera Peradaban: Journal on Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2026).
- Azra, Azyumardi. *Religious Moderation in the Indonesian Context*. Jakarta: Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019.
- Bahdar. *Ketika Islam Menyapa Tanah Kaili: Kisah Perjumpaan Agama dan Budaya Lokal*. Palu: Maestro Lere Palu Barat, 2023.
- Basyir, Kunawi. *Menyapa Masyarakat Madani di Bumi Seribu Pura* (Surabaya: Global Aksara Pers, 2023).

- Chalid, Ibrahim. "Peradaban Melayu sebagai Khasanah Peradaban Nusantara." In *Revitalisasi Peradaban Melayu dalam Kekinian*. Banda Aceh: Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam, 2008.
- Dafit, Dafit, et al. *Moderasi Beragama Multi Perspektif Pegiat dan Penstudi Rumah Moderasi Beragama Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palangka Raya di Kalimantan Tengah*. Yogyakarta: K-Media, 2021.
- Darussamin, Zikri Mawardi. *Integrasi Kewarisan Adat Melayu-Riau dengan Islam*. Jakarta: LKiS Printing Cemerlang, 2014.
- Dawami. "Local Wisdom in Religious Moderation Education: An Analysis of the Philosophical Value of the Symbolic Meaning of Tepak Sirih." *Journal of Instructional Development* 8, no. 2 (2025).
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Basic Books Inc, 1973.
- Ghifary, Muhammad, and Ramadani Mallo. "Building Inclusive and Dialogical Religious Practices: A Study of Normative Theological Approaches." *Ism: Journal of Islamic Studies and Multidisciplinary Research* 3, no. 1 (2025).
- Grace, Putri, et al. "National Integration through the Role of Traditional and Religious Leaders in Sidorejo Hilir Village." *JICN: Journal of Intellectual and Scholars of the Archipelago* 2, no. 5 (2025).
- Hidayat, Samsul. *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama*. Yogyakarta: Cv. Selfietera Indonesia, 2025.
- Jannati, Zhila, Risanrusli Rusli, and Anisatul Mardiah, "Konsep Islam Melayu dan Islam Nusantara," *Wardah: Journal of Da'wah and Society* 22, no. 2 (2021).
- Jubba, Hasse, et al. "Social Construction of Islamic Local Tradition in Malay Community, Indonesia." *Islamic Realities: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (2023). https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v9i2.7551.
- Luthfi, Muhammad Arif. "Religious Moderation in an Islamic Perspective: Maintaining Harmony in Diversity." *El-Makrifah: Journal of Islamic Studies and Education* 2, no. 2 (2025).
- Mahyuddin, M. *Adat dan Agama dalam Budaya Melayu*. Pekanbaru: Balai Adat Melayu Riau, 2015.
- Marlina. "Nilai Kearifan Lokal dalam Tunjuk Ajar Melayu." *Diksi* 8, no. 2 (2020).
- Maulana, Maulana, Achmad Ghozali, and Sjuai Sarifandi. "Tradisi Tepuk Tepung Tawar dalam Budaya Melayu Riau: Sebuah

- Analisis dalam Perspektif Hadis.” *Nusantara: Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies* 20, no. 2 (2024).
- Niswa, Choirun, et al. “Islam dan Stratifikasi Sosial di Dunia Melayu Transformasi Struktural di Tengah Globalisasi.” *J-Ceki : Journal of Scientific Scholars* 4, no. 3 (2025).
- Pahlepi, Reza, Badarussyamsi, and D.I. Ansusa Putra. “Moderasi Beragama dalam Kearifan Lokal: Studi Pada Seloko Adat Jambi.” *Kalam: Jurnal Agama dan Sosial Humaniora* 11, no. 2 (2023).
- Palawa, Alimuddin Hassan, and Mahyudin Syukri. “Integration of Islam and Malay: Studies in the Southeast Asia and the Archipelago.” *Nusantara: Journal of Islamic Studies of Southeast Asia* 20, no. 1 (2024).
- Putri, Ismarani Junia, Saipul Annur, and Choirun Niswah. “The Relevance of Malay-Based Islamic Education in the Era of Social Media: The Integration of Manners and Technology.” *Journal of Community Service and Educational Research* 4, no. 2 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.31004/Jerkin.V4i2.4242>.
- Qurtuby, Sumanto Al, Tedi Kholiludin (eds.). *Agama & Budaya Nusantara Pasca Islamisasi* (Semarang: eLSA Press, 2020).
- Rahman, Hardianto Ismail. *Ilmu Sosial dan Budaya Dasar Islam* (Sinjai: Latin, 2017).
- Ramadhan, Ramli, Neila Susanti, and Ismail Marzuki. “The Symbolic Meaning of Bale in the Religious Rituals of Malay Muslims Tanjungbalai: A Phenomenological Study.” *Islamika: Journal of Islamic Sciences* 25, no. 2 (2025).
- Ridwan, Nur Khalik. *Gerakan Kultural Islam Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Jamaah Nahdliyin Mataram, 2015).
- Rosidin, Luthfia, et al. “Strategies for Harmonization of Science, Religion, and Social in Strengthening Religious Moderation in Indonesia.” *Courtesy: Journal of Islamic Education*, 3 (2025).
- Rosyid, Maskur, and Dhani Dwi Afrizal. “Integration of Customary Law in the Reform of Islamic Family Law in Indonesia.” *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Jurisprudence, Economic and Legal Theory* 3, no. 2 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.62976/Ijijel.V3i2.1170>.
- Saifuddin, Achmad Fedyani. *Proceedings of the 60th Anniversary Conference of Indonesian Anthropology: Reflections on the Contribution of Anthropology to Indonesia*. Jakarta: Center for Anthropological

- Studies, Faculty of Anthropology, University of Indonesia, 2017.
- Sholeh, Badrus, and Khaeron Sirin. *Ormas Islam dan Gerakan Moderasi Beragama di Indonesia*. Depok: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2021.
- Schreier, Robert J. *Constructing Local Theologies*. New York: Orbis Books, 1985.
- Subhan, Arief, and Abdallah (eds.). *Konstruksi Moderasi Beragama: Catatan Guru Besar UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*. Jakarta: PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2021.
- Suminar, Suminar, et al. *Integrasi dan Disintegrasi dalam Perspektif Budaya*. Jakarta: BUPARA Nugraha, 2003.
- Susanty, Fatimah Depi. "Affective Education in Riau Malay Customs: Structure, Values, and Identity Formation." *Nusantara: Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.24014/Nusantara.V20i1.38563>.
- Takari, Fadlin Muhammad. *Memahami Adat dan Budaya Melayu*. Medan: Universitas Sumatera Utara, 2019.
- Trirahmayati, Tiara, and Yasnel, "The Way of Life of the Riau Malays: A Sustainable Cultural Heritage." *Multidisciplinary Indonesian Center Journal (MICJO)* 2, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.62567/Micjo.V2i1.409>.
- Triyono, Agus, et al. *Komunikasi, Religi, dan Budaya*. Yogyakarta: Asosiasi Pendidikan Ilmu Komunikasi Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah, 2017.
- Ulum, Raudatul, et al. *Religiosity and Social Piety*. Jakarta: Press Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022.
- Widiadharna, Novian. et al. *Gagasan Resonansi Agama dan Budaya Robby Habiba Abror* (Yogyakarta: Q-Media, 2025).
- Yanti, Annisa Darma, Tuti Andriani, and Fauzan Azima Syafiuddin. "Tolerance and Tolerance: A Study of Riau Malay Culture in the Dynamics of Multiculturalism." *Tolerance: Scientific Media of Religious Communication* 16, no. 1 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.24014/Trs.V16i1.29500>.