

Transformation of the Community of Believers in the Almighty God: A Sociological Analysis

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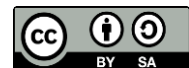
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Abstract

The Islamic community in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation, particularly following legal recognition through a Constitutional Court ruling in 2017. This transformation encompasses not only social, cultural, and economic aspects, but also changes in the structure of collective identity and the negotiation of their position amidst the dominance of the majority religion. This article aims to analyze this transformation process through a sociological approach, drawing on theories of functionalism, social conflict, and symbolic interaction. The main focus includes identity dynamics, social interaction patterns, integration challenges, and the role of religious organizations in preserving local traditions while adapting to modern norms. The results of this study highlight how legal recognition has opened up space for religious adherents to strengthen their position in society, despite challenges such as social stigma and marginalization still faced. The conclusion of this study is that this transformation ultimately reflects efforts to create social harmony and maintain diversity in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Keywords: Believers in Belief, social transformation, collective identity, social interaction, pluralism, social harmony.



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INTRODUCTION

According to Tuhumury, transformation is a change from an old form to a new form. The word transformation refers to a significant change or shift in society, whether in social, cultural, or spiritual

aspects. In this context, transformation refers to changes that occur in the lives of people who are part of the group of believers in the One Almighty God. Meanwhile, believers are a group of people who adhere to local or traditional beliefs that are not included in officially recognized religions (such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) (Hernández-Sosa et al., 2026; Melchor et al., 2026; Savolainen et al., 2026; Yinghua et al., 2026). They still recognize the One Almighty God as the core of their beliefs, as regulated in the Pancasila ideology in Indonesia.

The term "penghayat" refers to individuals or groups who adhere to traditional or local beliefs in Indonesia, known as "Penghayat Percaya". This group has a belief system that is different from the official religions recognized by the government. They often face challenges in gaining recognition and civil rights. However, with the Constitutional Court ruling Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016, their legal status was recognized, providing space for a more inclusive social transformation (Al-Sharafia & Almarhdi, 2026; Aliaga et al., 2026; Mishra, 2026). Believers in God Almighty is a group that adheres to a traditional belief system rooted in local Indonesian wisdom. They practice various spiritual teachings that have been passed down from generation to generation, reflecting the diversity of culture and spirituality of the archipelago. This group plays an important role in preserving the noble values and traditions that are an integral part of the identity of the Indonesian nation.

According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are 187 registered belief groups in Indonesia, with the largest concentration in Central Java. Organizations such as the Indonesian Supreme Council of Beliefs (MLKI) serve as a single forum for belief groups and indigenous communities, seeking to preserve and promote spiritual values derived from ancestral teachings (Alotaibi, 2026; López Padilla, 2026; Sagredo-Gallardo et al., 2026). Despite facing various challenges, including discrimination and marginalization, belief groups continue to play a role as preservers of Indonesia's spiritual culture. They contribute to preserving the diversity and richness of the nation's culture, as well as promoting tolerance and harmony in community life (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2016).

Believers in the Almighty God not only maintain the spiritual heritage of their ancestors, but also play an active role in shaping the character of a diverse and tolerant nation. Before official recognition, they often faced discrimination and marginalization in various aspects of life. However, with the Constitutional Court Decision Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016, their legal status was recognized, providing space for a more inclusive social transformation.

So in this article the researcher will discuss how the transformation of the Society that adheres to this belief, which at first can be said that this religion is the religion of the ancestors inherited from the ancestors, of course their changes or transformations must be appreciated because they are willing to accept the changes that occur this is because they want to accept the changes so that they remain under one ideology, namely Pancasila which reads "Belief in the Almighty God" of course this has a significant change even though we see this as just a change of name but for those who have inherited

hundreds or even thousands of years of culture will have an impact on their feelings. Therefore the researcher will discuss what transformations are in the context of sociological analysis.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis related to belief communities in various regions in Indonesia. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative sociological research design grounded in interpretive and constructivist paradigms to explore the transformation of the community of believers in the Almighty God. The design emphasizes understanding meanings, values, and social practices as they are constructed and negotiated within religious communities. A phenomenological and ethnographic orientation is employed to capture lived religious experiences, shifts in collective identity, and patterns of belief transformation within their social contexts. The qualitative approach enables in-depth analysis of symbolic interaction, social change, and the interplay between faith, culture, and contemporary social dynamics.

Research Target/Subject

The population of the study consists of members of religious communities who identify themselves as believers in the Almighty God within selected urban and semi-urban settings. The sample is determined using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of participants with diverse backgrounds, roles, and levels of religious engagement, such as community leaders, educators, youth members, and lay believers. Sampling continues until data saturation is achieved, ensuring that emerging themes adequately represent variations in belief transformation and social experience within the community.

Research Procedure

Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and systematic document review over a defined research period. Interviews are audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Observational data are recorded as detailed field notes, while documents are organized and coded thematically. Data analysis follows an inductive process involving coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation to identify patterns of transformation within the community of believers. Trustworthiness is ensured through triangulation of data sources, member checking, and reflective memo writing throughout the research process.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

Data are collected using semi-structured interview guides, participant observation protocols, and document analysis checklists. Interview guides are designed to explore perceptions of faith transformation, communal practices, social influences, and responses to modern challenges. Observation protocols focus on religious gatherings, rituals, and community interactions to capture behavioral and symbolic dimensions of belief. Relevant documents such as sermons, community

statements, educational materials, and organizational records are analyzed to provide contextual and historical depth to the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before we discuss further, it is good for us to know what has changed in the society that must transform its beliefs because it is forced by the state's decision, in order to remain in Pancasila, this is so that we can further appreciate the tribes that are willing to accept this. As follows:

Similarities: The Basis of Belief

Recognition of the Supreme Power: Traditional ancestral beliefs, spread across various regions in Indonesia, are centered on the recognition of a supreme power that is considered to be the regulator of the universe and all its contents. This power is often transcendent but also close to human life, manifested in various symbols and spiritual concepts. For example, in indigenous communities, this power can be personified through gods, nature spirits, or sacred entities that regulate the balance of the world. With the presence of the Pancasila ideology, especially the first principle on "Belief in the One Almighty God," this understanding has undergone a transformation. Belief in the supreme power is aligned with the framework of monotheism, where the One Almighty God is recognized as the only supreme entity that regulates the harmony of human life and nature.

Rituals and Harmony with Nature: In addition to recognizing the highest power, ancestral beliefs also emphasize harmony between humans and nature as the main principle of life. Balance with nature is seen as a form of respect for divine power and ancestors who are believed to help maintain the well-being of human life. This practice is manifested through spiritual rituals, such as harvest ceremonies, offerings to nature, and prayers for ancestors, which aim to maintain the balance of energy between humans, spirits, and the universe. Believers of Belief, as a form of inheritance of this tradition, continue these practices by recognizing that nature is a source of life that must be protected. These rituals not only have spiritual meaning, but also serve to foster a sense of togetherness and responsibility towards the environment. Thus, harmony with nature in traditional beliefs teaches humans to live in harmony with the cycle of nature, maintain balance, and appreciate the resources provided by divine power. Both ancestral beliefs and Believers of Belief value harmony with nature, respect for ancestors, and the implementation of spiritual rituals as a form of connection with the divine.

Differences and Changes

From Polytheism or Animism to Monotheism

Past: Ancestral beliefs were often polytheistic (worshipping many gods) or animistic (believing objects had spirits).

Now: In the Penghayat Percaya, this concept is aligned with monotheism, namely the belief in the One Almighty God as the source of all things. Gods or spirits are often understood as manifestations of the one God.

Traditional ancestral beliefs in various cultures, including in Indonesia, are generally polytheistic or animistic. In a polytheistic belief system, people worship various gods, each of whom is considered to have a certain power or area of power, such as nature gods, fertility gods, or protective gods. On the other hand, animism assumes that natural objects, such as trees, rocks, or rivers, have spirits or spiritual powers that can influence human life. These concepts reflect people's understanding of the world as closely connected to nature and a broader spiritual existence.

However, along with the changing times and the growing influence of monotheistic thought, these concepts began to undergo transformation. In the context of the Penghayat Percaya, especially in Indonesia, this change reflects an adaptation to the ideology of monotheism, namely the belief in the One Almighty God as the source of all things. Nevertheless, various spiritual elements that exist in traditional belief systems, such as gods or nature spirits, are still recognized. In this new understanding, the gods or spirits are considered as manifestations of the One God, not as separate independent entities. This concept allows ancestral beliefs to survive and develop within the framework of monotheism without losing their deep spiritual essence.

In a journal on the development of religion in Indonesia, Arianto (2009) explains that the process of change from polytheism and animism to monotheism among the Penghayat Percaya (Religious Adherents) shows continuity and flexibility in religious practices. This transformation shows how Indonesian society can align traditional beliefs with universal values, thus creating harmony between cultural heritage and broader religious beliefs. According to Dharma Researcher (2017), this change also illustrates how religion can develop dynamically by considering existing social needs and realities.

Legal Status and Recognition

Past: Ancestral beliefs were often considered "local beliefs" that did not have official recognition from the state.

Now: Following the 2017 Constitutional Court ruling, Believers are legally recognized in Indonesia, have the right to list their beliefs on their ID cards, and are protected by law (Constitutional Court, 2017).

In the past, ancestral beliefs in Indonesia were often considered "local beliefs" that did not have official status in the eyes of the state. Although many of these beliefs had significant followings, they were not formally recognized in the Indonesian state structure. Believers often could not list their beliefs on official documents such as ID cards, and practitioners of these beliefs did not receive the same legal protection as official religions. However, significant changes occurred after the Constitutional Court ruling in 2017 which granted legal recognition to Believers. With this ruling, these groups were given the right to list their beliefs on ID cards and receive legal protection. This decision was an important milestone in the recognition of constitutional rights for adherents of non-religious beliefs regulated by the state.

Adjustment of Customary Values with Pancasila

In the past: Customary values were purer and focused on local traditions, without any adjustment to the national framework. Now: These values are adapted to fit the state ideology, especially the first principle of Pancasila (Belief in One Almighty God), so that they become more universal.

Indonesian ancestral beliefs in the past often focused more on local values and specific traditions, emphasizing harmony with nature, ancestors, and supernatural powers. These customary values were not always related to the state ideology, especially in the context of Indonesia which was founded on the principles of Pancasila. However, over time, these values began to be adapted to fit the national principles, especially the first principle of Pancasila, namely "Belief in One Almighty God." This adjustment aims to align traditional beliefs with the concept of a monotheistic and more universal divinity. Thus, customary values that were previously more particular can now be accepted within the framework of the state ideology without eliminating local cultural identity. This allows adherents of the Belief to practice their teachings in a broader context and in accordance with the values of Pancasila.

Changes in Ritual Practices

Past: Ancestral belief rituals can be very specific and vary according to region, such as direct worship of certain objects or spirits.

Now: Ritual practices are more simplified, and the focus is more on recognizing the Almighty God. Some rituals have been changed so as not to conflict with religious norms or state regulations.

Ritual practices in ancestral beliefs in Indonesia are often very diverse and specific depending on the region and tribe. These rituals can involve worshipping certain objects or spirits that are considered to have supernatural powers. Some of these rituals are even carried out directly by worshipping certain objects such as trees or stones, which are symbols of the relationship between humans and the spiritual world. However, along with the recognition of Pancasila and the need to align religious practices with the norms of major religions, many traditional rituals have been simplified. The focus has shifted to emphasize recognition of the One God, as reflected in the first principle of Pancasila. Several rituals that are considered to be contrary to religious norms or state regulations have also been changed, or replaced with forms of rituals that are more in accordance with the laws and ethics in force in Indonesia

Relations with Other Religions.

In the past: Ancestral beliefs may have stood alone without the influence or connection of any major religion.

Today: Many adherents of beliefs live side by side with official religions, some even combine religious elements in their traditions, such as Wetu Telu (Lombok) which combines Islam and Sasak customs.

In the past, many ancestral beliefs in Indonesia stood alone without any interaction or influence from major religions such as Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism. Each religious or belief group often had separate communities that were not connected to each other. However, today many Penghayat Percaya live side by side with official religions. For example, in the Wetu Telu tradition in Lombok, the community combines Islamic practices with Sasak customary traditions. This integration reflects how

the influence of major religions can blend with traditional beliefs in a more inclusive form of religiosity. Therefore, despite differences in religious practice, many Penghayat Percaya now see major religions as part of their lives, while still maintaining the customary and traditional elements that are at the heart of their beliefs.

The transformation from ancestral beliefs to Adherents of Belief in God Almighty reflects an effort to preserve local traditions while adapting them to the modern context, state ideology, and the need for legal recognition (Martinez-Moreno et al., 2026; Rammert & Hausigke, 2026; Zainul et al., 2026; Zhanbayev et al., 2026). What has changed is the form of legality, adaptation of values, and focus on monotheism, but the core of respecting ancestors, nature, and spirituality remains.

The group of believers in the Almighty God in Indonesia consists of various organizations that adhere to and preserve traditional beliefs rooted in local wisdom. Here are some of them:

Sunda Wiwitan: The original belief of the Sundanese people centered in West Java. Sunda Wiwitan, which is still practiced by the Baduy indigenous community in Kanekes, shows how traditional beliefs play a role in forming a social structure that is thick with local wisdom values (Aytuna & Özkaya, 2026; Borges & Vieira, 2026; Fried et al., 2026). The practice of rituals and customs that are carried out strengthen social cohesion and community identity, and are a marker of resistance to cultural homogenization.

Kaharingan: Traditional belief of the Dayak tribe in Central Kalimantan. Kaharingan, as a traditional belief of the Dayak tribe, reflects the close relationship between spirituality and social life of the community (Cholid et al., 2026; Gyasi & Mintah, 2026; Mesquita, 2026). The rituals and traditional ceremonies carried out not only function as a means of worship, but also as a mechanism to strengthen social solidarity, maintain harmony with nature, and preserve local cultural values.

Parmali: The indigenous belief of the Batak people in North Sumatra. Parmali, as the indigenous belief of the Batak people, plays a role in forming a social structure that is oriented towards customary and ancestral values. Religious practices integrated with customs strengthen social ties within the extended family and community, and serve as a basis for social decision-making and collective problem-solving.

Sapta Darma: A belief system that developed in East Java. Sapta Darma emphasizes the development of individual spirituality that leads to social peace. Spiritual practices carried out collectively strengthen social bonds between individuals in a community, creating a social network that supports each other in achieving spiritual and social well-being.

Pangestu: A spiritual organization that focuses on Javanese spiritual teachings. Pangestu, as a spiritual organization, focuses on self-development through deep spiritual practices. Social relationships within the Pangestu community are built through joint activities that strengthen solidarity and understanding between individuals, and become a forum for sharing spiritual experiences that enrich social life.

Subud: A spiritual movement founded by Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo in Central Java. Subud, founded by Muhammad Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo, offers a spiritual approach that is universal and cross-cultural. The movement forms a global social network that connects individuals from diverse backgrounds, strengthens international solidarity, and promotes universal human values.

Indonesian Supreme Council of Beliefs (MLKI): The parent organization that houses various belief groups in Indonesia. As the parent organization that houses various belief groups, MLKI plays a role in fighting for the rights of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia. MLKI is a forum for interfaith and interfaith dialogue, strengthening social cohesion within a pluralistic framework, and encouraging the creation of an inclusive and harmonious society.

According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are around 187 registered belief groups in Indonesia, with the largest concentration in Central Java. Despite having received official recognition, these groups still face various challenges in terms of recognition and protection of their rights. Several studies have shown that there are still problems in education services, civil registration, and social discrimination against belief groups.

Overall, these seven beliefs show how traditional beliefs play a role in forming close social relationships between individuals, groups, and communities. Through social analysis, we can see that each belief creates a different pattern of social interaction, based on the spiritual, customary, and cultural values they adhere to. This diversity also shows how social and religious values play a role in maintaining harmony, solidarity, and balance in society, while creating a strong and mutually supportive social network.

After official recognition, believers experienced changes in their social identity. They were more open in expressing their beliefs and received better acceptance from society. This is in line with the findings that believers are now more accepted by society and more open about their status. After the official recognition of believers in Indonesia, there were significant changes in their social identity (Laviola & Cucari, 2026; Namboodiripad et al., 2026; Scuteri et al., 2026; Zarrouk et al., 2026). Previously, believers often experienced marginalization and discrimination, especially in population administration such as Identity Cards (KTP) and Family Cards (KK), where the religion column did not include their beliefs. However, with the Constitutional Court Decision Number 97/PUU-XIV/2016 on October 18, 2017, which granted the judicial review lawsuit against Article 61 of Law Number 23 of 2006 and Article 64 of Law Number 24 of 2013 concerning Population Administration, believers can now include their beliefs in the religion column on their KTP and KK.

This change has an impact on increasing social acceptance of believers. They are now more open in expressing their beliefs without fear of discrimination or stigmatization. The inclusion of beliefs in official documents provides legal recognition and increases their self-confidence and social identity. In addition, this official recognition also opens access for believers to obtain other civil rights, such as marriage registration and inheritance rights, which previously often became a problem because they

were not legally recognized. With this recognition, they can live social, economic, and cultural lives more equally and without significant obstacles.

Overall, official recognition of believers has brought positive changes in their social lives, increasing acceptance by society, and allowing them to be more open and equal in various aspects of life. Organizations such as the Indonesian Supreme Council of Beliefs (MLKI) play an important role in advocating for the rights of believers. They play a role in improving the quality of human resources and preserving the noble values of spiritual culture.

Believers of beliefs now find it easier to carry out traditional ceremonies and religious rituals according to their beliefs. In addition, they actively participate in social activities, such as mutual cooperation and community events, which strengthen social cohesion (Mustolehudin, Ahmad Muntakhib, Siti Muawanah, Eko, 2024). Despite being officially recognized, believers of beliefs still face challenges, such as stereotypes and discrimination. However, they develop adaptation strategies, such as hiding their identities or blending in with non-believers, to overcome these obstacles.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of the community of Believers in the Almighty God reflects the dynamics of complex social change in the midst of Indonesia's pluralistic society. This change not only includes the adaptation of traditional beliefs to the framework of state ideology, but also involves identity negotiation in the face of social pressure and the dominance of the majority religion. This process is important to create social integration through official recognition, but still opens up opportunities for Believers to preserve local traditions (Aziz, 2020). Thus, this transformation illustrates how social harmony can be achieved through the recognition of pluralism and cultural diversity in modern society. The transformation of the community of believers shows a complex dynamic in the Indonesian social context. Official recognition has opened up opportunities for broader integration and participation in community life. However, efforts to overcome the challenges of discrimination and marginalization still need to be continued, with the active role of believers' organizations and support from the government and the wider community.

This article is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the transformation of religious communities in Indonesia and their contribution to building an inclusive and tolerant society.

The transformation from ancestral beliefs to Adherents of Belief in God Almighty can be analyzed as part of the process of social change that occurs in Indonesian society (Khoirul Fata, 2023). The functionalism approach highlights that this transformation serves to integrate the Adherents of Belief groups into a larger social order through official state recognition. This aims to create social harmony in a pluralistic society. From a historical perspective, this transformation also reflects the adaptation of traditional values to modernization, where ancestral beliefs that were previously local and specific began to be recognized within the framework of the national ideology, namely Pancasila, which emphasizes Belief in God Almighty as a universal value.

In addition, social conflict theory helps explain how the dynamics of power and domination influence this change. Ancestral beliefs are often marginalized due to the dominance of the majority religion and state policies that previously only recognized official religions. This transformation creates space for the Penghayat Percaya group to maintain their identity through legal legitimacy and social negotiation. Through the perspective of symbolic interaction, it is also seen how symbols and practices

of belief are adapted to be relevant to modern norms without losing their spiritual meaning. Therefore, this transformation is not only a process of legal adjustment, but also a symbol of the struggle for identity and the sustainability of local traditions amidst the pressures of social change.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Pak Wii: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing; Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Sota Yamamoto: Data curation; Investigation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

Sakura Suzuki: Supervision; Validation; Other contribution; Resources; Visuali-zation; Writing - original draft.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest.

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