

Peace in Religious Teachings and its Impact on Economic and Political Stability

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Abstract

This study aims to delve into the values of peace within Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity in Malaysia and its profound influence on the country's economic and political stability. This study employs a qualitative approach, utilising both primary and secondary sources. In-depth interviews were conducted with religious leaders representing Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, while relevant documentation was used as a secondary source. The findings indicate the shared emphasis among religious leaders upon cultivating inner peace within their respective faiths. Each religion advocates that spiritual practices foster inner peace, contributing to a harmonious society, nation, and economic resilience. Conversely, neglecting these religious teachings can lead to violence, social issues, and an absence of peace within the country. Therefore, this study posits that peace holds immense significance, urging its integration among believers and indirectly impacting Malaysia's economic development and political stability.

Keywords: Value of peace, religious teachings, economic and political stability.

Perdamaian dalam Ajaran Agama dan Dampaknya Terhadap Stabilitas Ekonomi dan Politik

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menggali nilai-nilai perdamaian dalam Islam, Hindu, Budha, dan Kristen di Malaysia serta pengaruhnya yang besar terhadap stabilitas ekonomi dan politik negara tersebut. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif, sumber primer dan sekunder digunakan. Wawancara mendalam dilakukan dengan para pemuka agama yang mewakili Islam, Hindu, Budha, dan Kristen, sedangkan dokumentasi yang relevan merupakan sumber sekunder. Temuan ini menunjukkan adanya penekanan bersama di antara para pemimpin agama dalam menumbuhkan kedamaian batin dalam keyakinan mereka masing-masing. Setiap agama menganjurkan agar praktik spiritual menumbuhkan kedamaian batin, berkontribusi terhadap keharmonisan masyarakat, bangsa, dan ketahanan ekonomi. Sebaliknya, mengabaikan ajaran-ajaran agama ini dapat menyebabkan kekerasan, masalah sosial, dan tidak adanya perdamaian di dalam negeri. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini berpendapat bahwa perdamaian mempunyai arti yang sangat penting, mendorong integrasi di antara umat beriman dan secara tidak langsung berdampak pada pembangunan ekonomi dan stabilitas politik Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Nilai perdamaian, ajaran agama, stabilitas ekonomi dan politik.

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings, by nature, seek peace and harmony within their lives. Two-thirds of the countries in the world have more than 95 per cent of the population holding some form of

religious belief (Aliyu, 2022; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015) that brings inner peace to them. According to scholars of peace and conflict studies (Abd Razak et al., 2016; Abu Bakar, 2013; Abu-Nimer, 2000; Farhana et al., 2013; Islam, 2020), religion can motivate or catalyse peace by ending conflict and helping to build solid social cohesion (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015; Islam, 2020). Recent years have seen burgeoning literature on the relationship between peace, politics and religion. Generally, this reflects how religion has remarkably returned to prominence in the literature on sociology, economics, political science, and international relations (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2009; Sulaiman, 2021; Tan et al., 2022). Religion should not be viewed in isolation since religious interventions tend to focus on issues associated with political, economic and social improvement (Ibiyemi & Salako, 2021; Yazdani, 2020).

Religion can be understood as the worshipping of a god (or gods) by a person following his belief system. Identity is largely formed by religion, especially when religious differences occur alongside other demarcation lines, such as ethnicity, nationalism, or geography. Religion also provides the experience of belonging to a community of fellow believers (Sulaiman, 2021). Thus, religion can foster peace by bringing people together through its social dimension (Ibiyemi & Salako, 2021). Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Muslims have also incorporated peace concepts into their discourses (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015).

Despite this, Carothers & O'Donohue (2020) pointed out that religion has persisted in the polarisation and tension between and within societies which adhere to different cultural and religious values. Hence, religion can be viewed as a 'compass' for individuals and communities (Abu Bakar, 2013; Husin & Ibrahim, 2016; Sulaiman, 2021). Based on the report issued by the Institute for Economics & Peace (2015) and according to Khan & Leonardo (2023), countries with greater religious freedom are generally found to be more peaceful. In contrast, countries with less religious freedom are generally less peaceful. Malaysia has four major traditional religions, where the majority of the population practices Islam (61.3 per cent), followed by Buddhism (19.8 per cent), Christianity (9.2 per cent), Hinduism (6.3 per cent), and the rest adhering to Confucianism, Taoism, or other traditional Chinese philosophies and religions. About 32.2 million of the Malaysian population are estimated to be in other minority religious groups, including animists, Sikhs, and Bahais (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). As enshrined in the Federal Constitution, all Malaysians have the right to practice their respective religions (Husin & Ibrahim, 2016) in peace and harmony regardless of their faith, be it Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism or others. On top of that, the religious leaders in Malaysia have played a vital role in teaching shared values and promoting peace in society.

To further explore how the value of peace has impacted Malaysia's economic and political stability, this study examines four major religions practised in Malaysia: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, highlighting the values of peace within each of them and shedding light on their profound influence on economic and political stability. The findings of this study indicate that these faiths emphasise cultivating inner peace through in-depth interviews and analysis of relevant documentation through a qualitative

research approach. Malaysia's diverse society benefits from this exploration, which fosters interfaith understanding and promotes social harmony. In addition, this research reveals the practical implications of religious teachings on peace, suggesting a possible connection between inner peace and economic resilience. Formulating strategies that promote economic development requires an understanding of this connection. A further point mentioned in this study is that peace is essential in ensuring political stability. Violence and social unrest are among the risks associated with ignoring religious teachings.

This research addresses a critical gap in understanding by offering practical recommendations to integrate values of peace into religious and societal practices. This contributes towards fostering a harmonious society for multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, religious leaders, and the general public. The findings of this study will ultimately influence Malaysia's socioeconomic development, political cohesion, and well-being. This study offers a nuanced examination of the meaning of peace across religions, presenting valuable insights that have broad implications for academic discourse and practical interventions in Malaysia's complex socio-cultural landscape.

METHOD

This study has adopted a qualitative approach; the research paradigm is interpretivism. Thus, it explores the value concept of peace embedded in the religious teachings practised by the religious leaders in Malaysia. Methods of data collection are library research and in-depth interviews (IDI). The library research method was applied to obtain a conceptual understanding of the value of peace. Relevant documents include books, journals, articles, handbills which each religious leader holds for their believers, and related websites focused on the discussion on peace and religion, and to obtain a conceptual framework of the value of peace in the said four major religions.

The IDI approach was conducted with Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and Muslim leaders in Malaysia. The selection of religious leaders as key informants ensures that data is sourced from people who are experienced and directly involved with the practice of their religion in relation to the eight pillars of peace. All questions have been approved by the University Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC). This process ensures that the ethical standards and scientific merit of research involving human subjects are met. Thus, retrieving primary data using this approach is a reliable method. These adapted semi-structured and open-ended interviews allow the key informants to comfortably and freely expound on their points. A set of procedures have been established for conducting the IDI: a) e-mails to the key informants (extending invitation to participate in IDI) were sent out accordingly, b) an official letter from the Head of Shariah and Economics Department, University of Malaya, with a set of questions for the interview had been enclosed, c) e-mails to the target key informants were sent out approximately three weeks before the IDI commenced, d) the set of questions were distributed beforehand to achieve maximum responses and data from the respective key informants, e) the interview sessions lasted for approximately two hours, f) all the interview data were recorded and transcribed. Finally, raw data from the interviews were analysed using the content analysis method via Nvivo11.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This section begins with a review analysis.

Relationship between Religion and Peace

This section discusses the relationship between religion and peace, the value of peace embedded in the major religions in Malaysia, and the roles played by the religious leaders. The discussion on the value of peace is based on the eight pillars of peace as identified by the Institute for Economics and Peace (2019), illustrated in Figure 1 below.

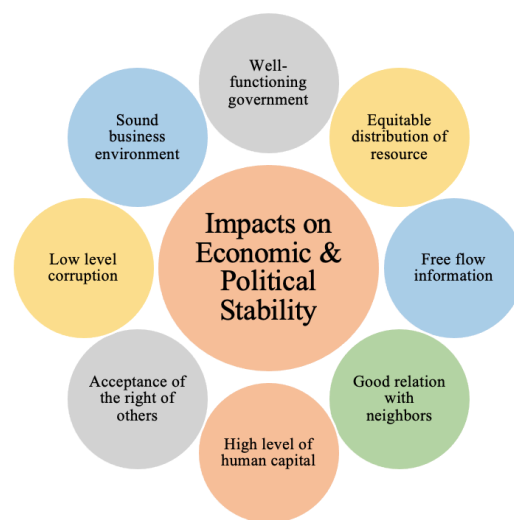


Figure 1. The Eight Pillars of Peace (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019)

Religion is defined as a system incorporating grand narrative, ritual, and ethical action, which bind people to each other and to trans-human realities (Abbasi, 2023). In addition, religion can also be a solid basis for identity, particularly when religious differences coincide with other demarcation lines such as political, ethnic, economic or geographic considerations (Ibiyemi & Salako, 2021). The literature indicates that religion is not only a belief system but also a social system. Thus, religion offers a sense of belonging to a community of like-minded people. Moreover, it can serve as a catalyst for peace by contributing to the resolution of conflict and the building of solid social cohesion (Khan & Leonardo, 2023). Such a belief system provides individuals and religious communities with a sense of belonging and direction; it is their compass. By engaging in the social dimension, religion can unite people and resolve issues that affect their lives (Firdous et al., 2023; Sulaiman, 2021, for example, living in peace and harmony with religious leaders and organisations.

Community leaders serve as religious representatives. The impact of religiously based political and charitable actions on society can be seen in many religiously based charitable activities (Polak & Rohs, 2023). In this sense, religious leaders and organisations offer credibility as trusted institutions with respected values and moral warrants to oppose injustice. They also have the unique leverage to promote reconciliation among conflicting parties, and the ability to rally support from the community, nation, and international

communities to achieve peace; as well as a sense of calling that inspires perseverance even in the face of significant and otherwise debilitating obstacles (Melnik, 2022; Smock, 2006).

However, it has been revealed that many commonly made statements on the relationship between peace and religion require a quantitative analysis (Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), 2015). The Global Peace Index has been steadily deteriorating in the past seven years due to increasing terrorist activity (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019). The conclusion is that religion and violence are inextricably linked. Religion has been associated with peace throughout history, although there have been many high-profile terrorist conflicts related to religious fundamentalism. Thus, more often than not, the role of religion in creating and undermining peace is assumed rather than systematically examined. There is no religious cause for violence. Instead, individuals who seek to uphold their religion rather than the value of peace in their religion are the ones who cause violence. Next, we will examine how religion's value of peace is not the leading cause of superficiality and violence among its adherents.

The value of peace embedded in the major religions

This section discusses the value of peace embedded in the four major religious teachings in Malaysia, i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. This discussion is based on the interviews conducted with the religious leaders of Malaysia's four major religions. It is found that these four religions practice the concepts of personal peace and societal peace at the heart of their religious discourses. Although Malaysia is constitutionally an Islamic country, all Malaysians are free to practice and profess their religion in peace and harmony (Farhana et al., 2013; Husin & Ibrahim, 2016) and they share the common values of peace in the current context.

Parallel to that, the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) (2015) found that countries with higher membership of religious groups tend to be slightly more peaceful. Also, based on the interviews with Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian religious leaders, they agreed that the more religiously the believers follow their faith or belief system, the more peaceful they will be in carrying out their daily routine. In essence, countries with greater religious freedom are generally more peaceful, whereas countries with less religious freedom are generally less peaceful. In other words, religious diversity leads to more peaceful countries. To reflect on the above presumptions, this section will further discuss the value of peace embedded in the four major religions.

From the perspective of Hinduism and the interview with the Hindu religious leader, one of the integral principles of Hindu philosophy is “Vasuda Eva Kutumbakam” or “the whole world is but one family”. This is considered as an ideal that every Hindu is urged to internalise in their path to spiritual progress. The teachings of the scriptures of Hinduism, the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, and Yoga Sutras are universal and have not been restricted by any geographical, racial, national, or ethnic boundary. Another important principle is “Ahimsa,” which is fundamental to bringing peace. Ahimsa goes deeper than “non-violence”, prohibiting subtle abuse and even simple hurt. A weaver saint named

Thiruvalluvar said in wisdom, "All suffering recoils on the wrongdoer himself." Those who desire not to suffer will refrain from causing pain to others.

Meanwhile, the message brought by Buddhism teaches people how to end suffering by identifying its cause and solution. Ahimsa is the basis for bringing peace to society through leading a good life. Buddhism provides five precepts for shaping Buddhists: refraining from harming others, committing sexual misconduct, speaking falsely, and consuming intoxicants. In Buddhism, it is believed that pain and suffering will lead to greed, hatred, and ignorance. Pigs, snakes, and cockerels represent these three elements. Based on this belief, each Buddhist adheres to the values of non-hatred, balance, and knowledge. They aim to attain enlightenment (enlightened being) to be beneficial to all. As a result, Karma (causality of actions) reflects this concept.

In addition to morality, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom, every enlightened being possesses "paramita", which reaches the other side. As a result, it develops compassion (karu), which implies active sympathy and tender affection. The concept is based on the experience of all living beings having enlightenment (bodhi). The virtue of compassion is often translated as pity or sympathy. Yet, it is believed that karuṇā must be accompanied by wisdom (prajñā) to be properly effective. It is stated in the holy book of Buddhism that a Bodhisattva actively helps and is willing to take on the suffering of all creatures and transfer karmic merit onto them. According to the karma concept of causality action, everyone carries ethical responsibility for their actions resulting from their thoughts, words, and deeds. In the karma theory, there is a focus on the outside and inside of people, and a discussion about the internal records in their significance because only they can foster a peaceful and harmonious relationship. Buddhism views human beings as being defined by their greediness, clinging to themselves, and connected to everything. It is possible to bring peace to this cycle of human suffering within the interminable reincarnations with the help of the "eightfold path," which is the primary substance of Buddhist teachings (right views, right resolution, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration). Additionally, Buddha initiated the therapeutic path, which has many implications for peace. Nirvana is the central idea of peace in Buddhist ethics. The concept of the four noble truths is intrinsically linked to nirvana. Soka Gakkai ("Society for the Creation of Values") seeks to continue this tradition.

However, in a Christian ethic as highlighted by the Christian religious leader in the interview, its teaching allows the people to be "life-justified" if they are made "god-justified" through salvation (Woschitz, 2003). Social life requires that everyone love one another as a fundamental condition. For social righteousness to be dispensed and a participatory and viable interaction possible, belonging to a responsible society is the primary prevalent effort; it is also imperative that all racism and discrimination be rejected, as well as all fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom.

On the other hand, it is essential to recognise that existential angst plays a significant, even often decisive, role in people's lives. According to the Christian worldview, true liberation and humanisation of mankind are connected to God's reconciliation with humanity due to human distress. Additionally, the believer acknowledges that suffering and

misery put their being at risk and must be cared for (Ayuba Jalo et al., 2022). Being a person does not simply mean being a certain way for one's own sake, but quite the contrary: finding oneself in the other and realising it in being with them (cf. Mt 10:39 par). Furthermore, the Christian ethics encourages believers to respect people's freedom and to love one another. Thus, the fruits of the spirit of "joy" and "peace" (Ga I 5:13ff), which are impossible without active love (Gal 6:2) (1 Cor 8:10.13), is embraced (Ayuba Jalo et al., 2022).

Based on the interview with the Islamic religious leader, it was discovered that Islam's teachings and scriptures contain a wealth of values, beliefs, and strategies to promote peaceful and nonviolent conflict resolution. To understand Islam, a thorough understanding of the Qur'an, the Prophetic tradition, and the early Islamic period is indispensable, as these scriptures and traditions have always served as a model for Muslims and Islamic movements to emulate and they are reflected in every philosophical, ideological, and scientific inquiry among Muslims (Abu Nimer, 2001; Abu-Nimer, 2000). Several values that constitute core principles in peace-making strategies and frameworks are derived from Islam that, when applied consistently and systematically, can transcend and govern all forms and levels of conflict, such as justice ('adl), beneficence (ihsan), and wisdom (hikmah). The attainment of peace and harmony both on the inside and the outside can be achieved by being a good and faithful Muslim (Islam, 2020; Othman bin Abdullah, 2002). A verse in An-Nahl (16:90) commands humankind to treat everyone justly, generously, and with kindness.

Many studies have suggested that the values underpinning the five pillars of Islam are the same values that shape Muslim nonviolent action: obeying God and the Prophet and disobeying others when necessary; practicing discipline through prayer; paying zakah (taxes to support the poor) to show solidarity and support for the poor; fasting to cultivate self-sacrifice, suffering, and patience; pilgrimage as a way of embracing unity and brotherhood (Abbasi, 2023; Aliyu, 2022; Islam, 2020; Sulaiman, 2021).

There have been many values and principles identified in Islam by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, such as unity, supreme love for God, mercy, subjection to passion, and accountability for all actions; whilst virtues of the true faith, forgiveness, and mercy are recommended. The Islamic values of justice, kindness, compassion, and wisdom are also directly related to peace-building. It emphasises social justice, brotherhood, equality of mankind (including abolishing slavery and racial barriers), tolerance, submission to God, and acknowledging the rights of others (Evans et al., 2023; Sulaiman, 2021).

Religious Leaders and their Roles

Religious leaders are assets in the peace-making of a country, playing an essential role as peacemakers. They are particularly effective in working together for peace when they are from different faith communities. When the different faiths explore and practice common values, such as justice and compassion, in public life, religious leaders can inspire others. Table 2 simplifies the roles of religious leaders based on the interviews conducted with the four leaders of major religions in Malaysia, where it is found that the roles highlighted by them are supported and in line with previous studies (Abu-Nimer, 2000; Evans et al., 2023; Smock, 2006; Suraju, 2014).

Table 1. *The value of peace embedded in the four major religions in Malaysia*

Values	Hinduism	Buddhism	Christianity	Islam
Non-Violence	“Ahimsa” (prohibiting subtle abuse and even simple hurt)	“Ahimsa”	“live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18)	“God commands you to treat (everyone) justly, generously and with kindness.” (16:90)
Pursuance of Peace	“The whole world is but one family”; everyone loves peace.	“Nirvana” is the idea that peace is fundamentally anchored.	“pursue peace with all people” (Hebrews 12:14; see also 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:22; James 3:17).	“Salam”, “silmi” “submission to God” Jami at-Tirmidhi 1854: "O Mankind, spread peace and feed people."
Compassion	No hatred, no jealousy, achieve happiness inside and outside, tolerance.	No hatred, inner peace, active sympathy and tender affection. Tolerance.	Everybody loves each other, the spirit of “joy” and “peace” Giving tolerance.	Justice (‘adl), beneficence (ihsan), wisdom (hikmah), Forgiveness and mercy are the true faithful. Tolerance and kindness.
Rights	Respect others	Eightfold path (Right views, resolve, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration)	Encouraging believers to love each other and respect the rights of others	Recognition of the rights of others
Responsibility	Karma (causality of action)	Attainment of enlightenment (enlightened being), to be able to be effective for the benefit of all. Karma	“life-justified,” if they are made “god-justified”	Accountability for all actions

Source: Interviews with selected religious leaders in Malaysia (2017)

In Malaysia, the character of religious leaders are predominantly displayed as credible and trustworthy with a respected set of values. They also sometimes assist the government in dealing with the tensions related to religious misunderstandings. They also perform the role of mediator in reconciling conflicts related to religion. Obviously, they can mobilise the community to support and maintain peace. Among other factors promoting peace, there should also be stronger international cooperation between ethnic groups of neighbouring states on a cultural, humanitarian, and educational level, e.g., through cultural exchanges, social interaction, and religious dialogues.

Table 2. *Roles of religious leaders*

Criteria	Main duty	Roles
An asset of the country	Peacemaker	They can communicate with the community.
Inspiration	Motivator	Faith explores and practices the shared values in public. Having a respected set of values depending on their belief system.
Unique leverage	Mediator - bridging the gaps in handling the tension issues and reconciling the conflicts	Multi-religion brings differences in terms of views and cultures. Indirectly, this can lead to conflict and tension. The religious leaders will be seated in the middle and play a crucial role in reducing the tension and conflict, whether among those of the same religion or those of different religions.
Credibility	Expert to be referred to	Trusted institution
Leadership skills	The religious leader should show the practicality of the religious teachings and show a good example.	Mobilise the community, the nation and international support for an effective peace process

Source: Interviews conducted with selected religious leaders in Malaysia (2017)

Conceptual Understanding of Peace Value in Religious Teaching

The conceptual understanding of peace values in religious teachings has been constructed based on past studies and interviews with religious leaders, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. The conceptual understanding of peace value in religious teachings consists of four main components: religion as the base or central core of this conceptual understanding, the value of peace harvested in the religious teachings, inculcate the believers of the major religions to shape their internal and external personality, attitudes and behaviour in dealing with everyone in their life. Being a faithful believer, he or she will command the conditions necessary to achieve internal and external peace and harmony (Abu Nimer, 2001). Every

religion brings the message of peace and non-violence. Thus, the value of peace, already embedded in religious teachings, helps believers to have a good personality and interact in a societal context. Differences in terms of the believers' languages, races and backgrounds should not be a barrier to a nation living in peace and harmony.

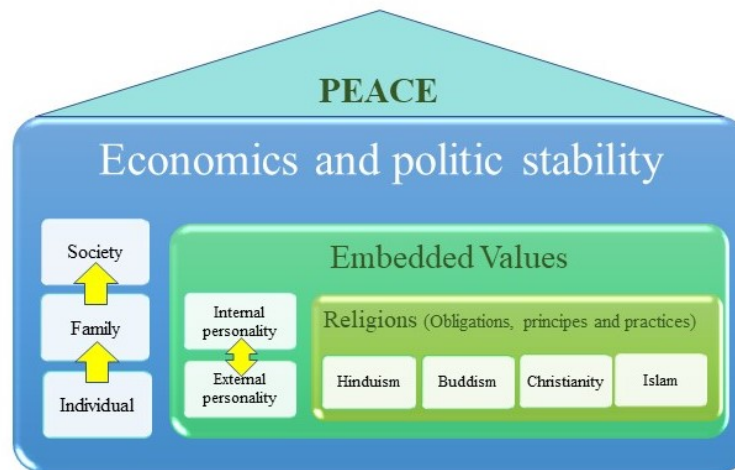


Figure 2. Conceptual Understanding of Peace Value Embedded in Religious Teachings

The root of living in peace and harmony should be based on the individual’s belief system and their behaviour in their daily life would depend on the values that the individual adopted since birth. Therefore, the core value element must be based on the religion or belief system and the teachings of the same. Then, all believers should “nurture” the value within their personality, inside and out.

It has been contended that developing people's personalities is the primary basis of developing a peaceful country. Suppose everyone has a set value that is cultivated in their religion which shapes them to become good people with good personalities. This would lead to the formation of a harmonious and happy family. As a result, the family that practices a set of religious values will indirectly produce leaders with the same set of values. Producing a good leader is vital to the people because before they take the lead, they should be able to lead themselves. Lead the soul and heart by following good intuition, based on the set of values that they have adopted since birth. For instance, a person should lead himself in terms of managing anger and stress and avoid more tension such as committing violence, interpersonal violence, or bullying (Firdous et al., 2023). Controlling negative attitudes is also easier to do by internally having a fundamental belief system, which can have a significant impact on the ability of a person to control or adapt to a stressful situation. By having this set of values in religious teachings, a person can manage himself and deliver a given task whenever he performs his duties related to economic activities such as education, management, business, societal work, and so on. The cycle with a good personality based on a set of peace values will greatly impact economic and political stability.

Based on the conceptual understanding as illustrated in Figure 2, analysis of religious leaders' perspectives will be discussed in the next section. The conceptual understanding of

the values embedded in religious teaching is the basis for thematic analysis from the religious leaders' perspective, which will examine how the value of peace impacts economic and political stability. In the interviews conducted, each religious leader highlighted the importance of inner peace to their believers. Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam teach their adherents that spiritual practice will bring inner peace. The calm and peace experienced by each individual through spiritual practice will drive society and the nation to be more peaceful. A peaceful society will bring about a positive impact and lead to economic and political stability. In contrast, all religions agree that when their believers are not obedient to their respective teachings, this may result in non-peaceful outcomes such as violence, murder, social ills, and robbery.

The Impact of Peace Values on Economic and Political Stability

This section expounds on the value of peace gathered from the four major religions, as presented in the previous section. Table 3 depicts the findings on the value of peace embedded in religious teachings and its impact on economics and political stability in Malaysia. The findings are based on four in-depth interviews (IDI) carried out with four prominent religious leaders in Malaysia.

The values of peace are embedded based on the eight pillars, which mainly focus on examining its impact on economics and political stability, as highlighted in the literature review (Figure 1). First, all the religious leaders interviewed agreed that establishing an exemplary governance or well-functioning government would require an active role played by the leader. The results indicate that a spiritual leader with good qualities and personality will be able to steer the country towards peace. This result is supported by previous literature discussing the existence of prosperity or peace in a country based on its governance (Abbasi, 2023; Abu-Nimer, 2000; Ayuba Jalo et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2023; Firdous et al., 2023; Kleindienst, 2024; Polak & Rohs, 2023; Suraju, 2014). A study by Evans et al. (2023) supports this finding; it was found that 62% of Malaysians agree that people from many different backgrounds make their country a better place to live in and more peaceful, due to religious teachings as well as diversity in ethnicity and culture.

Second, good governance should primarily focus on education, as it is believed that education will boost the growth of other sectors continuously (Kleindienst, 2024). The focus should be on both formal and religious education, which helps children, teenagers, and adults to understand and practice their spiritual beliefs (Abu Bakar, 2013; Abu Nimer, 2001; Sulaiman, 2021).

Third, the value of peace embedded in the teachings of the four main religions brings similar results to the believers when they practice and nurture all the values on a daily basis. Simultaneously, these values will reflect on the believer internally and externally. Therefore, the believers will show respect for their neighbours, quickly evaluate the good and the bad in information, accept the rights of others with high tolerance and kindness, and stand to refuse any form of bribery or taking others' money. Therefore, understanding, nurturing and practising religious teachings will positively impact an individual's personality, whether

internal or external, and simultaneously drive the individual to interact with their family and society.

Table 3. *The value of peace embedded in religious teachings*

Pillars of peace	Value embedded in the religious teachings of four major religions			
	Hinduism	Buddhism	Christianity	Islam
Well-functioning government	Spiritual leader	Leading own selves	Lead by example	<i>Tawhidic</i> belief
Equitable distribution of resources	Fairly distributed, No enforcement for charity	Fairly distributed, encourage charity	Fairly distributed, encourage charity (10%)	Fairly distributed, acknowledged type of ownership and charities
Free flow of information	Encourage all believers	Encourage all believers	Encourage all believers	Encourage all believers
Good relation with neighbours	Highly encouraged	Highly encouraged	Highly encouraged	Highly encouraged
High level of human capital	Education is a highly important sector	Education is a highly important sector	Education is a highly important sector	Education is a highly important sector
Acceptance of the rights of others	Highly acknowledged	Highly acknowledged	Highly acknowledged	Highly acknowledged
Low-level corruption	Highly Prohibited	Highly Prohibited	Highly Prohibited	Highly Prohibited
Sound business environment	Good ethics	Good ethics	Good ethics & moral enforcement	Good ethics & moral enforcement

Source: Interviews conducted with selected religious leaders in Malaysia (2017)

The intrinsic religious values ingrained within Malaysians directly impact the country's economic development and political stability. This is important because economic growth will not be sustainable and bring prosperity without strong individual, family, and community security. Without religious values, chaos will ensue, and a conducive economic environment will not be maintained (Firdous et al., 2023). Foreign investors will in turn be discouraged from investing in the country due to its political instability. In contrast, when religious values are embedded in every individual in a society, it will create an atmosphere

of peace in the country. The political stability achieved will encourage the growth of economic activities and attract foreign investors to make investments in the country.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, Malaysia's economic and political stability can partly be attributed to the value of peace. Thus, the value of peace has become a pivotal factor influencing the economic and political landscape of the country. From the findings, it is evident that religious teachings have a profound impact on fostering peace and stability. In Malaysia, religious teachings can be used as a catalyst to create peace. The country's diverse religious landscape encompasses Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

Despite their differing doctrines, all of these religions promote peace. This shared value has fostered social cohesion and stability. As a moral compass, religiously rooted values guide individuals to make decisions and take actions that benefit society. Individuals and families must nurture the cherished value of peace. Educating individuals about peace can create a conducive environment for economic and political stability. The family is a critical locus for transmitting these values, strengthening the nation's stability generation after generation. It is stressed that a person's understanding and commitment to peace cannot exist in an isolated manner. They manifest externally, influencing society as a whole. For a country to be economically and politically stable, peaceful values must be internalised within the individual, which has an external spillover effect.

There are three significant practical implications of this study: First, religious education programs should be enhanced. Second, there needs to be government policies that support peaceful coexistence, address socioeconomic disparities, and promote equal opportunity for all religious communities. Third, specific indicators that measure the success of peace-building programs need to be developed to monitor and evaluate the impact of peace initiatives on economic and political stability. The effectiveness of policies and initiatives to promote interfaith harmony and stability must be assessed regularly.

In addition, this study highlights three theoretical implications. First, this study supports the theory that religion can facilitate social and political stability—the findings of this study indicate that religion is essential in shaping societal values and behaviour. A nuanced discussion of religion's role in governance and stability is provided. Second, this study emphasises the importance of religious values as the moral compass for individuals. Societal ethics are emphasised in this theory in line with this study. Peace values derived from religious teachings can influence individual behaviour and societal norms.

In addition, this study establishes a connection between peace, socioeconomic development, and religious values. It supports theories exploring the complex relationship between cultural or religious values and economic prosperity. Further research is encouraged to explore how societal values can affect economic stability. To broaden their scope, future studies can include NGOs as additional stakeholders. Understanding the intricate dynamics at play in Malaysia would be made more comprehensive by investigating the contributions of NGOs to peace and stability.

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