

The Representation of Divinity and Mechanisms of Ideological Adaptation in Buddhist Religious Education Textbooks in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist Religious Education textbooks at the senior high school level in Indonesia and to examine the mechanisms of its adaptation to the ideology of Pancasila. This study is important because an epistemological tension exists between the non-theistic nature of Buddhist teachings and the principle of Belief in One Supreme God as the ideological foundation of the state. This study employs a qualitative approach using interpretative and comparative content analysis. The researchers collected data through a document study of six official textbooks used in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, and then analyzed the data through coding, categorization, and thematic comparison. The findings show that the representation of divinity in the textbooks is structurally ambivalent. The 2013 Curriculum employs a mechanism of double encoding, which combines normative affirmation of God with a conceptual rejection of God as a creator within a single text. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum employs a mechanism of discursive stratification, which separates normative and philosophical discourses into different contexts. These findings indicate that the representation of divinity constitutes a discursive construction shaped by the relationship between religious teachings and state ideology. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of developing a more integrative conceptual framework and pedagogical approach to reduce ambiguity and dissonance in learning. The originality of this study lies in the development of the concepts of double encoding and discursive stratification as

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mechanisms of ideological adaptation in religious education, which contribute new insights to the study of religious representation and textbook analysis.

Introduction

Indonesia is a country built upon the ideological foundation of Pancasila, in which the first principle, Belief in One Supreme God, has served as a fundamental principle of national life since independence in 1945. This principle emerged from a historical compromise between secular nationalist groups and religious groups, resulting in a state that is neither fully secular nor theocratic (BPIP, 2025; Cooper, 1989). Over time, Belief in One Supreme God has not only functioned as the foundation of the state but also as a normative framework that guides social, moral, and institutional life in Indonesia, including in the field of education (Latif, 2019).

Within this framework, the education sector becomes a strategic arena for internalizing religious values among students. The government establishes religious education as a compulsory subject, as regulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 and Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007. In addition to serving as a medium for transmitting religious teachings, religious education also plays a role in shaping students' character as individuals who possess faith and piety (Parker, 2014; Soedijarto, 2009). This policy applies to all recognized religions, including Buddhism, which, despite representing a minority group of approximately 0.72% of the population (6,022,914 people), continues to play a significant role in the national education system with 1,579 teachers and 288,176 students (Direktorat Jenderal Bimbingan Masyarakat Buddha, 2021; Kementerian Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2024).

However, the implementation of the principle of Belief in One Supreme God within the context of Buddhist religious education presents a complex conceptual challenge. Philosophically, Buddhism does not position God as the creator and absolute ruler of the universe (Brown, 1987). Instead, it explains reality through the law of cause and effect (*kamma*) and the cycle of existence (*samsara*) (Pyysiainen, 2003). Although Buddhism acknowledges the existence of supernatural beings such as deities, their status is not absolutely transcendent and remains within the cycle of impermanence (Cohen, 2025; Schmid, 2007). This condition reveals an epistemological tension between the non-theistic nature of Buddhist teachings and the ideological demand of the state that emphasizes the existence of Belief in One Supreme God.

This tension becomes more complex when it is represented in textbooks as the primary medium of instruction in schools. Textbooks do not merely function as sources of knowledge; they also serve as spaces for the production and reproduction of ideological discourse in education (Widodo, Wardhana, & Mislikhah, 2025). In

practice, the representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist religious textbooks may exhibit various forms of meaning negotiation, including adaptation, ambiguity, and conceptual contradiction (Sharapan, 2022). This situation may lead to cognitive dissonance in students' understanding and create pedagogical challenges for teachers in explaining the concept of divinity in a consistent and coherent manner (Widarti, 2023). Therefore, analyzing how the concept of divinity is represented in textbooks becomes essential for understanding mechanisms of ideological adaptation and their implications for religious education practices in Indonesia.

Research on the representation of religion in textbooks has developed into several major trends. First, studies focusing on representation and discourse construction show that textbooks are not neutral; instead, they function as media for reproducing ideology and dominant interests in society. A number of studies demonstrate that representations of religion in textbooks often reflect particular ideological narratives, including biases toward majority groups and simplifications of the complexity of religious teachings. Comparative studies show that textbooks across countries tend to present selective, stereotypical representations of religion that do not fully reflect social diversity (Amirali, 2024; Tridgell, 2025; Vestøl, 2016). Conceptually, Barić (2016) shows that the concept of God in textbooks evolves in response to social and educational dynamics, while Bezrogov (2020) emphasizes that visual representations of God are shaped by cultural contexts and educational policies. These findings align with Rose (1970), who argues that representations of religious figures in textbooks constitute socially constructed forms embedded with ideological interests. In the Indonesian context, studies also show that religious textbooks play a role in integrating state ideological values, such as Pancasila, into instructional materials (Yani, Hazin, & Hanafi, 2023). These findings confirm that religious representation in textbooks is a discursive construction shaped by ideological interests and educational policy.

Second, studies focusing on the representation of Buddhism in education and pedagogical approaches show that the presentation of religious concepts in textbooks cannot be separated from learning processes and student characteristics. Research indicates that representations of Buddhism in textbooks are often abstract, standardized, and detached from lived religious practices within society. In addition, a dominant perspective, such as "conversion Buddhism," often marginalizes the diversity of Buddhist community experiences (Fujiwara, 2019; Thanissaro, 2010). Other studies show that "textbook Buddhism" results from academic simplification that does not fully represent the complexity of Buddhist traditions (Berkwitz, 2016). From a pedagogical perspective, Tan (2023) shows that representations of the concept of divinity often do not align with students' cognitive development, which may lead to conceptual misunderstanding. In the Indonesian context, Praptiyono and Singamurti (2025) emphasize the importance of integrating

theory, practice, and realization, while Saputra et al. (2023) highlight the significant role of teachers in internalizing religious values through motivation and inspiration. These findings indicate that representations of divinity in textbooks are shaped not only by content but also by pedagogical approaches used in the learning process.

Third, studies focusing on the relationship between religious education and state ideology show that textbooks function as instruments for transmitting ideological values within the education system. Research across various contexts shows that religious education materials are often used to reinforce national identity, social stability, and state ideological agendas, although this may sometimes compromise religious diversity (Foroutan, 2021; Nazari, 2022). In plural societies, Putkonen and Tacke (2024) show that representations of God in textbooks reflect complex interreligious interactions. In Indonesia, Hutapea et al. (2025) demonstrate that the concept of divinity in Buddhist education is integrated with Pancasila values, such as loving-kindness (*metta*), as well as teachings from the *Tripitaka*, thereby forming a synthesis between religious and ideological values. These findings indicate that representations of divinity are not only theological but also function as tools for social and ideological integration within education.

Despite these contributions, significant research gaps remain. Most studies focus on general religious representation, pedagogical approaches, or value integration within the context of theistic religions. In contrast, studies that specifically examine how the concept of divinity in non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism is negotiated within a state ideology that emphasizes Belief in One Supreme God remain limited. In addition, studies that analyze specific discursive mechanisms in textbooks as forms of ideological adaptation, such as ambivalent or layered representational strategies, remain scarce. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist religious education textbooks in Indonesia and identifying the mechanisms of ideological adaptation used within the national education context.

This study aims to analyze how the concept of divinity is represented in Buddhist religious education textbooks at the senior high school level in Indonesia and to identify the discursive mechanisms used in the process of ideological adaptation to the principle of Belief in One Supreme God within the framework of Pancasila. Specifically, this study focuses on how such representations are constructed through discursive strategies such as affirmation, adaptation, and separation between philosophical and normative dimensions in Buddhist teachings. This study contributes to the field of religious education by revealing forms of ideological negotiation within non-theistic traditions and by expanding understanding of textbooks as media for constructing and reproducing religious meaning within the national education system.

This study argues that the representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist religious education textbooks is not neutral; rather, it constitutes a

discursive construction that reflects a process of negotiation between non-theistic Buddhist teachings and the ideological demands of the state that emphasize Belief in One Supreme God. From a discourse theory perspective, this representation can be understood as a practice of meaning production shaped by relations of power and ideology (Foucault, 1980), in which textbooks function as instruments for reproducing institutionally legitimized knowledge (M. W. Apple, 1994). Furthermore, from the perspective of the social construction of reality, the concept of divinity presented in textbooks results from processes of institutionalization and legitimation of meaning shaped through interactions among educational actors, state policies, and religious traditions (P. Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Therefore, this study argues that representations of divinity in Buddhist religious education textbooks tend to exhibit ideological adaptation strategies, such as double encoding and discursive stratification, which enable the coexistence of normative affirmation of divinity and conceptual rejection of God as a creator, resulting in ambivalent and layered forms of representation within the context of religious education in Indonesia.

Method

This study focuses on analyzing the representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist Religious Education textbooks at the senior high school level. The unit of analysis in this study is the narrative text in textbooks that explicitly and implicitly represents the concept of divinity, including terms such as Belief in One Supreme God, Sang Hyang Adi Buddha, the concept of creation, and explanations of ultimate reality in Buddhist teachings. The researchers selected textbooks as the object of analysis because they function as the primary medium for knowledge transmission and as instruments for ideological reproduction within the formal education system (M. Apple & Apple, 2004; Romanowski, 1996).

This study employs a qualitative research design using qualitative content analysis combined with interpretative and longitudinal comparative approaches. The researchers chose the qualitative approach because the study aims to understand meaning, structures of representation, and ideological contexts embedded in the text rather than to measure quantitative relationships between variables. Content analysis enables the researchers to identify patterns of representation systematically, while the interpretative approach allows the researchers to interpret meanings behind the text within specific social and ideological contexts (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Shava et al., 2021).

The researchers use a longitudinal comparative approach to compare representations of the concept of divinity across two curriculum periods, namely the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, in order to identify patterns of similarity, difference, and transformation in representational strategies and

ideological adaptation. This design enables the researchers not only to conduct a descriptive analysis of textual content but also to examine discursive transformations within the context of educational policy change.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data include six official Buddhist Religious Education textbooks at the senior high school level used in the national education system, which the researchers classify into two curriculum periods: the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. For the 2013 Curriculum, the researchers analyze the following textbooks: Nurwito and Nasiman (2017), *Pendidikan Agama Buddha dan Budi Pekerti Kelas X*; Prajoko and Sukiman (2017), *Pendidikan Agama Buddha dan Budi Pekerti Kelas XI*; and Nurwito and Katman (2018), *Pendidikan Agama Buddha dan Budi Pekerti Kelas XII* (Revised Edition), all published by the Center for Curriculum and Textbooks, Research and Development Agency, Ministry of Education and Culture. For the Merdeka Curriculum, the researchers analyze the following textbooks: Kuntari and Kuswanto (2021), *Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti SMA/SMK Kelas X*; Santoso and Waldiyono (2021), *Pendidikan Agama Buddha dan Budi Pekerti SMA/SMK Kelas XI*; and Katman and Tupari (2022), *Pendidikan Agama Buddha dan Budi Pekerti SMA/SMK Kelas XII*, published by the Center for Textbooks, Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The researchers select these textbooks purposively because all of them are official textbooks that have undergone institutional curation and validation by national educational authorities, and therefore represent the ideological position of the state in delivering religious teachings through the formal education system. The researchers obtain secondary data from relevant academic literature on religious representation, education, and ideology to support the interpretation and analysis of the findings.

The researchers collect data through a documentation study using several systematic steps. First, the researchers conduct immersive reading of all textbooks to understand their context, structure, and patterns of content presentation. Second, the researchers segment the text by identifying units of meaning related to the concept of divinity. Third, the researchers perform coding using a coding framework that includes categories such as "God," "*Sang Hyang Adi Buddha*," "creation," "ultimate reality," and "Belief in One Supreme God." The researchers document each identified data point systematically by recording the source, location (chapter and page), and context of occurrence to ensure data traceability.

The researchers analyze the data through three stages of qualitative content analysis as proposed by Elo and Kyngäs (2007), namely preparation, organization, and reporting. In the preparation stage, the researchers define the unit of analysis and conduct repeated readings to gain a deep understanding of the data. In the organization stage, the researchers perform open coding, grouping, categorization,

and abstraction to identify major themes in the representation of divinity. The researchers then conduct a comparative analysis between textbooks from the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum to identify patterns of similarity, difference, and transformation in representation. In this stage, the researchers also direct the analysis to identify ambivalent and discursively stratified patterns of representation, which they conceptualize as mechanisms of double encoding (Hall, 1980) and discursive stratification (Foucault, 1972). In the reporting stage, the researchers present the findings in a descriptive-interpretative form supported by direct quotations as empirical evidence.

Result

Overview of Textbooks

This study uses six Buddhist Religious Education textbooks at the senior high school level as the primary data source, which the researchers classify into two curriculum regimes, namely the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. These two curricula represent national education policy frameworks that serve as the foundation for textbook development in this study. The 2013 Curriculum replaced the 2006 School-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*) and emphasizes the integrated development of students' competencies through the integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, as well as the application of a scientific approach and authentic assessment in the learning process (Lembaga Pengawasan dan Pengembangan Informasi Kurikulum Indonesia, 2013; Puad & Ashton, 2023). In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum represents a more recent policy that emphasizes learning flexibility, a focus on essential content, and character development through the Pancasila Student Profile, while allowing teachers to adapt instruction to students' needs and interests (Kemendikdasmen, 2024). These differences indicate a shift from a competency-based standard model toward a more adaptive, contextual, and student-centered learning approach.

For the 2013 Curriculum, the researchers analyze textbooks by Nurwito and Nasiman (2017) for Grade X, Prajoko and Sukiman (2017) for Grade XI, and Nurwito and Katman (2018) for Grade XII. For the Merdeka Curriculum, the researchers analyze textbooks by Kuntari and Kuswanto (2021) for Grade X, Santoso and Waldiyono (2021) for Grade XI, and Katman and Tupari (2022) for Grade XII. All of these textbooks are official government publications used nationwide, and therefore they reflect both the curriculum framework and the ideological orientation of Buddhist religious education in Indonesia.

Structurally, textbooks under the 2013 Curriculum adopt a competency-based approach that emphasizes the integration of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. The content structure generally consists of thematic chapters that combine Buddhist teachings with character formation and moral education. For example, in

the Grade XI textbook, the material is organized into themes such as morality (*sīla*), karma, and the law of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*), which are presented through a combination of text, reflection, and learning activities. This approach emphasizes the transformation of knowledge into practice (*pariyatti-patipatti-pativedha*), so that religious education becomes not only cognitive but also normative and practical.

In contrast, textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum show a more systematic structure based on learning outcomes. The material is organized into three main elements, namely history, ritual, and ethics, which are developed through activity-based and experiential learning approaches. The textbooks also include instructional guidelines, activity frameworks, and an emphasis on the values of the Pancasila Student Profile. In addition, they integrate Buddhist teachings more explicitly with contemporary issues such as diversity, religious moderation, and social life, which reflects a more contextual and adaptive curricular orientation.

In both curricula, the concept of divinity does not always appear as a standalone topic; instead, it is distributed across themes such as the universe, life, morality, and religious diversity. In the 2013 Curriculum, the concept of divinity tends to appear implicitly through discussions of cosmic law, the nature of existence, and moral values. In contrast, in the Merdeka Curriculum, the concept of divinity appears more frequently in a normative context related to Pancasila values, particularly in strengthening religious identity and promoting religious moderation. This pattern indicates that the position of the concept of divinity in textbooks is not only theological but also ideological in function.

Table 1. General Characteristics of Buddhist Religious Education Textbooks

Aspect	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
Number of Textbooks	3 textbooks (Grades X, XI, XII)	3 textbooks (Grades X, XI, XII)
Approach	Competency-based (attitudes, knowledge, skills)	Learning outcome-based
Content Structure	Thematic with integration of moral values	Systematic (history, ritual, ethics)
Learning Model	Religious and reflective activities	Experience-based and contextual activities
Main Focus	Character development and practice of teachings	Pancasila Student Profile and religious moderation
Position of Divinity Concept	Implicit within cosmic law and morality	More explicit within ideological and Pancasila value contexts

The six textbooks analyzed in this study show differences in orientation and presentation patterns between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in terms of content structure, learning approach, and the position of the concept of divinity. Textbooks under the 2013 Curriculum tend to present material thematically with an emphasis on character formation through the integration of knowledge and religious practice, which leads the concept of divinity to appear implicitly within discussions of morality and cosmic law. In contrast, textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum present material in a more systematic and outcome-based structure, with an emphasis on contextual values such as the Pancasila Student Profile and religious moderation, which makes the concept of divinity more explicitly visible within a normative framework. These structural and pedagogical differences indicate that the representation of divinity in textbooks is not singular; rather, it follows the direction of curriculum policy and the broader ideological orientation of education.

Representation of the Concept of Divinity in Textbooks

The analysis of six Buddhist Religious Education textbooks at the senior high school level shows that the representation of the concept of divinity appears in various forms, both explicitly and implicitly, and varies between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. This representation is not solely determined by Buddhist teachings but is also shaped by the ideological context of national education, which positions Belief in One Supreme God as a normative principle. In general, the concept of divinity is represented through terms such as “Belief in One Supreme God,” “Sang Hyang Adi Buddha,” and philosophical concepts such as “ultimate reality,” with characteristics that include affirmation, rejection, and ambiguity in their presentation.

In the 2013 Curriculum, the representation of divinity appears explicitly and emerges across various contexts, including religious history, religious life, and cosmology. The textbooks clearly affirm the existence of God as part of the state ideological framework.

“All schools of Buddhism believe in the existence of Belief in One Supreme God...” (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, pp. 32–33).

However, this affirmation does not stand alone. The text simultaneously presents a conceptual rejection of God as the creator and controller of the universe. The textbooks explicitly express this rejection through critiques of the theistic concept of God.

“In Buddhism, belief in... God... who governs the world... is a ‘myth’” (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, p. 162).

“...the incorrect concept of creation that the world was created by a creator figure...” (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, p. 187).

In addition, the textbooks represent the concept of divinity through an emotional relationship between humans and God, which indicates the presence of an affective dimension in the text.

“loving-kindness toward the Supreme God...” (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, p. 108).

These findings show that the 2013 Curriculum combines normative affirmation and conceptual rejection within a single textual structure. This pattern indicates that the representation of divinity is not neutral but rather constitutes a discursive construction shaped by the ideological framework of education (M. Apple & Apple, 2004).

In contrast, textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum show a tendency toward more implicit and philosophical representations. The concept of divinity no longer appears as a personal entity but is defined as ultimate reality that is non-personal in nature.

“Viewing God as ultimate reality... not a personal being...” (Kuntari & Kuswanto, 2021, p. 31).

Nevertheless, the term “Belief in One Supreme God” remains present in a normative context, particularly in relation to character formation and national values.

“I consistently internalize and reflect the attributes of Belief in One Supreme God...” (Katman & Tupari, 2022, p. 167).

In addition, in both curricula, the concept of divinity appears in cosmological discussions, where the universe is not explained as a creation of God but as a result of causal law.

“...the universe exists not because it was created...” (Santoso & Waldiyono, 2021, p. 131).

The comparison between the two curricula shows differences in representational patterns in terms of presentation form, terminology, and contextual usage of the concept of divinity. The 2013 Curriculum presents a more explicit representation that combines affirmation and rejection within the same framework, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum presents the concept of divinity in a more implicit and philosophical manner by separating normative and conceptual dimensions.

Table 2. Comparison of the Representation of the Concept of Divinity

Aspect	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
Form of Representation	Explicit and varied	Implicit and philosophical
Affirmation of God	Very explicit (Belief in One Supreme God)	Present (normative)
Rejection of God	Explicit (myth, critique)	More implicit
Language	Theistic and critical	Philosophical and normative
Context	Ideological and cosmological	Philosophical and character-based
Distribution	Dominant in Grade X	More evenly distributed

Based on these findings, the representation of the concept of divinity in textbooks can be classified into three main typologies. First, normative theistic representation refers to representations that affirm the existence of God through the term “Belief in One Supreme God” within the framework of state ideology and character education. Second, philosophical non-theistic representation refers to representations that define divinity as ultimate reality that is non-personal and does not function as the creator of the universe. Third, hybrid representation refers to representations that combine normative affirmation of God with conceptual rejection of God as a creator, resulting in an ambivalent and layered form of representation. These findings indicate that the representation of divinity in Buddhist Religious Education textbooks is not singular but reflects a complex interaction among religious teachings, pedagogical strategies, and ideological demands within the national education system.

Comparative Analysis: 2013 Curriculum vs Merdeka Curriculum

The differences between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum do not only lie in the content of the representation of divinity but also in the mode of presentation, the level of explicitness, and the position of the concept of divinity within the instructional structure. In the 2013 Curriculum, the concept of divinity appears directly in various contexts, both as part of religious identity and within doctrinal explanations, which allows the text to present statements that are simultaneously affirmative and critical within a single framework. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum presents the concept of divinity through a more descriptive and philosophical approach by avoiding confrontational language and emphasizing abstract conceptual definitions.

In the 2013 Curriculum, the representation of divinity tends to be expressed explicitly through the affirmation of causality as the primary principle governing

reality, while simultaneously eliminating the need for the concept of a creator. The textbooks clearly position the law of cause and effect as the main explanatory framework for existence.

“By understanding that everything that happens in this world is solely the result of cosmic law processes, we are expected to abandon the incorrect concept of creation that the world was created by a creator figure...” (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, p. 278).

“Accept every result as a consequence of causes that we have previously performed.” (Prajoko & Sukiman, 2017, p. 184).

“Beings in hell realms exist as a result of the power of past unwholesome karma.” (Nurwito & Katman, 2018, p. 22).

These excerpts show that the 2013 Curriculum not only affirms the principle of causality but also implicitly and explicitly rejects the concept of God as a creator. In this context, the law of *kamma* functions as the primary mechanism that replaces the role of God in explaining the origin and dynamics of life.

In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum presents the representation of divinity through a more neutral and philosophical approach. The textbooks do not directly reject the concept of God but instead redefine it in a more abstract and non-personal form.

“Viewing God as ultimate reality, absolute truth, not a personal being or a supreme entity...” (Kuntari & Kuswanto, 2021, p. 31).

“The universe exists not because it was created, but through a long process... governed by the law of truth (*Pancaniyama Dhamma*).” (Kuntari & Kuswanto, 2021, p. 31).

These excerpts indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum maintains the non-theistic framework of Buddhist teachings but presents it through a more descriptive and non-confrontational language. The textbooks do not eliminate the concept of God; instead, they transform it into an impersonal metaphysical principle.

Based on the analyzed data, several key patterns emerge in the differences between the representational strategies of divinity in the two curricula. First, the level of explicitness differs. The 2013 Curriculum adopts an explicit approach by directly negating the concept of a creator, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum adopts an implicit approach by avoiding direct rejection statements.

Second, the representational approach differs. The 2013 Curriculum uses an evaluative approach, in which certain concepts are explicitly judged as correct or incorrect. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum uses a philosophical approach that explains concepts without providing direct normative judgment.

Third, the narrative consistency differs. The 2013 Curriculum demonstrates internal contradictions by presenting affirmation of “Belief in One Supreme God” alongside rejection of God as a creator. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum appears more consistent because it separates contexts of discussion, thereby avoiding direct contradictions.

Fourth, the position of the concept of divinity shifts. In the 2013 Curriculum, the concept of divinity appears as a central element of doctrinal identity, whereas in the Merdeka Curriculum, the concept appears as a secondary element after explanations of core Buddhist teachings.

Table 3. Comparison of Strategies for Representing Divinity

Aspect	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
Level of Explicitness	High (direct and confrontational)	Low (implicit and descriptive)
Form of Presentation	Affirmation and rejection within one framework	Separated into different contexts
Approach	Evaluative	Philosophical
Consistency	Contradictory	More stable
Position of Concept	Primary element	Secondary element
Language	Normative and critical	Descriptive and normative

The analysis shows that the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum employ different strategies in representing the concept of divinity. The 2013 Curriculum adopts an explicit, normative, and relatively confrontational approach, which produces a contradictory representation between ideological affirmation and theological rejection. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a more implicit, philosophical, and contextual approach by redefining the concept of divinity into a more abstract and non-personal form. This difference indicates a shift from a theological-normative representation toward a more discursive and adaptive representation aligned with the ideological framework of national education.

Mechanisms of Ideological Adaptation: Double Encoding and Discursive Stratification

The representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist Religious Education textbooks does not merely reflect religious teachings but also results from a process of adaptation to the state’s ideological framework, particularly Pancasila. In this context, textbooks do not function neutrally as media for transmitting knowledge; instead, they operate as arenas of discursive production that negotiate between the

theological demands of non-theistic Buddhism and the ideological demands of the Indonesian state, which emphasizes the principle of Belief in One Supreme God (Skillman, 2007; Van Bruinessen, 2013). This adaptation manifests through two primary mechanisms, namely double encoding in the 2013 Curriculum and discursive stratification in the Merdeka Curriculum.

The concept of double encoding in this study refers to a representational strategy in which two different meanings—namely normative affirmation of divinity and conceptual rejection of God as a creator—appear simultaneously within a single unit of text (Hall, 1980). This concept explains how textbooks combine the ideological demands of the state with the non-theistic framework of Buddhist teachings within one discursive structure. Meanwhile, discursive stratification refers to a representational strategy that separates two types of discourse into different contexts (Foucault, 1972), namely normative discourse that affirms Belief in One Supreme God and philosophical discourse that represents non-theistic Buddhist teachings. This separation occurs without explicit conceptual integration between the two domains.

First, double encoding in the 2013 Curriculum. The analysis identifies a representational mechanism that combines formal affirmation of divinity with conceptual rejection within the same textual structure. The textbooks express affirmation through the use of theistic language in the context of religious relationships and spiritual practices.

“loving-kindness toward the Supreme God, who provides encouragement, warmth, and joy” (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, p. 108).

However, other parts of the same text explicitly reject the concept of God as the creator and regulator of the universe and categorize it as an incorrect view.

“*issara-kutta* and *brahma-kutta* as ‘wrong views’ that must be ‘abandoned’” (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, pp. 184–187).

The textbooks further reinforce this rejection in learning assessment instruments, where they do not position God as the primary explanation for life.

“the result of our own actions” as the correct answer (Nurwito & Nasiman, 2017, p. 92).

These findings show that a single textual structure contains two contradictory layers of representation. On one hand, the text affirms the existence of God within the normative framework of the state. On the other hand, the text rejects the concept of God as a creator within the framework of Buddhist teachings. This pattern indicates a mechanism of double encoding, in which ideological affirmation and theological rejection coexist simultaneously within a single discourse.

Second, discursive stratification in the Merdeka Curriculum. In contrast to the 2013 Curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates a more structured representational pattern by separating philosophical discourse from normative discourse. At the level of content, the textbooks define the concept of divinity philosophically as ultimate reality that is non-personal.

“Viewing God as ultimate reality, absolute truth, not a personal being...”
(Kuntari & Kuswanto, 2021, p. 31).

However, at the level of evaluation and character formation, the textbooks continue to use theistic terminology intensively in a normative form, particularly as indicators of attitudes within the Pancasila Student Profile framework.

“Having faith and devotion to Belief in One Supreme God” as an attitude indicator (Katman & Tupari, 2022, pp. 22, 71, 97, 98, 167).

This separation also appears in religious practice, where the texts present theistic expressions without sufficient conceptual explanation connecting them to Buddhist teachings.

“our gratitude to Belief in One Supreme God” appears alongside “devotion to the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and teachers” (Santoso & Waldiyono, 2021, p. 49).

These findings indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum does not combine affirmation and rejection within a single textual structure. Instead, it separates them into different discursive contexts. This pattern reflects discursive stratification, in which philosophical discourse (non-theistic Buddhist teachings) and normative discourse (state ideological demands) coexist without explicit conceptual integration.

Both mechanisms demonstrate that the representation of divinity in textbooks results from a negotiation between religious teachings and state ideology. In the Indonesian context, the principle of Belief in One Supreme God functions not only as a normative value but also as an ideological framework that must be accommodated within the education system (Skillman, 2007; Van Bruinessen, 2013). This condition requires non-theistic Buddhist teachings to be represented in ways that remain compatible with the state’s theistic framework.

In the 2013 Curriculum, this negotiation occurs through the direct integration of two different systems of thought, which produces explicit contradictions within the text. In contrast, in the Merdeka Curriculum, the negotiation occurs through the separation of discourse, which reduces direct conflict but produces conceptual ambiguity.

Table 4. Comparison of Mechanisms of Ideological Adaptation

Aspect	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
Adaptation Mechanism	Double encoding	Discursive stratification
Form of Ambivalence	High (explicit contradiction)	Moderate (implicit ambiguity)
Pedagogical Approach	Informative-contradictory	Formative-normative
Pedagogical Risk	Cognitive dissonance	Conceptual ambiguity

These findings show that textbooks do not only function as educational media but also serve as ideological instruments that reproduce state values within religious education. Within this framework, the representation of divinity can be understood as a discursive construction shaped by power relations among the state, religion, and the education system. The mechanisms of double encoding and discursive stratification represent two distinct strategies of ideological adaptation in responding to tensions between theological and ideological demands. Therefore, the representation of divinity in textbooks cannot be understood merely as a reflection of religious teachings but must be interpreted as the result of an ideological negotiation process within the national education context.

Discussion

This study shows that the representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist Religious Education textbooks in Indonesia is not singular; instead, it demonstrates structural ambivalence that arises from the epistemological tension between non-theistic Buddhist teachings and the state ideology that emphasizes Belief in One Supreme God. Specifically, this study identifies two main mechanisms, namely double encoding in the 2013 Curriculum, which combines normative affirmation and conceptual rejection within a single textual structure, and discursive stratification in the Merdeka Curriculum, which separates philosophical and normative discourses into different contexts. These findings confirm that textbooks do not only function as learning media but also operate as spaces of ideological negotiation within the national education system.

This ambivalence emerges from the relationship between two different systems of knowledge. On one hand, Buddhism does not position God as a creator but explains reality through the law of cause and effect. On the other hand, the state, through Pancasila, requires the existence of the concept of divinity as a fundamental principle of national life (Skillman, 2007; Van Bruinessen, 2013). In this context, textbooks function as a medium that must accommodate both frameworks simultaneously. Therefore, the representation of divinity does not derive purely

from religious doctrine but results from a compromise between theological and ideological demands in education.

Accordingly, the representation of the concept of divinity in textbooks is not neutral but constitutes a discursive construction that reflects a negotiation process between non-theistic Buddhist teachings and the ideological demands of the state. From a discourse theory perspective, this representation can be understood as a practice of meaning production shaped by power relations and ideology (Foucault, 1980), in which textbooks function as instruments for reproducing institutionally legitimized knowledge (M. W. Apple, 1994). Furthermore, from the perspective of the social construction of reality, the concept of divinity presented in textbooks results from processes of institutionalization and legitimation of meaning shaped through interactions among educational actors, state policies, and religious traditions (P. L. Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Therefore, the ambivalence in the representation of divinity can be understood as a consequence of knowledge production within a field of power relations between religion and the state.

This study aligns with previous research showing that textbooks are not neutral but function as media for reproducing ideology and dominant interests in society. Studies indicate that representations of religion in textbooks are often selective and shaped by educational policy and socio-political contexts (Amirali, 2024; Tridgell, 2025; Vestøl, 2016). In addition, research on Buddhist education shows that textbook representations often involve simplification and standardization that do not fully reflect the complexity of Buddhist traditions (Berkwitz, 2016; Fujiwara, 2019). In the context of religion-state relations, studies also show that religious education often serves as an instrument for building national identity and transmitting ideological values (Foroutan, 2021; Nazari, 2022). However, this study offers a new contribution by specifically identifying the discursive mechanisms used in ideological adaptation, namely double encoding and discursive stratification, which have not been widely discussed in previous studies.

From a historical perspective, ambivalence in the representation of divinity can be traced to the political context of Indonesia after 1965, particularly during the leadership of Soeharto, when recognition of the concept of God became a key requirement for the legitimacy of religion within the state framework (Skillman, 2007). In this context, religion does not only function as a belief system but also as a source of moral and ideological legitimacy for the state. This phenomenon aligns with the practice of religious legitimation, in which religion serves as a source of legitimacy for political authority and collective identity (Kudaibergenova, 2019; Lusthaus, 2011). In various global contexts, religion is often used to build ideological consensus and strengthen national identity (Abulof, 2014; Barkey, 2014). Within the Buddhist tradition itself, texts and religious concepts undergo reinterpretation to adapt to specific socio-political contexts (Vermeersch, 2020a, 2020b). Therefore, the representation of divinity in textbooks can be understood as a form of historical

adaptation that allows Buddhism to remain recognized within the education system without fundamentally altering its epistemological structure.

From a social perspective, the use of the concept of “Belief in One Supreme God” in textbooks functions as a shared language within a pluralistic society. This language enables interreligious communication, strengthens social cohesion, and supports values of tolerance and religious moderation (Skillman, 2007). This condition aligns with the principles of religious pluralism, which emphasize interfaith dialogue and universal ethical values in diverse societies (Bialostocka, 2017; Moreau, 2025). Dialogical and multicultural approaches have also proven effective in enhancing interreligious understanding and strengthening social solidarity (Ipgrave, 2009). However, the use of uniform terminology without adequate conceptual explanation may create ambiguity in religious understanding, especially when epistemological differences among traditions are not explicitly clarified. This condition may reinforce latent biases in plural societies, as shown in studies on the dynamics of religious interpretation in social contexts (Ammerman, 2010). Therefore, this representation has an integrative function while also carrying the potential to generate interpretive tension in plural societies.

From an ideological perspective, the representation of divinity in textbooks reflects the dominance of Pancasila as the normative framework of national education. In this context, textbooks function as instruments for reproducing state ideology that not only transmit knowledge but also shape national identity through the integration of religious values (Widodo et al., 2025). This finding aligns with studies showing that textbooks systematically embed dominant state narratives through the selection of content, values, and cultural representations that support nation-building projects (Klymenko, 2016; Wang, 2016). In various global contexts, such as India and Pakistan, curricula and textbooks also function as political communication media to construct national identity based on particular ideological frameworks (Anand & Lall, 2022; Qazi & Shah, 2019). Therefore, in the Indonesian context, the representation of divinity in textbooks cannot be understood merely as a reflection of Buddhist teachings but must be seen as part of the mechanism of state ideological reproduction that integrates religious values into national identity construction.

From a reflective perspective, the mechanism of ideological adaptation has both functions and dysfunctions. Functionally, this strategy enables the formal recognition of Buddhism within the national education system, provides a shared language for interreligious dialogue, and strengthens the position of minority religions within the constitutional framework of the state. However, several significant dysfunctions emerge. First, inconsistent presentation produces conceptual confusion. Second, the use of theistic terminology creates distortion in Buddhist teachings that does not fully align with their epistemological framework. Third, contradictions in representation generate cognitive dissonance among

students, which may lead to psychological tension and learning barriers (Jain, 2019; Widarti, 2023). Fourth, character assessment becomes formalistic without deep conceptual understanding, which may hinder substantive internalization of values. This condition shows that poorly managed cognitive dissonance may reinforce misconceptions and reduce student engagement, so ambivalent representation risks producing negative effects on religious understanding (de Vries, McGrath, & Vaidis, 2023).

To address these dysfunctions, this study proposes several strategic actions at conceptual, pedagogical, and policy levels. First, educators and curriculum developers need to develop an integrative conceptual framework that bridges the concept of Belief in One Supreme God in Pancasila with the concept of ultimate reality in Buddhism, such as *Nibbana* or *Asankhata Dhamma*, so that students can achieve coherent and non-contradictory understanding. Second, policymakers need to revise curriculum design and evaluation instruments by emphasizing substantive understanding, including wisdom (*paññā*), morality (*sīla*), and mental discipline (*samādhi*), rather than relying on formal and administrative indicators of divinity. Third, institutions need to strengthen teacher capacity through training that emphasizes interpretative, reflective, and contextual approaches in explaining the tension between Buddhist teachings and state ideology, so that teachers can manage cognitive dissonance pedagogically. Fourth, textbook developers need to adopt hermeneutic and dialogical approaches that explicitly explain epistemological differences among traditions while also identifying conceptual intersections within the framework of national life. Through these efforts, Buddhist religious education can become more consistent, reflective, and meaningful without compromising doctrinal integrity or commitment to state ideology.

Conclusion

This study shows that the representation of the concept of divinity in Buddhist Religious Education textbooks in Indonesia is not singular; instead, it demonstrates structural ambivalence that arises from the epistemological tension between non-theistic Buddhist teachings and the state ideology that emphasizes Belief in One Supreme God. The findings indicate that the 2013 Curriculum employs a mechanism of double encoding, which combines normative affirmation of God with conceptual rejection of God as a creator within a single textual structure. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum employs a mechanism of discursive stratification, which separates normative and philosophical discourses into different contexts. These findings indicate that textbooks do not merely present religious teachings but also reflect processes of ideological negotiation within the national education system.

This study contributes to the field of religious education and textbook studies by proposing two main analytical concepts, namely double encoding and discursive

stratification, as mechanisms of ideological adaptation in the representation of divinity. These concepts extend previous studies that tend to examine religious representation in general by specifically showing how a non-theistic tradition such as Buddhism is negotiated within a state ideological framework. In addition, this study provides empirical contributions through a comparative analysis of two national curricula and offers theoretical contributions by integrating perspectives of discourse, ideology, and social construction in understanding knowledge production in textbooks.

However, this study has several limitations. The study focuses only on textual analysis of official textbooks and therefore does not include classroom practices or the perspectives of teachers and students in understanding the concept of divinity. In addition, the study does not examine in depth the variation of curriculum implementation across different social and cultural contexts. Therefore, future research should adopt more comprehensive approaches, such as field studies, interviews, or educational ethnography, in order to understand how the representation of divinity in textbooks is interpreted and implemented in actual learning practices.

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