

Religious Moderation and Social Harmony in the Multiethnic Society of the Strait of Malacca Region

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ABSTRACT

The communities in the Malacca Strait region have multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious characteristics formed through historical interactions, trade, migration, and cultural exchanges among various coastal communities in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the surrounding areas. This diversity serves as social capital in building a harmonious life, but it also presents challenges such as exclusivism, intergroup prejudice, and tensions related to religious identity. This research aims to analyze the role of religious moderation in strengthening social harmony among the multi-ethnic communities of the Malacca Strait region and to examine the contribution of Islamic education in instilling values of tolerance, balance, respect for differences, and coexistence. This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method. The data sources include scientific journal articles, books, policy documents, and academic publications relevant to religious moderation, Islamic education, multi-ethnic society, Malay culture, and social harmony in the Malacca Strait region. The literature is analyzed descriptively-analytically through the processes of identification, selection, classification, comparison, and synthesis of findings to obtain patterns of relationships between religious moderation, Islamic education, and social harmony. The study results show that religious moderation serves as a value framework in building inclusive social relations through the strengthening of tolerance, respect for diversity, rejection of violence, and acceptance of local wisdom. Islamic education has a strategic contribution in transmitting these values through the formation of open, balanced, tolerant attitudes, and appreciation of differences. In the context of the Malay community in the Malacca Strait region, the integration of religious moderation, Islamic education, and local cultural wisdom has the potential to strengthen solidarity, cross-cultural dialog, and social cohesion. The novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual synthesis that connects religious moderation, Islamic education, and Malay culture as a basis for strengthening social harmony in the multi-ethnic society of the Malacca Strait region.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Malacca Strait region is a social space that brings together communities with diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Community interactions in this area develop through population mobility, trade, inter-port relations, and cultural exchanges that connect the Sumatra region with the Malay Peninsula. These relationships indicate that the Strait of Malacca not only serves as a geographical boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia but also as a social space that enables the formation of cross-ethnic, religious, and cultural interactions (Irewati, 2020). That character makes the Strait of Malacca area relevant to be studied from the perspective of a multi-ethnic society, particularly in examining how diversity can be managed into a social strength while

also minimizing the potential tensions arising from differences. That diversity has dual social consequences. On one hand, intergroup encounters can strengthen cultural exchange, solidarity, cooperation, and social cohesion. On the other hand, differences in ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural identities can become sources of prejudice, stereotypes, exclusivism, and discrimination if not accompanied by the ability to build inclusive social relationships (Hamid et al., 2019). This issue shows that diversity does not automatically result in social harmony. Harmony requires values, attitudes, and social mechanisms that allow different groups to maintain their identities while also building mutually respectful relationships. In this context, religious moderation becomes relevant to be placed as one of the approaches in managing societal diversity. Religious moderation is not only related to how someone understands and practices their religious teachings but also to how those beliefs are manifested in a plural social life. The principles of balance, tolerance, respect for differences, openness to dialog, and rejection of violence can serve as the foundation for building constructive social relations. Research (Subchi et al., 2022) shows that the relatively harmonious religious life in Indonesia still faces challenges such as intolerance and radicalism, making the strengthening of religious moderation necessary to maintain a peaceful and inclusive religious life. Thus, religious moderation in a multi-ethnic society should be understood not merely as a normative religious concept, but as a value framework that can support the formation of social cohesion and harmony.

That perspective becomes increasingly important when religious moderation is placed in the context of a multicultural society. Social interactions in a multi-ethnic society not only bring together religious differences but also involve ethnic, linguistic, customary, traditional, and cultural identity differences. Therefore, strengthening religious moderation requires an approach that can connect the religious dimension with the social and cultural realities of society (Sa'diyah, 2025). Tolerance, dialog, respect for diversity, and rejection of violence become values that are not only important in interfaith relations but also in building relationships between groups more broadly (Arikarani et al., 2024). This argument places religious moderation as part of the process of forming a social culture that enables society to manage differences constructively. In this process, Islamic education holds a strategic position because education not only functions to transmit religious knowledge but also shapes the attitudes and character of students in social life. Islamic education oriented toward multicultural values can serve as a space to develop tolerance, appreciation for differences, dialog skills, and social responsibility. (Zalnur et al., 2023) shows a correlation between multicultural Islamic education and indicators of religious moderation, particularly in the development of tolerance and social skills. In line with this, (Syafei et al., 2022) demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education learning based on religious moderation can contribute to the formation of tolerant attitudes and the strengthening of multicultural values among students. These findings show that Islamic education has the potential to build social dispositions that support a pluralistic society. However, Islamic education does not exist outside the social and cultural context of society. In the Strait of Malacca region, Islamic values have historically interacted with Malay culture, forming a social tradition with distinct characteristics. The values of deliberation, mutual cooperation, politeness, respect for others, solidarity, and balance in community life can serve as cultural sources that support the practice of religious moderation (Harahap et al., 2022). Thus, Islamic education in the context of the Strait of Malacca needs to be understood contextually, meaning it should not only teach the principles of moderation normatively but also connect them with local values that have been ingrained in the community. The integration of Islamic values, education, and Malay wisdom has the potential to strengthen societal acceptance of inclusive religious practices while preserving local cultural identity.

Several studies have discussed religious moderation, multicultural Islamic education, and tolerance in various contexts. (Fikri et al., 2024) for example, shows that religious moderation plays a role in strengthening tolerance and social harmony in multicultural societies. (Subchi et al., 2022)

places religious moderation as one of the approaches to address the challenges of intolerance and radicalism. Meanwhile, research by Zalnur et al. (2023) and Syafei et al. (2022) shows the contribution of Islamic education in shaping tolerant and moderate attitudes. Research (Darmi et al., 2024) also highlights the importance of the position of religious education in understanding and conveying religious moderation in the context of Indonesia and Malaysia. These findings provide a basis that religious moderation and Islamic education are related to the formation of tolerance and harmonious social life. Nevertheless, there is still room for research that needs to be expanded. Some studies on religious moderation still focus on the national context, educational institutions, or interfaith relations, while multi-ethnic societies as a broader social space have not been widely placed as an analytical unit. Islamic education studies also more often place schools, madrasahs, and universities as arenas for the formation of moderate attitudes. At the same time, research on the Malacca Strait region has focused more on aspects of history, trade, Islamization, connectivity, and Indonesia-Malaysia relations (Irewati, 2020), while the interconnection between religious moderation, Islamic education, Malay wisdom, and social harmony in the multi-ethnic society of the region has not been extensively elaborated in an integrated manner. This gap indicates the need for an approach that connects the dimensions of religion, education, culture, and social relations within a single analytical framework.

Based on this gap, this research views that social harmony in the multi-ethnic society of the Strait of Malacca region cannot be sufficiently explained solely through the existence of social interactions or the historical proximity between communities. Harmony requires a process of managing diversity through values that promote balance, tolerance, respect for differences, dialog, and social solidarity. Religious moderation can serve as a framework of values, Islamic education as an instrument for attitude formation, while Malay wisdom can be a source of local values that strengthen the application of these principles in community life. The relationship among the three becomes important because the success of managing diversity is greatly influenced by the alignment between the values taught, the cultural context of the society, and the practices of daily social interactions. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of religious moderation, multicultural Islamic education, and Malay wisdom in analyzing social harmony in the multi-ethnic communities of the Malacca Strait region. This research does not position religious moderation merely as a concept of interfaith tolerance, but as a social framework that encompasses balance, respect for differences, openness to dialog, rejection of violence, and strengthening of solidarity. Furthermore, Islamic education is positioned as an instrument for the formation of moderate values and attitudes, while Malay wisdom is understood as a source of local values that can strengthen this process. This framework allows the research to view social harmony as the result of the interaction between religious, educational, cultural, and social life dimensions of the community. Based on this argument, this research aims to analyze the role of religious moderation in building social harmony in the multi-ethnic community of the Strait of Malacca region, as well as to analyze the contributions of Islamic education and Malay cultural values in strengthening tolerance, respect for diversity, cross-cultural dialog, and peaceful social life.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to analyze the relationship between religious moderation and the formation of social harmony in the multi-ethnic society of the Malacca Strait region. This method was chosen because the research is not aimed at measuring the relationship between variables statistically or obtaining data through field research, but rather at synthesizing various relevant research findings on religious moderation, tolerance, social interaction, Islamic education, Malay wisdom, and social harmony. The analysis was conducted

descriptively-analytically by placing previous research findings as material to build arguments and find connections between themes. The research data sources consist of literature relevant to the study focus, including scientific journal articles, academic books, policy documents, and scientific publications discussing religious moderation, multi-ethnic and multicultural societies, Islamic education, tolerance, social harmony, as well as Malay culture and wisdom. The literature is selected based on its relevance to the research focus, source credibility, connection to the context of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Strait of Malacca region, and the recency of the publications. The literature used primarily comes from scientific publications in recent years, while still retaining earlier sources that have strong conceptual and historical relevance. Data collection was conducted through literature searches on various scientific publication sources using keywords related to "religious moderation," "religious moderation," "multicultural society," "Islamic education," "Malay wisdom," "tolerance," and "social harmony," as well as keyword combinations linking these concepts with Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Strait of Malacca. The literature obtained is then selected based on the relevance of the title, abstract, focus of discussion, and its contribution to the research objectives.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively-analytically and thematically through several stages. First, the selected literature is identified and grouped based on the main themes, namely religious moderation, tolerance, social interaction, social trust, Islamic education, Malay wisdom, and social harmony. Second, the findings from each group of literature are compared to identify similarities, differences, and inter-theme relationships. Third, an analytical synthesis is conducted by explaining the mechanisms of the relationships between concepts, rather than merely describing the results of previous research. The synthesis is built through an argumentative flow that religious moderation provides fundamental values such as balance, tolerance, respect for differences, openness to dialog, and rejection of violence. These values then encourage the formation of a tolerant attitude in facing religious, ethnic, and cultural differences. Tolerance manifested in social interaction practices enables communication, cooperation, and dialog between groups. Interactions that occur positively and repeatedly can subsequently strengthen social trust, solidarity, and a sense of belonging. That trust becomes one of the important foundations for the formation of social harmony in a multi-ethnic society. In this framework, Islamic education and Malay wisdom are analyzed as mechanisms for value internalization. Islamic education serves as a space for the formation of knowledge, attitudes, and character that support moderation, while Malay wisdom is understood as a source of local values that can strengthen the acceptance and practice of these values in social life. Values such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, politeness, respect for others, solidarity, and balance in community life are analyzed in relation to the principle of religious moderation. Thus, Islamic education and Malay wisdom are not placed as standalone themes, but as mechanisms that help translate the values of moderation into social behavior and practices. Based on this process, the research analysis produces a framework of inter-theme relationships: religious moderation → tolerance → social interaction → trust and solidarity → social harmony, with Islamic education and Malay wisdom playing a role as mechanisms for internalizing and reinforcing values at each stage. This framework is used to interpret various findings from previous research and explain how the value of moderation can contribute to the formation of harmonious social life in the multi-ethnic society of the Strait of Malacca region.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Religious Moderation as the Foundation of Tolerance in a Multiethnic Society

The results of the literature synthesis show that religious moderation is the initial foundation in building constructive social relationships in societies with religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Religious moderation does not stop at a religious understanding that lies in between extreme attitudes, but also relates to the ability of individuals and groups to accept the existence of other

groups, respect differences, reject violence, and accommodate diverse social and cultural realities. (Subchi et al., 2022) show that religious moderation is related to tolerance, national commitment, rejection of violence, and the ability to accommodate local cultures. The findings show that moderation has an important social dimension in the life of a pluralistic society. In the context of the multi-ethnic society of the Strait of Malacca, this principle becomes important because diversity is not only related to religion but also to ethnicity, language, customs, and cultural identity. If differences are understood through an exclusive perspective, interactions between groups have the potential to create social distance and prejudice. On the other hand, religious moderation provides a value framework that allows differences to be understood as a social reality that must be managed through respect and dialog.

3.2 Tolerance as a Driver of Intergroup Social Interaction

The study results show that tolerance becomes more meaningful when translated into social interaction practices. Tolerance is not just an attitude of accepting the existence of other groups, but also providing space for different communities to communicate, cooperate, and participate equally in social life. In a multi-ethnic society, positive social interactions allow individuals to get to know other groups more directly. This introduction is important because prejudice and stereotypes often develop when intergroup relationships are built on incomplete perceptions. On the other hand, open interactions allow for the formation of understanding regarding the experiences, needs, and values of other groups. Research findings on multicultural education also show that understanding diversity is related to the development of tolerance. (Wahyono et al., 2022) demonstrate the importance of multicultural education in building teachers' understanding of religious tolerance in a diverse educational environment. If related to the society of the Strait of Malacca region, tolerance can be understood as a bridge that transforms identity differences into social interactions. Thus, the relationship between themes in this research can be explained as Religious Moderation → Tolerance → Social Interaction. Social interaction then becomes a space for the actualization of moderation values. In other words, moderation is not enough to be taught merely as a concept, but it needs to be realized through social relationships that enable different groups to communicate and cooperate.

3.3 Social Interaction as a Mechanism for the Formation of Trust and Solidarity

The subsequent literature synthesis shows that consistent social interactions can serve as the foundation for building intergroup trust. When communities of different religions and ethnicities repeatedly engage in communication, cooperation, social activities, and joint problem-solving, social experiences are formed that allow for the development of mutual trust. In this context, social harmony cannot be understood merely as the absence of conflict. Harmony is a process that requires active social relationships, including communication, cooperation, mutual assistance, and appreciation for other groups. Research on tolerance and moderation also highlights the importance of social interaction in strengthening intergroup relations. Studies on the local tradition of village clean-up, for example, show that shared cultural practices can serve as spaces for dialog, interaction, and the strengthening of interfaith tolerance (Hidayatullah et al., 2026). These findings provide a basis for understanding the social mechanisms within the Strait of Malacca community. When tolerance results in positive social interactions, those interactions can build shared experiences. Shared experiences then strengthen trust and solidarity. Therefore, the relationship between themes can be formulated as Tolerance → social interaction → shared experiences → social trust → solidarity. Social trust becomes important because multi-ethnic societies need the assurance that other groups can coexist peacefully and do not use identity differences as a basis to dominate or discriminate against other groups. Thus, social harmony in a multi-ethnic society is not a condition that forms automatically because the society has a long history of interaction. Harmony must be continuously produced through social interaction, cooperation, and trust between groups.

3.4 Islamic Education as a Mechanism for Internalizing Moderation Values

The synthesis results show that Islamic education has a strategic position in the process of internalizing religious moderation. Islamic education not only serves to convey knowledge about religious teachings but also shapes the attitudes and behaviors of students in facing a pluralistic social life (Mulyana, 2023). shows that the values of moderation in Islamic religious education include non-violence, equality and justice, as well as tolerance. The implementation of these values in the educational environment can create a safe and respectful atmosphere between Muslim and non-Muslim students. These findings are reinforced by research on the moderation education curriculum in higher education. (Mukhibat et al., 2024) shows that the development of moderation education in higher education can shape knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to tolerance, national commitment, rejection of violence, and accommodation of local culture. In the context of this research, Islamic education can be understood as an internalization mechanism that transforms the value of moderation from a concept into a disposition of attitude. The process takes place through learning, the exemplary behavior of educators, dialog, habituation, interaction among students, and the integration of values of tolerance and respect for differences in the educational process. The relationship can be formulated as Islamic Education → internalization of moderation values → formation of tolerant attitudes → inclusive social behavior. Thus, Islamic education has a strategic function in building a social foundation for harmony in a multi-ethnic society. Education not only prepares individuals to understand religious teachings but also prepares individuals to live together with different groups.

3.5 Islamic Education and the Formation of a Culture of Tolerance

Islamic education has a broader influence when the value of moderation is not only provided in the form of learning materials but also becomes part of the educational culture. This means that tolerance must be manifested in the way teachers interact with students, how students respond to differences, and how educational institutions create spaces for dialog. Research (Helmawati et al., 2024) on Islamic religious education and religious moderation in higher education institutions shows that students' moderation attitudes are influenced by internal and external factors and require continuous efforts to strengthen tolerance and moderation. This indicates that Islamic education cannot work in isolation. The internalization of moderation values requires a supportive social environment. Therefore, Islamic education needs to connect with the surrounding society and culture. In the context of the Strait of Malacca, Islamic education can serve as a bridge between religious values and the reality of the multi-ethnic Malay society. Values of tolerance, deliberation, mutual cooperation, justice, respect for others, and social concern can be developed through contextual learning. Thus, Islamic education functions not only as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a mechanism of social internalization, which is a mechanism that transforms the value of moderation into habits, attitudes, and social practices.

3.6 Malay Wisdom as a Cultural Mechanism for Strengthening Moderation

Besides Islamic education, the synthesis results show that local wisdom can function as a cultural mechanism that strengthens religious moderation. The approach based on local wisdom is important because the value of moderation will be more easily accepted when it is connected to the cultural experiences of the community. Research on the relationship between local traditions and tolerance shows that cultural practices can serve as a space for intergroup encounters and building harmony. Research (Hadziq et al., 2024), for example, shows that local traditions can serve as spaces for social interaction and reflect the values of pluralism and religious moderation. Other findings indicate that the integration of religious moderation and local wisdom can be an approach to strengthening interfaith harmony and reducing identity-based discrimination. The Malay context

provides a more specific space in this analysis. The research (Rehayati et al., 2026) on the Malay-Islamic community through the study of Tuhfat al-Nafis found a connection between social responsibility, justice, cultural ethics, and the formation of a harmonious community life. The research shows that religion, culture, and social ethics in the Malay-Islamic tradition can be understood as interconnected elements in building social harmony. Thus, the Malay wisdom in this research is not positioned merely as a cultural heritage, but as a cultural mechanism that helps translate religious principles into social practices. The relationship can be formulated as Islamic values → interacting with Malay customs → becoming social values → practiced in community interactions → strengthening harmony. Malay wisdom can thus become a bridge between the normative values of religious moderation and the practices of community life.

3.7 Integration of Religious Moderation, Islamic Education, and Malay Wisdom in Building Social Harmony

The main result of the literature synthesis shows that religious moderation, Islamic education, and Malay wisdom should not be understood as three separate elements. The three form a mutually reinforcing relationship. Religious moderation provides a framework of values, Islamic education offers mechanisms for internalization, while Malay wisdom provides the cultural context for applying these values in social life. Based on the synthesis of previous research, this article can offer a conceptual framework:



Figure 1. Model of Religious Moderation and Social Harmony in Society

The framework is relevant to the Indonesia-Malaysia comparative study which found that state policies and community initiatives play a role in building interfaith relations, cooperation, and social harmony. The study specifically employed a comparative qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and focus group discussions with religious leaders, government officials, and interfaith activists (Hermawan & Matas, 2023). Meanwhile, Islamic education and Malay wisdom serve as reinforcing factors that internalize these values. Based on the study results, there are three main conceptual findings. First, religious moderation is an important foundation in building harmony in a multi-ethnic society because it provides principles for managing differences without erasing each religion's and ethnicity's identity. Second, tolerance, social interaction, communication, and acceptance of differences are the main mechanisms that connect religious moderation with social harmony. Third, Islamic education and local Malay wisdom can be strategic instruments for internalizing moderation values in community life. These findings also indicate that the context of the Strait of Malacca has characteristics that differ from studies of religious moderation that only consider Indonesia on a national level. The Strait of Malacca is a transnational social space that brings together Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore within a network of history, culture, trade, and Malay society. Therefore, religious moderation in this context should be viewed as a cross-cultural and cross-border practice, not just as a religious policy of a single country. That position provides opportunities for the development of region-based multicultural

education. Islamic education in the Strait of Malacca region can develop learning that introduces the history of cultural encounters, Malay values, religious diversity, coastal community experiences, and cross-cultural dialog practices. With this approach, education not only produces students who understand diversity but also enables them to manage diversity peacefully and productively.

Table 1. Study Results Table

Aspect	Study Findings	Implications for the Strait of Malacca
Multicultural society	The Strait of Malacca is a space for interaction among various ethnicities and cultures	Diversity needs to be managed as social capital
Religious moderation	Emphasizing balance, tolerance, and respect for differences	Becoming an approach in managing plurality
Tolerance	Reducing prejudice and discrimination	Building a sense of security between groups
Dialog	Opening communication across religions and ethnicities	Prevent misunderstandings and conflicts
Cooperation	Creating positive cross-group experiences	Strengthening social cohesion
Local wisdom	Deliberation, mutual cooperation, and politeness support communal life	Becoming a local moderation base
Education	Forming understanding and inclusive attitudes	Preparing a generation capable of living in a pluralistic society
Institutional	The government and community organizations play a role in maintaining harmony.	Strengthening conflict prevention mechanisms
Social media	Can strengthen or weaken tolerance	Requires digital literacy and responsible communication

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that social harmony in the multi-ethnic society of the Strait of Malacca region is formed through several interconnected aspects. Ethnic and religious diversity is the main characteristic of the society in the Strait of Malacca region, formed through a long history of trade interactions, migration, and cultural exchange. These conditions become social capital that can enrich the lives of the community, but at the same time require good management so that differences do not develop into conflict. Furthermore, religious moderation and tolerance are

important foundations in managing that diversity. Religious moderation encourages society to practice their beliefs in a balanced manner while still respecting the existence of other groups. The attitude of tolerance is then manifested through respect for differences in religion, ethnicity, culture, and tradition. With the presence of tolerance, prejudice and discrimination between groups can be minimized, thereby creating a sense of security in communal life. The next aspect is dialog and social cooperation. Tolerance will be stronger when realized through real interactions such as interfaith dialog, deliberations, mutual assistance, social activities, and cooperation to solve community issues. In the context of the Strait of Malacca, such interactions are important because its society has diverse backgrounds. Through communication and cooperation, the community can find common interests that transcend ethnic and religious boundaries.

Local wisdom and education also hold a strategic position. Malay values such as deliberation, mutual cooperation, politeness, respect for others, and maintaining social relationships can serve as a cultural foundation in developing religious moderation. Meanwhile, education plays a role in shaping the mindset of the younger generation to be able to accept diversity and resolve differences peacefully. Thus, religious moderation not only becomes a religious concept but also evolves into a social culture in community life. Lastly, institutionalization and digital literacy become supporting factors in maintaining social harmony. The government, religious institutions, community organizations, educational institutions, and community leaders play a role in creating dialog spaces and preventing conflicts. On the other hand, the community's ability to use social media critically is also necessary because provocative, intolerant, or false information can exacerbate intergroup conflicts. Thus, Table 1 shows that social harmony is not formed automatically just because people live side by side in diversity. Harmony requires a continuous process through religious moderation, tolerance, dialog, cooperation, strengthening local wisdom, education, and institutional support. In the context of the Malacca Strait region, all these elements can serve as the foundation for the formation of an inclusive, peaceful, and socially cohesive multi-ethnic society.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings, religious moderation plays an important role in building social harmony in the multi-ethnic communities of the Malacca Strait region. Ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity can become a social strength when managed through attitudes of tolerance, respect for differences, interfaith dialog, and social cooperation. Malay local wisdom and education also serve as supporting factors in strengthening the values of moderation and social cohesion. Therefore, the sustainable strengthening of religious moderation through education, interfaith and intercultural dialog, and collaboration between the government, religious institutions, and society is necessary to realize an inclusive, peaceful, and harmonious life for the people of the Strait of Malacca.

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