

Ritualizing Buddhayana: The Invention of Rituals in Java Under the State Policy and the Diversity of Indonesian Buddhists

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the invention of rituals of Buddhayana, the biggest Buddhist movement in Indonesia. Being a recognized religion in Indonesia also requires standardized rituals; thus, Buddhayana members adapt and negotiate among themselves. It questions, when Buddhayana have to invent rituals to express their identity as required by the government and to respond to the needs of Buddhists from different backgrounds such as Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, how can they do so without being criticized as syncretism or cross-traditional practices? The researcher conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Java from 2022 to 2023. Findings show that (1) as a religion of the minority, the initiation ritual has been invented to affirm the status of world religion and generate the imagined community of Buddhists. (2) Regarding the holy bathing on Kliwon, monks from Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana are invited to perform the ritual, showing that it is a separate ritual and the monks do not cross sectarian lines. The ritual can also accommodate the needs of people from different backgrounds. (3) It shows that the invention of rituals creates unity and allows different groups of people to come together and choose parts of the ceremony that match their identities.

Keywords Buddhayana; Invented tradition; Javanese practice; Visuddhi

Received: June 7, 2024

Revised: October 26, 2024

Accepted: November 5, 2024

Introduction

Buddhism in the twentieth century has tended to be less ritualistic and more didactic, to the extent that many argue that Buddhism is not a religion but a spiritual practice (Batchelor, 1998). Buddhist meditation, such as *Vipassana*, is one example, adapted in Myanmar by Ledi Sayadaw (Braun, 2019) and disseminated by Goenka internationally (Hart, 2011, p. 32). The meditation method does not use religious terms but general words such as mindfulness, breathing in and out, etc., and is open to both religious and non-religious people to learn. According to McMahan (2008, p. 48), Tibetan Buddhism in the West has transformed into a universal religion, serving people outside Tibet by demythologizing Tibetan gods and demons, reducing them to metaphors or tools for meditation. However, rituals, a central part of the religion, remain important, especially for identity formation. Thus, many places, including Indonesia during the period of the Buddhist revival, still show the invention or restoration of ritual, a topic that this paper will discuss.

McMahan's findings are challenged by Christopher Emory-Moore (2020, pp. 17-18), who argues that modern Buddhism does not necessarily mean a decimation of tradition, a decimation of myth, and a Westernization. The New Karmapa Tradition (NKT) case study reveals that Tibetan Buddhism has thrived in the West despite retaining its old ways. NKT chose to interpret Buddhism, which involves gods, supernatural stories, and many other teachings, such as heaven and hell in the afterlife (meanwhile, modern Buddhism often describes hell as everyday mental suffering). Emory-Moore's study is consistent with the conclusions reached by Gottowik (2014, p. 14), who asserts that modern Southeast Asian religions are connected to local beliefs and reject certain Western tendencies, such as rationalization and individualism. Therefore, people do not eliminate supernatural powers or mystical practices; rather, they adapt world religions and modern science to support their existence. These scholarly works support further study of Buddhism in Indonesia, where rituals to construct Buddhist identity and adapt practices to accommodate believers from different backgrounds.

During the Old Order (1950-1967) and New Order (1967-1998), the state heavily interfered with religions in Indonesia, to the point that citizens were required to choose religion on their identity cards. Many Chinese who were previously unclear about their religion, as they were followers of the *Tri-Dharma* (Taoism, Confucianism, and Mahayana Buddhism), had to choose the state-recognized religion, so many turned to Buddhism. More importantly, to support the assimilation policy, their Chinese identity had been partly replaced by Theravada Buddhism (Buaban et al., 2024, p. 103). Therefore, standardized rituals were needed in Indonesia to identify oneself as a religious follower. However, some accused inter-religious practices of being heretical. For example, Ashin Jinarakkha, the founder of the Buddhayana movement, was a Buddhist who also admired Sai Baba's teachings. This led to the expulsion of Buddhayana from the Federation of Indonesian Buddhists (Perwalian Umat Buddha Indonesia: Walubi) in 1994 (Husen, 2013, p. 44). In the worst cases, legal punishments were imposed, as in the case of the Lia Eden community (Makin, 2016).

A question then has been raised: When Buddhism has to invent rituals to express their identity as required by the government, to respond to the needs of Buddhists from different backgrounds such as Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, as well as the local beliefs, how can they do so without being criticized as syncretism or cross- traditional practice? This paper examines two rituals: Visuddhi (Initiation) and Mandi Malam Kliwon (Bathing on the night of Kliwon). Since the visit of Bhikkhu Narada in 1934 until the present, Indonesia has emphasized Visuddhi or initiation, as Buddhists are the minority. This ritual gives a sense of rebirth (reincarnation) in Buddhism, and shows that Buddhism is a world religion with communal rituals. It also facilitates the imagination of uniting with Buddhists around the world. Moreover, the bathing ritual on the night of Kliwon, which is in line with the Javanese calendar, shows the adaptation of the Buddhayana to use local beliefs to promote Buddhism. However, this second ritual is free from criticism of cross- traditional practices since it is held in the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions, respectively, which have been led by monks from

different traditions. I collected data over two years of ethnographic fieldwork in Yogyakarta, Boyolali, and Bogor (2022-2023), and I will use those places as case studies in this article. I stayed in different monasteries and accompanied the monks when invited to conduct ceremonies outside the temple. The primary methods used were participant observation and in-depth interviews. This research used the concept of the Invention of Traditions introduced by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger.

The rise of Buddhayana and standardized Buddhism in Indonesia

Buddhayana is the most significant Buddhist movement in Indonesia. It was initiated in 1955 by Ashin Jinarakhita (1923-2002) and claimed to be non-sectarian in the sense that monks (also laypeople) from Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, can stay and learn Buddhism together in the same temple (Kimura, 2003, p. 60). After returning from Myanmar for ordination in 1955, Jinarakhita founded a Buddhist organization called Indonesian Buddhist Laity Association (Persaudaraan Upasaka- Upasika Indonesia: PUUI, nowadays known as Indonesian Buddhayana Council) to train laypeople to teach Buddhism and conduct rituals in temples, due to the small number of monks (Yulianti, 2022, p. 10). In 1959, a monastic organization called Sangha Sujit Indonesia (Supreme Sangha of Indonesia) was established; nowadays, it is known as Sangha Agung Indonesia or SAGIN).

When people asked Jinarakhita why he became a monk, he answered, 'There were many Islamic teachers and Christian priests, but few Buddhist monks, and most Mahayana monks only performed rituals, not taught Buddhism' (Juangari, 2016, p. 225). This sentence reveals Jinarakhita's positive view of world religions. On the other hand, we see his criticism of Mahayana monks who were more concerned with rituals than with educating Buddhist followers. This reasoning may explain why he chose to be ordained as a Theravada monk, a tradition that reflects modern Buddhism with fewer rituals and a stronger emphasis on teaching (Buaban et al., 2024, p. 100). Since the colonial era, a simple form of Theravada Buddhism has been in the minds of Indonesian Buddhists. Aung Soe Aan, the president of the Giri Lojo Lodge, a branch of the Theosophical Society in colonial Indonesia, was sent to India in 1932 to learn how to solve the problem of opium addiction. He had the opportunity to visit a Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka and was impressed by the simple and clean temples compared to the Chinese shrines. In addition, Sri Lankan monks could speak English and teach Buddhism instead of performing rituals. This was the beginning that led to the invitation of Bhikkhu Narada to Indonesia in 1934 (Buaban, 2024, p. 7).

The 1970s, in addition to state intervention in religion, were also an era of organizational divisions, with Buddhists split into groups. We should mention the Theravada and Mahayana groups here as two important organizations. In 1976, five Theravada monks led by Bhikkhu Aggabalo from Buddhayana founded a new organization called the Sangha Theravada Indonesia (STI). In 1978, twelve Mahayana monks and nuns, led by Bhiksu Dharmasagaro, also left and founded the Sangha Mahayana Indonesia (SMI). Although both groups stated that their reasons for leaving were problems in the organization management, it is well known that they could not accept trans-traditional practices such as Theravada monks chanting Mahayana Sutra (Buaban, 2024, p. 21). Currently, monks from STI and SMI still criticize that Buddhayana is a syncretic form of Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhayana members have taken this criticism more seriously and have tried not to hold such ceremonies in public areas.

Boyolali was chosen as one of the fieldworks because it is the location of the Buddhist college, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Agama Buddha Smaratungga (STIAB Smaratungga) since 1983. The Buddhayana organization oversees Smaratungga, which is designed to educate Buddhists at the bachelor's and master's degree levels. Most Buddhayana members who graduated with B.A. in Buddhist Education, both clergies and laypeople, are products of Smaratungga. In general, students are from poor families around Indonesia. Following my five-month field trip in 2022, most novices were from Lombok. I traveled with Bhikkhu Ditthisampanno, the rector of Smaratungga at that time,

and other monks to various villages in Central Java. From village to village, they visited poor Buddhist families. They advised or convinced the villagers to send their daughters or sons to study in Boyolali under the auspices of the Buddhayana organization. Some material objects, such as a bag of rice for the family and a bus ticket to the college for the new student, were given as gifts.

The life of Smaratungga students is interesting. During the study, they were familiar with the morning and evening chanting in Theravada (*Paritta*), Mahayana (*Liem Keng*), and Vajrayana (*Mantra*). The chanting schedule has been put in front of the chanting hall, indicating which Buddhist tradition will be chanted on that day. After graduation, as a condition for those who received scholarships, they were sent to work in various temples for a year, which, of course, can be renewed if they still want to. They know how to chant properly and teach basic Buddhism in Buddhist Sunday schools. They play the role of the promoter of standardized Buddhayana. By doing so, they may receive a small salary of around 1,000,000 IDR or 64 USD, while the temple provides their daily food and dormitory. After a year, in case they have more opportunities, some tend to change their job or pursue a Master's degree in a secular universities. Meanwhile, many continue their work and some continue a Master's degree in Smaratungga again.

Theravada monks standardized the *Paritta* Chanting Book titled *Paritta*; which includes some mantras also used in Mahayana and Vajrayana rituals. This 300-page book has been distributed to Buddhayana temples. Pemaratana (2020) traced the use of the chanting book, named *Buddha-Vandana*, and viewed it as one of the symbols of modernization in Sri Lankan Buddhism. The chanting book has been developed by print technology and used by both elite and non-elite Buddhists. Its arrival in 1902 helped to standardize Buddhist rituals and reduce the errors of mantras, compared to the earlier oral tradition. Pemaratana's work reflects the form of modernity that religion is not necessarily to be less ritualistic, which is similar to the rise of Buddhism in modern Indonesia. In addition to training students, the Buddhayana organization also recruits laymen and laywomen to learn chanting, ritual performance, and teaching basic knowledge about Buddhism. They call these people Romo for males and Ramani for females, and they send them to serve in various temples. Well-trained Buddhayana members, of course, lead or facilitate the two rituals demonstrated below.

Visuddhi: Baptism in Buddhist version

Visuddhi or Wisuddhi is an initiation ritual in Buddhism that is found in every tradition. In Theravada itself, it is a new rite traced back to the twentieth century in Sri Lanka and India. The popular case is Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, former minister of law and justice of India, who converted to Buddhism in 1965 and persuaded 500,000 untouchables to convert to Buddhism (Arunav, 2015). This event is not only a religious ceremony but also a political agenda since Ambedkar intended to arrange a huge ritual and announced to free the low-class citizens from caste discrimination in India. According to Juangari (2016, p. 10), on March 11-24, 1934, Narada gave sermons in Jakarta and more than twenty-five people became Buddhists. The ritual process was not available in detail, nonetheless we can assume that they had to chant some *Parittas* and take a vow, as conducted in Indonesia nowadays.

The word 'Visuddhi' is probably adopted from the Hindu concept of *Visuddha Chakra*. *Visuddha* means filter. It helps filter all the negative energies into our body and soul; therefore, Visuddhi helps purify the practitioner. This belief parallels the concept of protection, which is the literal translation of the word *Paritta* itself. We can say that Buddhism also includes a protective aspect, not solely rational teaching or spiritual development as modern scholars imagine (McDaniel, 2011). In addition, we can assume that the term Visuddhi comes from *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification), a text composed by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century. It shows the understanding and interpretation of the Buddhist practices maintained by the monks of Mahavihara temple in Sri Lanka.

It is also considered the most important Theravada text outside the Tipitaka scriptures (Nyanamoli, 2011, p. xxvii).

This invented ritual illustrates Buddhism as a world religion, in the Indonesian sense of monotheism, in which followers are required to be loyal to a single religion and single God. Believers seem to be prohibited from following two or more faiths simultaneously. Some may claim that Visuddhi can be found since the Buddha's time as well, like the case of Tapussa and Bhallika, known as the first lay disciples of Buddha (Pradhan, 2005, p. 51). However, there was no specific ritual in that situation. The story tells that they met the Buddha and before leaving him, they revealed their faith by saying "please remember us as your followers". However, though the ritual nowadays is conducted with more complicated steps and communal, it still gives the feeling of being original as Buddhists use some of the words spoken by Tapussa and Bhallika. Remarkably, Visuddhi gives them the imagined Buddhist communities, in which they are part of Buddhists all over the world. It is not just the people in their village who are Buddhists, but Buddhists in other countries also practice this ritual. Corresponding to Evi Sutrisno's study of Confucianism in Indonesia, in the process of the institutionalization of Confucianism in the 1990s, ritual performances were more individual. However, nowadays, they tend to be more communal (Sutrisno, 2018, p. 156).

In Indonesia, people normally arrange Visuddhi in a huge ceremony. On May 1, 2019, the ritual was in Aula Pergeruan Buddhist Bodhicitta, Medan. Eight hundred twenty-two laypeople attended the first section of the rituals, and four hundred twenty laypeople attended the second section. Bhiksu Ariyamaitri was a Guru Visuddhi (spiritual teacher) (Dewan Redaksi, 2019, p. 51). On March 5, 2022, in Yogyakarta, sixty Buddhists and I attended this ritual in Vihara Giri Surya. A Buddhayana monk, Bhikkhu Bhadrapalo, was invited to be a Guru Visuddhi. The ritual begins with a five-minute prayer to pay homage to the Triple Gem (*Namassakara Gatha* and *Tisarana Gamana Gatha*), to appreciate the Buddha, his teachings, and his noble disciples in detail (*Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha Nussati*), and to extend loving-kindness to all beings (*Karaniya Metta Sutta*). After offering wreaths to the monks, the ritual continues with the chanting of the *Saccakiriya Gatha*, an important mantra that helps to strengthen the identity of those who follow Buddhism. See text and translation below.

Natthi Me Saranam Annam

There is no other refuge,

Buddho / Dhammo / Sangho Me Saranam Varam

The Buddha, his teaching, and the Noble disciples, are my highest refuges,

Etena Saccavaccena,

By saying this truth,

Sotthi Me Hotu Sabbada

Peace and security will be with me forever.

Considering the last sentence, peace and security will be with me, reflecting the sense of protection like the Hindu concept of *Visuddha Chakra*. Then, we repeated the Five Precepts after the monk, and listened to the teaching for about 20 minutes, explaining the precepts in detail and encouraging us to participate in the temple's activities. In addition, a new name (*Nama Visuddhi*) in Pali or Sanskrit will be provided to each member, implying they are reborn in Buddhism. As is the Christian tradition, a new name is given to a newly converted person. Baptism, or immersion in a river, symbolizes that a person's sins have been washed away and that they have become a new person in the Christian way of life.



Figure 1 My Buddhist Identity Card (issued by Buddhayana Organization)

Visuddhi can be explained under the discourse of authentic Buddhism as well. Even though it is organized in the form of ritual, Buddhist scholars always differentiate their faith from other religions'. "Iman Rasional" or rational faith is a term used by Wijaya Mukti (2020, p. 36) to mention that faith in Buddhism does not start from blind belief (Iman yang buta atau tanpa dasar). But people base their beliefs on wisdom or understanding of the Four Noble Truths. According to Wijaya (2020, pp. 106- 108), "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha (Tisaranagamana)" refers to the Dhammapada teaching. The meaning is that "paying respect to the holy or pure person is more beneficial than performing rituals for hundred years." It means that learning Buddhism or associating with those who have already purified their mind is better than involve with rituals. Therefore, Wijaya does not deny all rituals as long as they can bring people closer to Buddhism and motivate them to develop their behavior.

Wijaya Mukti (2020, p. 95) provides a guideline for Buddhayana ceremonies and it is adopted on every occasion, as follows.

- (1) Paying respect to Almighty God (*Tuhan yang Maha Esa*) and *Triratna* (as well as Bodhisattva)
- (2) Chanting *Paritta* 'Saccakiriya Gatha' to affirm the strong faith in Buddhism
- (3) Observing *Panca Sila*, the Five Precepts of Buddhist practice
- (4) Contemplating the noble qualities of *Triratna* (Buddha, his teaching, and the Noble disciples)
- (5) Reading the Buddha's teachings from the texts
- (6) Developing loving-kindness, compassion, and empathetic joy
- (7) Chanting and taking a vow or wish
- (8) Sharing merits with other beings (melimpahan jasa)

Monks and Romo/ Ramani generally transmitted this type of teaching after learning to chant the *Paritta*, teach Buddhism, and perform standard rituals. They could be said to act as representatives of the Buddhayana from Central Jakarta and the students who graduated from Samartungga.

Malam Jum'at Kliwon: Promoting Buddhism through local belief

The opinions on cross-traditional practices of monks in Buddhayana members themselves are diverse. Jinarakkita and Phao Krishanaputra (famous Buddhayana teacher in Medan) have no problem with this practice as they viewed it as an outside identity and emphasized the understanding of the essence of religion (Racheman, 2011, pp. 76-78). Bhikkhu Suryanadi (Interview 2022) agreed on this by providing a similarity between the Sanskrit Sutra and the Pali Sutta. According to him, the meaning of *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra* of Mahayana is the same as *Lakkhana Sutta* of Theravada. Those sources explain the five aggregates. On the contrary, though Bhikkhu Dhammayano (Interview 2022) agrees with cross-doctrinal practice, in his opinion, it should only be conducted in the private sphere. He continued, saying that Theravada monks in Theravada uniforms performing Mahayana rituals look funny (*kelihatan lucu*). Dhammayano's statements align with the modern interpretation, which requires a clear-cut identity. To claim that Buddhayana is merely a platform for Buddhists from different traditions to participate in rituals separately according to their sects is the saying from those who do not see cross-doctrinal rituals in Buddhayana temples. An example of Malam Jum'at Kliwon ritual in Bogor will clarify this claim.

Malam Jumat Kliwon, an invented tradition by Jinarakkita and Aryasasano (Juangari, 2016, p. 206), shows the trans-doctrinal practice and the adaptation of Buddhayana to the local belief. In 1973, followers founded Sakyawanaram Temple in Cianjur, Bogor, West Java, near Gede Mountain. Cipendawa River crosses through the temple. Sakyawanaram is a big temple where Jinarakkita chose to spend most of his life. The patrons are mostly Chinese from Jakarta, Bandung, and Bogor, who speak Bahasa Indonesia.

The bathing ritual in Malam Jum'at Kliwon has been invented since the early period of the temple's establishment (Arya Kusalo, Interview 2023). According to the Javanese calendar, there is usually one Kliwon day in a month, so this ritual is held once a month. In Sakyawanaram, there is a site for worshiping Prabu Siliwanggi, the king of Pajajaran, the last dynasty of a Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in West Java (Hellman, 2022, p. 153 and Falah, 2021, p. 82). According to legends, King Siliwanggi refused to convert to Islam, so he left the kingdom and transformed into a white tiger. People widely display the symbol of a white tiger in Bogor. People in West Java, especially in Jakarta, Bandung, and Bogor, are not limited by religions and they worship Siliwanggi for their worldly success. His (previous) kingship and supernatural power imply that worshiping the king (as the owner of this province) will bring success. Another site in Sakyawanaram is the place for worshiping "Eyang Surya Kencana," a descendant of Siliwanggi (see Figure 2). He was a spiritual seeker and was interested in meditation. He married a daughter of the spirit world (*dunia jin*) and moved to the spirit realm (instead of dead) in Gede Mountain.

The temple has built worship sites, which look like Muslim tombs, for worshiping and arranging the ritual of every Malam Jum'at Kliwon. According to my observation, June 2022 attracted around 1,000 pilgrims who wanted to join the rite and take a holy bath from the Cipendawa River. Since a Buddhayana temple hosts these sites, people use only vegetarian food for worship. The ritual begins at 6 p.m. by chanting the Javanese Mantras (*Mantra-Mantra Bahasa Jawa Kuno*) from the book titled Guide for Devotional Rituals (*Tuntunan Puja Bakti*) (3rd edition in 1991 by PMVBI). People conduct the chanting to worship Siliwanggi, Surya Kencana, and the Triple Gem in Javanese. Then, it is followed by the chanting in Sanskrit, Vajrayana tradition, to eradicate bad dreams, sickness, and obstacles. Of course, Theravada monks always lead the rite, while a Vajrayana monk leads the section of Tantra. Mahayana monks finalized the ritual with chanting in front of the Guan Yin statue.



Figure 2 The tomb of Eyang Surya Kencana

Source: Author (2022)

The rituals in the past differed from those of the present because there were very few Mahayana and Vajrayana monks at that time, so the rituals had to be performed only by Theravada monks (Dhammayano, Interview 2023). Nowadays, Buddhayana is more sensitive to the issue of cross-traditional practice. Therefore, they try to position monks in a way that corresponds to those traditions' rituals. However, when Mahayana monks were conducting the ritual, Theravada and Vajrayana monks also participated. Outsiders often criticize this image, so the ceremony was only performed in Buddhayana temples. Dhammayano suggested that the aim of worshiping Eyang Surya Kencana is to remind people that they should remember meditation as spiritual fulfillment, as emphasized by Surya Kencana. Although Jinarakkita adopted local beliefs, he devised a new ritual to promote *Vipassana* meditation and added a section for listening to sermons. As a result, people could purify not only their bodies with holy water, but also purify their souls with sermons and meditation (Juangari, 2016, p. 206).

Visuddhi ritual shows the loyalty that Buddhism also requires from its followers like other Abrahamic religions do. This means that believing in other gods or crossing religious boundaries is not desirable, so the Indonesian Buddhists have to chant *Saccakiriya Gatha* with Indonesian translation to affirm that they strongly take refuge in the Buddha, his teaching, and the noble disciples only. Even though the ritual has been invented, or at least added more activities, it is still considered an original ritual practiced in the Buddha's time. Based upon the concept of invention of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992), these rituals that appear to be old are often newly invented for different purposes such as confirming loyalty and creating imagined community among Buddhists around the world. Similar to the Javanese prayers used in the bathing ritual on the night of Kliwon, it helps make participants of this section, including non-Buddhists, to feel that they were attending the Javanese ritual, even though many mantras had been added by the Buddhayana members (Dhammayano, Interview 2022).

As has been seen in other places, when Buddhism entered a new land, it did not mean that the people in that community abandoned their old practices and followed only Buddhist principles. On the

contrary, people always adopted new rituals to fit into their traditions. An example is a case study of Navayana women in Mumbai by Sonowal and Ashok (2021). Previous studies have often claimed that Dalits or Hindus from the lowest caste converted to Buddhism to free themselves from the social hardships brought by Dr. Ambedka since 1956. In contrast, Sonowal & Ashok argue that such conversions are political acts of the upper class, while the lives of ordinary people have not changed. This means that even though they are Buddhists, they still live in the same place, under the same economic and social conditions, which people treat and view as the past. They are also a minority who still maintain contact with their Hindu relatives and often participate in Hindu rituals. Moreover, many do not deny the power of the gods and goddesses. When healthcare is out of reach for the poor, the grace of the gods is another way of receiving worship. In Indonesia, the missionary work of Buddhayana in Lampung, South Sumatra, during Suharto's regime, studied by Putro Zaenal (2020), reveals that a lot of its population belonged to Buddha Jawi Wisnu (Vishnu) and Sam Kaw Hwee (Chinese tradition) and later converted to Buddhayana (mostly Theravada) in 1964. As assumed, Buddhists continue to worship Buddha and the Hindu gods previously believed in. However, compared to the Kliwon ritual, this article describes the intricacies of the ritual, which not only blends the two cultures but also allows people of different faiths to choose the parts of the ritual that best fit their identities.

Conclusion

In the context of Indonesia during the 1950s- 1990s, religion was heavily interfered with politics. In addition to the marginalization of Chinese and Mahayana identities, Buddhists had to affirm their belief in God and create rituals to standardize their practices. In this article, Buddhayana created a conversion ceremony, Visuddhi, that in Thailand or Sri Lanka was a small matter. However, it was a large ceremony in Indonesia that gathered hundreds of people to create an imagined community of Buddhists worldwide. Another ritual was the holy bathing on Kliwon. To escape criticism, Buddhayana used monks from Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana to lead the ceremony to convey that they were performing separate rites, and the monks did not commit cross-traditional chanting, even though they did. These rituals appeal to Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhists and attract people from other religions to the Vajrayana section, as it conveys the meaning of tantric, making participants feel as if they are practicing the traditional Javanese beliefs. Of course, those who do not wish to participate in the ritual led by the monks, can directly bathe and pray by themselves, using their religious prayers. This article suggests that in some cases, the creation of rituals creates unity and allows different groups of people to come together and choose parts of the ritual that resonate with them.

Regarding recommendations, this research project limited access to informants, focusing on interviews with key informants, mostly monks. Therefore, if researchers also focused on lay followers, a broader and more complex picture of the ritual would be obtained.

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