



The Adaptation Strategy of Central Kalimantan's Dayak Ngaju Religious System to the State Official Religions in Palangka Raya



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Abstract

The findings show that the integration and adaptation of Dayak Ngaju religious system adherents to Hinduism were done because of both internal and external factors. The internal factor includes the need for recognition of their basic rights in religion as well as a desire for changes, pioneered by intellectuals and leaders of Dayak Ngaju religious system. The external factor includes religious politics, economy, education, religious conversion, as well as the existence of Great Council of Kaharingan Hinduism and the role of State Hindu College of Tampung Penyang Palangka Raya. The adaptation strategies are indicated through accommodative behaviors, revitalization, and resistance. The adaptation strategies imply that the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system can maintain Kaharingan identity by calling the religion "Hindu Kaharingan", even though in state administration, the religion is still written as Hinduism. In daily practice, the teachings of Dayak Ngaju religious system can be delivered in its entirety, and the adherents may still have their rights in religious practices, education, economy, and politics just like the adherents of Indonesian official religions.

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1 Introduction

Religiosity in Dayak Ngaju culture in Central Kalimantan has rooted the original Dayak Ngaju religious tradition called *Agama Helo* (literary means ancient religion) known as Kaharingan. Kaharingan was predicted to extinct, and (Bendell, 1970; Luardini et al., 2019) compared Kaharingan to a weathered wood that is no longer strong to step on. Thus, they predicted that the adherents started to abandon it. However, in reality, Kaharingan is still maintained and practiced as a religion by integrating with Hinduism, one of the official religions, and becomes a new identity named *Hindu Kaharingan*. Unfortunately, the religious system in other regions experienced a completely different fate, as written by Aju (2016) about the extinction of Kaharingan in West Kalimantan. Also, the existence of the Dayak Ngaju religious system was facing a challenge due to the state law Number 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention of Religious Abuse and/or Defamation concerning official and nonofficial religions. This differentiation became more prominent when the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a decree in 1974 requiring every Indonesian to fill in the religion section on their identity card with either Protestant, Catholic, Hinduism, or Buddhism, which means that Dayak Ngaju religious system is not included in religion section because it considered as just a local ethnic belief.

Given the constant challenges in such changing situations, Dayak Ngaju religious system still can be maintained. It continuously negotiates and adapts to the changes to stay relevant with the current social situations, including the government policies regarding the official religions in Indonesia. Sanderson (2003) argues that adaptation is a social trait that appears as a result of individual needs, purposes, and desires. Adaptation is strongly related to a sociocultural pattern because it is formed through the adaptation process. This phenomenon also reflects in Dayak Ngaju religious system which emerges from the adherents' needs, purposes, and desires to sustain the religious system, even in a new form.

Since adaptation strategies are defensive as well as sustainable for an entity, the researchers are interested in studying the adaptation strategies of Dayak Ngaju religious system to the official state religions in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan. This study employs Alfred Schultz's phenomenology theories, Trijono's Cultural Adaptation theories, and Synchronic Reception theories to analyze the reasons, the strategies, and the implications of the adaptation toward the identity, teachings, religious life, education, culture, economics, and politics of the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system (Edung et al., 2018). Analyzing these things as well as comparing Dayak Ngaju religious system with marginalized or extinct local beliefs seems to be very intriguing.

2 Materials and Methods

This descriptive qualitative research requires observations of Dayak Ngaju religious system in Palangka Raya. Regarding past events, documents were reviewed and reconstruction was conducted through direct interviews. Informants were determined using Spradley's (1997) dan Benard's (2017) theories which require informants' to be knowledgeable about the topic being studied. The informants were chosen using purposive sampling based on Bungin's (2010) suggestions on the criteria that should be met by informants. Thus, the informants for this study are Basir (religious leader of Kaharingan), Kaharingan figures, NGO leaders/activists, academics, and the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system or Kaharingan Hinduism of Palangka Raya. Data analysis employed Spradley's cyclical model and process. Moleong (2007) argues that in this model, data collection is not separated from data analysis.

3 Results and Discussions

3.1 The Reasons Why the Adherents of Dayak Ngaju Religious System Adapt to A-State Official Religion

The Dayak Ngaju Religious System, known as *agama Helok* or Ngaju religion in the past, emerged from a local/native belief whose practices revolve around the cycle of birth, life, and death, including healing rituals. Also, the belief lives by certain good conduct (*hadat*) and certain life restrictions (*pali belum*). In the past, this native Dayak religion received negative stigmas, associating it with headhunting, being old-fashioned and uncivilized, idolatry, and others. However, Hans Scharer (2013) in his book *Ngaju Religion the Conception of God Among a South Borneo People* clarifies that Dayak is not without religion. They do have a divinity concept that must be interpreted based on their theology, and not of other religions. This native Dayak religion was not organized and

structured yet, unlike the main world religions. Sugiyarto (2016) claims that Kaharingan has become a religion to Dayak people, even though previously the holy verses of *Ranying Hatala Langit*, the God Almighty, had not been scripted. The adherents of Kaharingan have struggled for their true identity to be recognized since 1950.

Several internal and external factors become the reasons why the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system adapt to one of Indonesia's official religions, i.e., Hinduism. The first internal factor is a desire to change. Sanderson (2003) explains that religion is a universal characteristic of human life, meaning that society possesses the mindset and the behaviors that qualify as a religion, a superstructure consisting of symbols, images, beliefs, and specific values in which humans express their existence. Furthermore, having witnessed the development of other religions, the leaders of Dayak Ngaju religious system are forced to adapt to the current situation to organize and structure it like other religions. This change was started by giving the religious system an official name i.e., *Kaharingan* during the *Sarekat Kaharingan Dayak Indonesia's* (SKDI) congress in 1950. Riwut (2015) reveals the purpose of initiating SKDI that is to accommodate the endeavor of Kaharingan adherents to gain state's recognition as an official religion. But because SKDI could not maintain focus on its main goal, *Majelis Besar Alim Ulama Kaharingan Indonesia* (The Great Council of Indonesian Kaharingan Clerical and Scholars), MB-AUKI for short, was formed to take over the job, as informed by Walter S. Penyang, the head of the *Majelis Besar Agama Hindu Kaharingan* (MB-AHK), the Central Great Council of Kaharingan Hinduism. MB-AUKI then designed a place of worship, drafted the steps and ways of praying, as well as compiled a holy book and songs to follow the examples of the elements of the official religions (Interview, 9 March 2020). This means that the move was a result of Kaharingan adherents' awareness and desire to change by organizing and structuring their religion.

The second internal factor is the need to obtain religion's recognition and legality so that the adherents can have the same rights as of the official religions, such as the freedom to practice their religion and to have their identity cards, family cards, etc. Gaya (2016) affirms that integrating Kaharingan with Hinduism was a right choice to obtain legality as an official religion under the umbrella of Hinduism. The third internal factor is the intellectuals and leaders of Dayak Ngaju religious system. According to Siswati (2017), intellectuals are individuals who act as the organizers in all levels of society, as well as in the area of production, politics and culture. In the development of Dayak Ngaju religious system in Palangka Raya, (1) there has been a group of intellectuals and religious leaders as organizers and reformers, and (2) this group is supported by several advantages such as cultural capital, social capital, economic capital, symbolic capital, network with the rulers of that time, and SKDI as an essential factor. This follows the Gramsci's theory about the role of intellectuals as a reforming group (Barker, 2005; Ratna, 2005) and how those intellectuals in their environment (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004; Marini et al., 2020; Mulyoutami et al., 2009) utilize their advantages to organize and maintain their religious system.

There are a few external factors of Dayak Ngaju religious system's adaptation to one of the official religions in Palangka Raya. The first one is religious politics. In 1965, a state law Number 1/PNPS/1965 on the Prevention of Religious Abuse and/or Defamation concerning official and nonofficial religions was issued. This was backed by Law No. 5/1969 concerning statements of various Presidential Decrees and Presidential Regulations as Laws by the New Order government. The separation of official and nonofficial religions became more prominent when the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a decree in 1974 requiring every Indonesian to fill in the religion section on their identity card with either Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Local ethnic beliefs such as Kaharingan were not in the options. As a result, the adherents of Kaharingan had to choose Hinduism to integrate with to obtain identity cards. Etika (2018) explains that the integration was conducted not only for Kaharingan adherents to obtain recognition, but also to fit in the country. Their goal was to take a part in ruling the country, not merely to become citizens who are ruled by the government.

Secondly, a financial factor also led to the adaptation. Not choosing one of the five official religions to be put on their identity cards means that someone is assumed to be affiliated with banned parties and are not eligible for government-based employments, such as civil servant, the Indonesian National Army, or the Indonesian National Police. Without jobs, the financial situations of the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system would be left behind. The third external factor is education. By integrating with Hinduism, Kaharingan can get an education on religion that is based on the national curriculum. Even though in practice, teachers and lecturers synergize materials on Hinduism with local teachings of Kaharingan to maintain the religious system and to cater to the students' needs. This practice affirms Utama's (2016) statement, that the teaching of Hinduism in schools should be based on the curriculum created by the government, but it can also include local beliefs to accommodate real-life needs. Etika (2019) discovers that before integrating with Hinduism, it was difficult for adherents of Kaharingan to obtain

education across all disciplines. After the integration, the access became more open allowing many of the adherents of Kaharingan to pursue their education in undergraduate programs even to postgraduate programs.

The fourth factor is religious conversion. [Ramstedt \(1995\)](#) states that the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious systems were vulnerable proselytization targets to conversion by Christian evangelism and preachers of Islam. The attempt for conversion has massively endeavored from the colonial era until Indonesia's independence. However, since the integration with Hinduism and becoming adherents of an official religion, the conversion attempts have lessened. The chief of MD-AHK of Palangka Raya affirmed this in an interview (8 March 2020).

Fifth, the presence of the great council of Kaharingan Hinduism also encouraged the adaptation of Dayak Ngaju religious system to adapt to Hinduism. Previously known as MB-AUKI, the council experienced a name change to MB-AHK and it was declared as a religious body through a decree number H/37/SK/1980 issued by the Directorate General of Hinduism and Buddhism Community Guidance of Ministry of Religious Affairs. This council was maintained and given a bigger responsibility to protect, serve, and guide the adherents of Kaharingan. Lastly, the existence of the State Institute of Hinduism Tampung Penyang (IAHN-TP) Palangka Raya also became a factor of the integration. As the only Hindu higher education institution in Kalimantan, IAHN-TP takes an important role in preserving and developing the teachings of Kaharingan. Pranata, the vice-rector I of the academic affair of IAHN-TP, mentioned several courses which are rooted in Kaharingan teachings, such as Tawur (on the theory and practice of a ritual that precedes all Kaharingan ceremonies), Panaturan (study on the holy book of Kaharingan), Acara Agama Hindu Kaharingan (on the ceremonies in Kaharingan), Tandak (on mantras that are sung during rituals), Bahasa Daerah (local languages in Central Kalimantan), Theology Hindu Kaharingan (Theology of Hindu Kaharingan), Bahasa Sangiang (on the ancient Dayak language used in rituals). Moreover, most of the activities relating to research, public service, assisted villages, workshops, and practices are all associated with Kaharingan traditions (interview, 29 January 2020).

The adaptation process in the form of integration would not have been possible without the intellectuals who, according to [Putro \(2000\)](#), belong to the traditional and universal intellectual typology, in which intellectuals, leaders, and administrators of Dayak Ngaju religious system become the reformers of their belief system. This affirms with Alfred Schultz's phenomenology theory cited by [Kuswarno \(2009\)](#) in which the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system took a role as actors conducting social acts with other actors to reach equality and togetherness in the bonds of intersubjective meaning. Also, they were encouraged to integrate with Hinduism by past motives (such as being unacknowledged, being targets of conversion, being left behind in economy, education, and politics, as well as being restricted in religious practices) and future motives (such as Kaharingan to have recognition, protection, and legality).

Dayak Ngaju religious system's ability to survive is the result of the resilience of the adherents in responding to the entry of foreign cultures and religions. They adapt by accepting as well as resisting some ideas or teachings of Hinduism to the point where *Kaharingan* practices get to a moderate state and are not completely detached from the root. This continuous adaptation process results in confidence to appear different in a uniformed and universalized world. This is aligned with Roland Robertson's theory on Glocalization, which is the result of new local adjustments to global pressures. Kaharingan's integration with Hinduism is an example of cultural contact between a local religion and a mainstream world religion which results in a fundamental cause-effect influence i.e., glocalization (globalization and localization) phenomena. [Utama \(2016\)](#) argues that glocalization happens when local and global elements exchange and co-exist with one another and when an intense communication between the two cannot detach the historical aspects of the local culture. This gives power to the local culture to negotiate with global culture, as well as enables an immersion of global culture into local culture through glocalization ([Ristati, 2017](#); [Bramantyo & Rahman, 2021](#)).

3.2 The Adaptation Strategies Used by the Adherents of Dayak Ngaju Religious System in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan

Several responses will emerge when a cultural entity, ethnicity, or religion experiences globalization, modernization, or pressure from the state policies. Trijono (2004) mentioned at least four responses as follows:

“The response of local ethnic communities to globalization take various form of social movement. There are at last four of responses can be identified: (1) accommodation; (2) revitalization; (3) revitalization; (4) resistance. Accommodation occurs as long as local ethnic and religion communities accept the globalization, enter or more extremely

absorbed into global dynamic, and practice the cultural and economic system of capitalism in their daily life. Revitalization happens when local religious and ethnic communities use the elements of modernization and capitalism to reinforce and revitalize their culture and identities. Revitalization of certain ethnic and religious groups emerges as far as local religious and ethnic community oppose the globalization by reinforcing their ethnic and religious traditions. Finally, resistance is a form of total refusal and opposition of local ethnic and religious communities to modernizations and the penetration of capitalism mode of production”.

If these responses are connected to the adaptation strategies of Dayak Ngaju religious system to one of the official religions i.e., Hinduism, the accommodating attitude is to accept Hinduism. This led to the decision to integrate to Hinduism, instead of other religions. Hinduism and its teachings serve as a reinforcement in maintaining the existence of Kaharingan identity and teachings. The systematic effort made by adjusting their religious system to the new system was a form of change to maintain its existence. This affirms Spencer's view in [Ritzer & Goodman \(2004\)](#) which suggests that social change is essential in society. Only the best ones who can adapt to their environment will survive, while the weak ones will die.

The adaptation to Hinduism does not mean that Kaharingan adherents completely detach their teachings. Some non-principle matters are practiced together, but the rest are carried out in parallel manners. Therefore, the adherents of Kaharingan are familiar with typical Hindu things such as the symbols, praying in Pura (Balinese temple), Hindu religious holidays, Hindu education, yoga, dan *Puja Tri Sandhya* (commonly used prayer in Indonesian Hinduism), even though most of the older generation does not follow most of them and just practice purely Kaharingan rituals. This phenomenon emphasizes that a stimulus does not always result in a uniformed response due to various factors. According to [Utama \(2016\)](#), different responses emerge because of different attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, needs, environment, and life orientations.

The second response is revitalization. After the integration of Kaharingan with Hinduism, which is then known as Kaharingan Hinduism, service and guidance for adherents of Kaharingan is provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the Directorate General of Hindu Community Guidance (Bimas Hindu). The adherents of Kaharingan receive the same service and religious rights, including the provision of places of worship and other essential religious activities. Gradually, the adherents of Kaharingan revitalize their religious system by utilizing the places of worship as teaching centers to spread and develop the teachings of Kaharingan, the provision of the holy book of *Panaturan*, and other books such as on the religious songs named *Kandayu* and on the instructions of ceremonies. All of these developments are supported by funding from both Bimas Hindu and the regional government of Central Kalimantan.

Another response is revitalization which, according to [Trijono \(2004\)](#), occurs when a religion or local ethnicity makes a revival depending on to what extent it resists globalization by holding strongly on the traditions. As they integrate with Hinduism, the adherents of Kaharingan are also strengthening their religious system by reinforcing their identity and teachings through religious institutions and religious festival activities. Besides the official Indonesian Hindu Councils (PHDI), there are several Kaharingan-based organizations in Central Kalimantan, such as The Hindu Kaharingan Grand Council (MB-AHK), the Institute for Development of Tandak Intan Kaharingan (*Lembaga Pengembangan Tandak Intan Kaharingan - LPTIK*), the Hindu Kaharingan Women's Union (*Persatuan Wanita Hindu Kaharingan - PWHK*), and the Hindu Kaharingan Youth, College Student, and Pupil Association (*Persatuan Pemuda Mahasiswa Pelajar-Agama Hindu Kaharingan - PPMPAHK*). Regarding religious festival, besides the national competition of *Utsawa Dharma Gita* (chanting of Hindu hymns), a Kaharingan-based competition is also conducted i.e., the festival of *Tandak Intan Kaharingan*. Delae, one of the central MB-AHK administrators and recurring jury at the festival of Tandak, mentioned several contested Kaharingan teachings, such as reading the holy book of *Panaturan*, *Kandayu*, *Tandak*, Hindu Kaharingan spiritual songs, traditional folk music (*Karungut*), and quizzes on Hindu Kaharingan religious ceremonies (Interview, 14 January 2020).

Apart from accommodation, revitalization, and revitalization, the response that emerges from the integration is resistance. In practice, not all Hindu teachings are accepted by the adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system. The adherents resist compromising the matters of principle such as the ceremonies for birth, life, and death, *basir* (Kaharingan religious leader), *Basarah* (set of prayers), theology, and means of religious ceremonies. Unlike following Islam or Christianity where the adherents must adhere to the rules of the religions, following Hinduism does not have to do so. This affirms Gramsci's opinion in [Storey \(2004\)](#) that the slightest hegemony and domination

always gives room for resistance to emerge. The resistance presents itself not only because of the fundamental belief system but also, surprisingly, because Hinduism is a flexible religion that gives room for its adherents to practice the teachings in nonuniformed ways. The assumption that the integration would negate Kaharingan teachings and identity is proven to be wrong. Based on the reality in the field, because of the integration, both Hinduism and Kaharingan can be practiced equally, maintained, and developed to date.

3.3 The Implications of the Adaptation Strategies to the Identity, Teachings, Religious Life, Culture, Education, Economy and Politics of the Adherents of Dayak Ngaju Religious System in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan

The first implication of the adaptation is to the teachings and the identity of Dayak Ngaju religious system. The adherents can still identify with the belief systems by calling it Kaharingan Hinduism, even though in state administration, the religion is still written as Hindusm. The existing teachings of Kaharingan can still be practiced as explained in a circular letter issued by the official Indonesian Hindu Assembly Organization (PHDI) of Central Kalimantan Province number I/E/PHDI-KH/1980 on 21 Juni 1980. It is regarding the existing rituals of religious ceremonies to be preserved and carried out as they are, as long as they do not contradict the holy books of Veda or Panaturan and the government regulations. The adherents of Kaharingan preserving their belief system is a form of resistance strategy. According to Bourdieu (Gaya, 2016; Victoria et al., 2017), this is a strategy of condescension which is a strategy of humbling oneself to improve quality.

Secondly, the adaptation impacts the religious life and culture of Dayak Ngaju in which the adherents have complete freedom to practice the religion. The central government through the Director-General of Hinduism Guidance of Ministry of Religious Affairs as well as the regional government provides service, guidance, and funding as much as of another religion. For this reason, it is common to find the place of worship Balai Basarah, religious rituals such as *Tiwah* (the festival of the dead), *Festival Tandak Intan Kaharingan* (religious contest), *Mamapas* (cleansing and purifying ritual), and *Pakanan Sahur* (ritual carried out to express gratitude to the ancestors). Sisto Hartati, the Head of Section for Hinduism Guidance Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Central Kalimantan Province, explained that the funding from the state budget has been widely used to help build *Balai Basarah*, to provide the holy books *Panaturan* and books of songs (*Kandayu*) for public, to train *Mantir Basarah* (the Kaharingan priests), and other programs (interview, 14 January 2020).

Thirdly, there is a positive impact on the sectors of education, economics, and politics of the adherents of Kaharingan Hinduism. Before the integration, Kaharingan was not included in the formal education curriculum. Furthermore, most of the adherents did not have access to higher education. But today, there are a lot of Kaharingan adherents who have pursued their education to doctorate programs. Consequently, better job opportunities are offered to them and this improves their finances. On the other hand, with good education, the adherents of Kaharingan can be involved in politics which, in turn, make them rulers who plan, manage, and run the government.

The adherents of Kaharingan excitedly accept the integration to Hinduism because they can actively gain benefits from it, even though some people still would not. Hinduism was chosen to integrate with due to it being a non-dogmatic religion in which all practices do not have to be uninformed. Hinduism is suitable because Dayak Ngaju would not have to experience extreme acculturation, let alone completely negate the teachings and the identity. This is in alignment with the theory of Synchronic Reception.

4 Conclusion

The adherents of Dayak Ngaju religious system adapting to one official state religion in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan Province, were triggered by two main reasons. Firstly, the internal factors include the need for recognition of the basic rights in religion, desire to change, as well as the role of intellectuals and religious leaders. The other is external factors which comprise religious politics, economics, education, religious conversion, as well as the presence of MB-AHK and IAHN-TP Palangka Raya. The adaptation strategies done by the adherents of Dayak Ngaju appear as accommodative attitudes toward Hinduism. By integrating Hinduism, Dayak Ngaju can revitalize and improve its teachings. Furthermore, revitalization was facilitated by strengthening the teachings through religious organizations and festivals. Apart from accommodation, revitalization, and revitalization, also appears resistance toward Hinduism. Dayak Ngaju religious system resists compromising on principle matters such as religious rituals, priests, Basarah, theology, and means of ceremonies. The adaptation brings about positive implications to the identity and teachings of Dayak Ngaju religious system which results in its existence till the

present time. Also, it impacts the religious life, culture, education, economics, and politics of Kaharingan Hinduism adherents.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declared that they have no competing interests.

Statement of authorship

The authors have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The authors have approved the final article.

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