Integritas Terbuka: Peace and Interfaith Studies

Religious Pluralism in Indonesia's Multicultural Society

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: dialog; interfaith; believer; tolerance. *Article history:* Received 2021-10-18 Revised 2022-11-18 Accepted 2022-11-21	Indonesia is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious nation where religions are developed and adhered to and are inseparable from a plural society. Sociologically, religious pluralism is a fact that we are different, diverse, and plural in terms of religion. The existence of these religions is a particular challenge that each religious believer must face because pluralism is already around us, and not no one can refuse it again. In such conditions, tolerance and interfaith dialogue of religious adherents are the primary capital in maintaining the integrity of plural and multicultural religious communities.

ABSTRAK

Indonesia sebagai sebuah bangsa yang multi etnik, multi budaya dan multi agama dimana agama yang berkembang dan dianut tidak terpisahakan dari masyarakat plural. Secara sosiologis, pluralisme agama adalah suatu kenyataan bahwa kita adalah berbeda-beda, beragam dan plural dalam hal beragama. Keberadaan agama- agama tersebut merupakan tantangan khusus yang harus dihadapi oleh masing- masing pemeluk agama, sebab pluralisme sudah berada di sekeliling kita, dan tidak ada satu orangpun yang sanggup untuk menolaknya lagi. Dalam kondisi demikian toleransi dan dialog antar iman pemeluk umat beragama merupakan modal dasar dalam menjaga keutuhan masyarakat beragama yang plural dan multikultural.

1. INTRODUCTION

The diversity of Indonesian society, which includes belief systems, religions, tribes, languages, and cultures, is the main attraction for applying pluralism. Geographically, Indonesia consists of thousands of islands stretching from Sabang to Papua. Meanwhile, the number of tribes living on large and small islands is 358 tribes, and 200 sub-ethnic groups are spread throughout Indonesia. Then if we look at the adherents of religion, the results of the 2010 census of 237,641,326 people in Indonesia, there were 207.2 million people (87.18 percent) were Muslims, 16.5 million people (6.69 percent) were Christians, 6.9 million people (2.91 percent) are Catholics, 4 million people (1.69 percent) are Hindus, 1.7 million people (0.72 percent) are Buddhists, 0.11 million people (0.05 percent) Confucianism, and other religions 0.13 percent.

From the kingdom era until Indonesia became an independent country, the islands in Indonesia are inhabited by a very diverse population. Therefore, the motto '*Unity in Diversity,'*

which means "different remains one," is appropriate to describe Indonesian Ness's reality to date. This expression indicates a strong will from religious leaders, traditional leaders, and ordinary people to achieve a unified nation. Even though there are different elements, the will to unite the nation overcomes this diversity.

Still respecting differences and understanding them as realities of life can potentially create ethical awareness of pluralism and multiculturalism in Indonesia. With this potential, it will be able to form a future Indonesian culture based on the understanding of building the nation. Indonesia, as a meeting place for various ethnic groups, religious backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds, which are physically separated by different geography, is a certainty of the diversity of this nation. For this reason, this reality must be developed as a nation's potential while anticipating that this pluralism does not become an excuse for national divisions.

2.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
2.1. Religious Pluralism in Indonesia

Religious pluralism has become a particular phenomenon to date because pluralism promises a life of peace and harmony among people of different religions. There are at least three general principles in viewing religious pluralism (1) that pluralism can best be understood in terms of logic which sees one thing that has many forms, namely the transcendental reality that occurs in various religions (2) that there is a shared recognition regarding the quality of religious experience, and (3) that spirituality is known and legitimized through the imposition of its criteria on other religions (Coward, 1989). Of course, for a pluralistic society like Indonesia, this is both very good and challenging, what if not with a huge area and religions professed by so many people. However, the people can still live amid this plurality. Religious pluralism has unknowingly been present as a saviour against divisions against absolute truth claims between religions.

The phenomenon of claims to the truth of each religion has been a problem in human history since time immemorial until now, but behind that, pluralism is natural. And that is a new challenge for modern society to accept it as a social fact that does not have to be avoided. Humans must doubt today's reality as entities and inseparable parts of the social life system. Still, humans must realize that they no longer live alone in a religious community but coexist with various adherents of different religions within a region or a country. Such a phenomenon for people who are not used to and have no experience in interacting with various realities of adherents of other religions will, of course, give birth to its problems, so inevitably it forces experts from various scientific disciplines to formulate an effective solution to be able to respond to these problems.

The idea of religious equality, or religious pluralism, has given rise to various meanings and understandings; acceptance of this idea or vice versa is still a struggle to this day. For this reason, it is better if, in discussing this idea, you should be able to look broadly at the implications that have been proven to make religious people harmonious and able to run the wheels of a life well and side by side (Wahyuninto, 2010).

Pluralism, which has thrived amidst the life of religious communities in Indonesia, has given birth to several views among religious leaders, mainly Islamic religious leaders. Their views on pluralism are either extreme or moderate. Especially after the MUI defined pluralism as an understanding that "teaches that all religions are the same and therefore the truth of each religion is relative." This definition is wrong, and MUI is considered to have misunderstood or not understood pluralism. Some of the views on pluralism referred to above were, among others, put forward by Ulil Abshar Abdalla, who said: "All religions are the same. Everything leads to the path of truth. So, Islam is not the most correct. Ulil also wrote: "Without embarrassment and embarrassment, I say, all religions are precisely on such a path, the long road to the Truest. All religions, therefore, are true, with variations, levels, and levels of depth in living the path of

religiosity that is different. All religions exist in the same big family: that is the family that loves the way to the truth that never ends." (Abdallah, 2002).

Gerardette Philips in the book *Open Integrity* states that different religions are both legal paths of salvation to the same goal (Gerardette, 2020), why is that because religion is considered by its followers to be the highest reality, namely as a true and equal religion. Views on religious pluralism were also put forward by Budhy Munawar-Rahman, in the book *Islam Pluralist*. According to him, "religious pluralism" is an understanding which states that all religions have the opportunity to obtain salvation on the hereafter. In other words, religious pluralism views that apart from our religion (Islam), followers of other religions also have the potential to obtain salvation (Munawar-Rachman, 2017). On another occasion, Budhy wrote that pluralist theology would give legitimacy to 'the truth of all religions', because adherents of any religion deserve to be called 'people of faith', meaning 'people who believe in and put their trust in God'. Therefore, Budhy concludes, "what is needed now in understanding the problem of pluralism between religions, is the view that anyone who has faith regardless of their religion, because all are equal before God. For this reason, our God is the One God (BM Rahman, 2019).

In line with Budhy Munawar-Rahman, Abdul Munir Mulkhan, argues, "If all religions are self-righteous, it is important to believe that God's one heaven itself consists of many doors and rooms. Each door is a way for followers of each religion to enter their heavenly room. The condition for entering heaven is the sincerity of human liberation from hunger, suffering, violence, and fear, regardless of religion (MT Rahman & Mimbar, 2018). This is the universal way of heaven for all religions. From here, cooperation and dialogue between adherents of different religions is possible (Munir, 2004). Another Muslim scholar, Nurcholish Madjid, stated that there are three attitudes of religious dialogue that can be taken, namely: (1) an exclusive attitude in viewing other religions (other religions are the wrong path, which is misleading for its followers); (2) an inclusive attitude (other religions are an implicit form of our religion); and (3) a pluralist attitude – which can be expressed in various formulations, for example: "other religions are equally valid paths to reach the same truth", "other religions speak differently, but it is the truth- equally valid truths", or "every religion expresses an essential part of a truth". Then, he added: "as a religious view, basically Islam is inclusive and stretches its interpretation in an increasingly pluralist direction. For example, perennial philosophy, which has recently been widely discussed in inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia, stretches the pluralist view by saying that every religion is an expression of faith in the same God. Like a wheel, the center of the wheel is God, and the spokes are the paths of various religions. Perennial philosophy also divides religion into *esoteric* (inner) and *exoteric* (outward) levels. One religion is different from other religions on the exoteric level but relatively the same on the esoteric level. Therefore, there is the term 'One God, Many Ways' (Nurcholis Madjid, 1998). Nurcholish Madjid also stated: "pluralism is actually a rule of God *(sunnatullah)* that will not change, so it is also impossible to fight or deny it." (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992).

Meanwhile, another view on pluralism was also put forward by Alwi Shihab. According to Alwi, "The principle outlined by the Qur'an, is the recognition of the existence of people who do good in every religious community, and by doing so, deserve a reward from God. Again, this principle reinforces the idea of religious pluralism and rejects exclusivism. In another sense, religious exclusivism is incompatible with the spirit of the Qur'an because the Qur'an does not discriminate one religious' community from another." (Shihab, 1999).

Still related to religious plurality, Abdul Moqsith, in his dissertation, stated: "If we pay close attention, it is clear that in that verse [QS 2:62] there is no expression so that Jews, Christians, and Shabi'ah people believe in the Prophet Mohammed. By following the literal sound of the verse, believers who remain in their faith, Jews, Christians and Shabi'ah who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do good deeds – even if they do not believe in the Prophet Muhammad, will get a reward from Allah. The statement that Jews, Christians, and Shabi'ah believe in the Prophet Muhammad is a statement by commentators and not an

expression of the Qur'an (Taufiq & Suryana, 2020). Muhammad Rasyid Ridha said there was no requirement for Jews, Christians, and Shabi'ahs to believe in the Prophet Muhammad (Abd Moqsith Ghazali, 2009).

However, upon further investigation, it turns out that Muhammad Rasyid Rida in his *Tafsir al-Manar* said that QS al-Baqarah (2:62) and al-Ma'idah (5:69) discussed the salvation of the people of the book whose treatises of the Prophet Muhammad had not yet or did not reach them, so they are not obligated to believe. As for the people of the book whose preaching of Islam has reached them, according to Rashid Rida, according to (QS 3:199), there are five conditions if they want to be safe in the afterlife. These include: (1) believing in Allah with true faith; namely, faith that is not mixed with shirk or polytheism accompanied by the submission that encourages to do good, (2) believing in the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. This is following an authentic hadith: "By Allah, in whose hand I am in His hands, I have not heard of any of my current ummah, whether Jewish or Christian, then they do not want to believe in me, but enter him into hell" (narrated by Imam Muslim).

As the understanding of pluralism as stated by the scholars above, Azyumardi Azra also explains that "Islam is indeed pluralist; there are many Islams, and not one. Indeed, in the text, Islam is one, but when reason has begun to try to understand it, not to mention actualizing it, plurality is a reality and cannot be avoided." (Shihab, 2005). As mentioned above, the definition of pluralism is not only defined by several scholars. The understanding of pluralism has also been widely discussed by other Muslim scholars such as Dawam Rahardjo, A. Syafi'i Maarif, Siti Musdah Mulia, Nur A. Fadhil Lubis, and Syafiq A. Mughni.

Pluralism is not only discussed by Muslim scholars; Christian theologians also discuss pluralism. Today they admit that the future development of Christian theology will directly result from serious dialogue with other religions. One factor that promotes this dialogue is the availability of comprehensive data for theologians on other faiths. This knowledge of other religions will force Christian theologians to question the exclusivity demands of their Christian faith.

Regarding encounters with other religions, R E. Whitson argues that the theologian must open one's religion to other religions (Robley E. Whitson, 1971). While **John Dunne** recommends Christians experience other religions, then hold reflections to enrich their religion, if an atmosphere of mutual encouragement can occur. The spiritual wisdom of other religions will improve the experience of one's religion (Dunne, 1972).

Franz Magnis Suseno also expressed almost the same opinion that religious pluralism is a historical fact based on humans' actual situation. Religion has realized that there are various religions on this earth. Even though there is a shift or conversion of religions, the scale is microscopic, especially in prominent religions. Against this reality, religion must take a stance; in assuming that stance, an exciting fact emerges that most religions have recognized pluralism, perhaps not in practice, but still in normative teachings (Suseno, 2014).

2.2. The Nature of Religio and Religious Pluralism
2.2.1. The Essence of Religion

Religion is essentially the belief in God's existence, which cannot be separated from human life. In language, the word "religion" comes from Sanskrit, closely related to Hinduism and Buddhism, meaning "don't go" stay in place, inherited from generation to generation". As for Islam, religion comes from the word *din*, which means mastering, subduing, obedience, recompense, or habit. *Din* also brought regulations in the form of laws that must be obeyed both in the form of orders that must be carried out and in the form of prohibitions that must be abandoned. The word *din* in the Qur'an is mentioned 94 times in various meanings and contexts. The pronunciation of *'adinu'* is the most frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, which is 62 times, *dinukum* ' 11 times, followed by the pronunciation of '*dinuhum* 10 times, '*dina* 4 times, the

pronunciation of '*dini* 2 times, the pronunciation of *madina* 2 times and the pronunciation of '*dinu* 1 time (Al-Tabrani, 1994).

Religion apart from the various definitions above can mean: (1) Vengeance (QS Al Fatihah (1) verse 4. (2) Worldly laws or regulations made by the king (QS Yusuf (12) verse 76. (3) Religion) that comes from Allah SWT, when coupled with the word Allah (Q.SAli Imran (3) verse 83. (4) The religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad SAW as the true religion, namely Islam, when the word *din* coupled with the word *al-haq* (QS At-Taubah (9) verse 33. (5) Religion other than Islam (QS Al Kafirun (109) verse 6 and QS Ash Shaf (61) verse 9.

Apart from being found in the several verses above, the word religion is also found in the letter Asy-Syura: 13 Allah said:

Meaning: he has decreed for you about what religion He has bequeathed to Noah, what We have revealed to you, and what We have bequeathed to Abraham, Moses, and Isa, namely.

'Establish religion, and do not divide split about it. It is tough for those polytheists whose religion you call them to him. Allah attracting to that religion those whom He wills and giving guidance to (His religion) those who return (to Him). (QS. Ash-Shura: 13).

In another verse Allah says, Al-Baqarah: 256.

Meaning: There is no compulsion to (enter) religion (Islam). Verily, the true path is clear from the wrong direction. Therefore, whoever disobeys *tagut*, and believes in Allah, then indeed he has held on to a strong knot that will not break, Allah is all-hearing, all-knowing (QS. Al-Baqarah: 256).

Another verse as in the letter al-An'am: 61

Meaning: Say, verily I have been shown by my Lord to the straight path, namely *(din)* religion, the straight religion *(millata)* of Abraham, and Abraham was not one of the people polytheists (QS. Al-An'am, 61).

The word religion mentioned above is only an example. Because as a whole, the word religion is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an, which amounts to 94 times. The repetition of religion in many verses and letters shows how important religion is for a person (Wibisono, Truna, & Ziaulhaq, 2020).

Religion is the rules that bind humans in relation to their God, relationships with fellow human beings, and relationships with nature. So, a religious person is an orderly person, a peaceful person and a person who is at peace, both with himself and with other people from all aspects of his life. Religion is covered by three main issues: (1) Belief (*credial*), namely the belief in the existence of a supernatural power that is believed to regulate and create nature. (2) Worship (*ritual*), namely human behavior in relation to the supernatural power as a consequence or recognition and submission. (3) The value system that regulates human relations with other humans or the universe associated with these beliefs.

Belief in religion has been considered and believed to have certain core beliefs that every adherent must maintain. Faith in religion thus becomes a guiding tool for anyone who believes in the truth that religion brings to God as a guide tool given by God to the direction of the truth, happiness, peace in the world, and enjoyment in the hereafter should not give birth to claims from each religion. However, the most important thing is mutual respect among fellow believers (Ziaulhaq, 2020).

2.2.2.   Religious Pluralism

The development of pluralism in Indonesia still has some challenges; one of the biggest challenges is that many groups still understand religion exclusively ('la & Achmad, 2001). Responding to this phenomenon, religious leaders must have some breakthroughs to provide a unified and holistic understanding to all religious communities. The aim is for religious people to understand religion as a whole and to be tolerant of the existence of other religions.

Musa Asy'arie revealed that the essence of pluralism is single and that single existence continues without stopping in giving birth to plurality. Pluralism does not get more straightforward but becomes more complex. Because actually, the process will continue as long as there is still life. The method of life that produces plurality, in essence, is a continuous series that does not stop unless life has ended. Therefore, pluralism cannot be avoided, let alone rejected. Even though humans tend to reject it, pluralism is considered a threat to their existence or their group's existence. Although leaving pluralism means rejecting life itself (M. Taufiq Rahman, 2018).

Pluralism can be explained *first;* there is an understanding of cultural relativity. Cultural pluralism is the most elementary reality, therefore, it cannot be avoided by anyone, for example, choosing to be born from a particular ethnic community or a certain race, a specific skin, or selecting parents. For this one, humans cannot make their free choice because God has arranged everything in the best way possible, humans must accept it with open arms, and all of that is unavoidable. Differences in good-bad or right-wrong judgments will usually be determined based on differences in cultural backgrounds (Zubair, 2007).

Culture, in general, cannot be seen partially. Because culture itself is a systemic whole, starting from cultural values, worldviews, norms, morals, customs, laws, behavior, and so on. Every human being, both individually and socially, has different conditions and experiences, so the norms, ethics, and cultural expressions are also different. The consequence of cultural pluralism is an inevitable part of human life. According to Gramsci, pluralism requires the organization of social groups so that they can formulate their identity by overcoming the division of society into individuals; if this happens, it is feared that social relations will not have social strength (Beilharz, 2003).

Indonesia with its diversity of religions and cultures must be developed with ethical awareness. Because the domination of a particular ethnicity over other ethnic groups presupposes the existence of a hierarchical structure that places the dominant ethnic group in a higher position and places others in a lower position, it must be sued, because if allowed to do so, it will undermine the foundations of a pluralistic society. Ultimately, it will disrupt the integrity of the nation and state. A plural society is a society that is fragmented into different racial, religious or linguistic groups (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2010). For this reason, a social structure is needed to discriminate and conceptualize various parts of a social system and the relationships between elements (Kaplan & Menners, 2000).

Second, the understanding of normative relativity to the understanding of normative pluralism. In this case, there is a hint that different interpretations and meanings of the same universal value can occur due to differences in perception. Even though the so-called perception does not know wrong and right, the perception will only present differences that are not fundamental. This can happen because of differences in experience, ability, and way of dealing with problems. Normative plurality is accidental, not substantial. Universally there are agreed-upon values, but different interpretations of agreed-upon principles are unavoidable. Facing a phenomenon like this requires a social, ethical approach, not an *aqidah* approach, which tends to close itself off and is only appropriate for internal interests. This is where dialogue and partnerships are essential, implicitly containing the communication of two different but equal parties (Philips, 2020).

The emergence of reality in the plurality of religions and beliefs is an example of normative plurality that cannot be avoided. The pluralistic religious fact is indeed very problematic in the context of Indonesian majority. Religious differences and the truth claim they believe in have made religion in Indonesia at a conflictual level, not only among religions, but also among other entities such as scientific, social, political, cultural knowledge, and so on. In the context of the reality of religious plurality, the practice of domination and the desire for power often colours religious relations. The dominance of a religious discourse over other religious discourses presupposes the existence of a hierarchical structure of interpretation which places the dominant religious discourse in a central position and other religious discourses in a peripheral role. This hierarchical structure executes not only certain religious discourses, but also subordinates, and subordinates and permeates it (Zubair, 2007).

The face of pluralism in society can be distinguished in five. *First*, moral pluralism, namely the existence of an invitation to spread tolerance among religious adherents. *Second,* religious pluralism *(Soteriological religious pluralism),* namely the understanding that other religions can also obtain salvation.   *Third, epistemological* pluralism, there is a claim that adherents of certain religions have more solid justification for their faith than adherents of other religions. *Fourth,* alethic *religious pluralism,* namely the existence of the truth of a religion must be found in other religions to the same degree. *Fifth,* deontic pluralism, pluralism which concerns God's commands (Adeng Muchtar Ghazali, 2013).

Religion is sometimes like a double-edged sword, on the one hand, religion becomes a social glue and becomes a symbolic structure of the collective memory of its adherents (Philips, 2022). On the other hand, the concrete identity of religion can cause problems, because religion also acts as an ideology, providing an interpretive framework for understanding the world and interpreting social relations. The meaning of interpretation tends to hide interests. Concealment of interests cannot be separated from efforts to integrate and justify domination. What is interpreted and justified by religion is the relationship of power. Every action and power always seek legitimacy. Power demands more than belief. To fill the gap, religion is a system of justification for domination. Thus, if religious identity is threatened, it is the same as threatening its adherents' social status, stability, and existence. So, anyone considered threatening will be resisted even to the point of murder.

Beautiful religious ethics are often pushed aside by a focus on good and right. But attention to the aesthetic orientation of consciousness invites caution not to identify aesthetic awareness with religious awareness. The latter bears the suffering of concrete individuals. Meanwhile, aesthetic awareness wants to target specific types because art does not recognize pain in itself. Art only sees beautiful/bad faces or material expressions. In aesthetics, religion manifests itself through its capacity, evoking a unique feeling that cannot be reduced to aesthetic senses, but changes in compassion and compassion. This religious feeling is directly related to the idea of God because of the expression of the expectation of salvation and liberation. In this context, prayer finds meaning because it expresses the expectation of deliverance. Thus, the convergence between aesthetics and religion lies in prayer, especially in mysticism. Concrete religion tends to accept the law of separation that underlies the relationship between God and humans. This separation is unknowingly by its adherents who want to unite, namely when humans commit violence in the name of God.

In the view of secular humanist ethics, violence up to murder driven by such transcendental motivations cannot be justified at all. Indeed, humanity is an abstract concept, but violence or the killing of its victims is concrete. In cases like this, religion is questioned by secular humanist ethics, such as why religion which teaches sound, precisely in daily practice, displays a lot of violence, and the violence is in the name of religion. If so, the characteristics of religious ethics must be sought in other forms.

Humanism has become a trans-structural and universal ideal concerning attitudes and ethical qualities of political institutions that guarantee human dignity. Humanism is the belief that

everyone must be respected as a person, as a human being in the fullest sense, not because he is smart or stupid, rich or poor, good or bad and does not depend on where he comes from, what ethnic community or religious community, and whether he is a male or female (Aqil, 2020). So, humanism interprets rational individuals as the highest value (Lorens, 1996).

Based on phenomena like the above, a strategy is needed to carry out a hierarchical reversal to delegitimize the 'center' claim of the dominant discourse. The right strategy is deconstruction (disassembly), namely by changing the hierarchical structure of interpretation, then deconstruction places discourses in an equal position. Usually, the subdued religious discourse forms a structure of joint resistance against the dominant discourse. By breaking down the hierarchical structure that forms the domination-subordination structure, subdued religious discourse can undermine the role of legitimacy and justification of repressive power relations. Because power relations cannot survive without a discourse that supports them. For this reason, repressive power relations can be transformed into positive power relations. Thus, deconstruction as a method of building awareness can be understood as a strategy for being open to others (Zubair, 2007).

Third, an understanding of meta-ethical relativism leads to an account of the existence of substantive plurality.

Every human being, both individually and in groups and nations, must have the principles of truth that are believed to be able to solve problems, which of course, may be different from other nations. Indonesia has Pancasila, which in principle, must be believed in its ideological truth by the Indonesian people themselves, even though there is an understanding that there are differences that give birth to substantive plurality with other nations that cannot be avoided. An ideology must answer ideality, reality, and flexibility challenges. Pancasila, as the state ideology, has proven to be able to face these challenges. Pancasila is built from the Indonesian people's religious values, beliefs, language, customs, and culture (Kattsoff, 1992). Thus, realistically, a plural Indonesian society is still framed by *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and bound by the state ideology, namely Pancasila.

3. CONCLUSION

A plural life in Indonesia is a gift that this great nation must be grateful for because in its history until now, the Indonesian state is still able to protect the religious entities within it; the reality of diversity and conflict in interacting in religion is an advantage and disadvantage. After the collapse of the WTC a decade ago, religious life was increasingly tested. The aftermath of the upheaval reminded everyone how important it is to maintain a pluralistic life. Because each religion has its truth claim, for this reason, maintaining harmony amid a pluralist life as it is now is very important.

The problem faced by each adherent of a religion, what must be done immediately is to awaken the multi-ethnic nation's children with a sense of justice in the broadest sense, to be more open, to continue to strive for inter-faith dialogue and not to develop hegemony based on religion or background any culture even if because of the majority. Thus, efforts to build a new Indonesian model that is based on a paradigm based on the ethics of pluralism and multiculturalism must be carried out.

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