

The Altar of the Creator: Religious Syncretism of Hinduism and Buddhism in North Jakarta

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Kata Kunci :

Dewa Brahma; *Phra Phrom*;
Kecamatan Penjaringan,
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Sinkretisme

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bermaksud mengkaji pengaruh ajaran Hindu-Buddha di wilayah Kecamatan Penjaringan, Jakarta Utara. Penelitian kualitatif ini menganalisis literatur mengenai ajaran Hindu dan Buddha. Terkhususnya mengenai *Phra Phrom* sebagai sinkretisme antara ajaran Hindu dan Buddha dari Thailand. Analisis akan diverifikasi oleh hasil observasi terhadap sejumlah tempat ibadah Dewa Brahma di wilayah Pluit dan Kamal Muara. Verifikasi juga akan dilaksanakan melalui wawancara dengan sejumlah umat Hindu dan Buddha. Penelitian ini menemukan berbagai arca *Phra Phrom* di wilayah Jakarta Utara menunjukkan sinkretisme ajaran Hindu dan Buddha di wilayah pesisir Barat Jakarta. Hasil penelitian memperkaya khazanah ilmu sosial.

Keywords :

Lord Brahma; *Phra Phrom*;
Penjaringan District;
Hindu-Buddhist;
Syncretism

Abstract

This research aims to examine the influence of Hindu-Buddhist teachings in the Penjaringan District, North Jakarta. This qualitative research analyzes literature on Hinduism and Buddhism, specifically regarding Phra Phrom as a syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism from Thailand. The analysis will be verified by observations of several places of worship for the god Brahma in the Pluit and Kamal Muara. Verification will also be carried out through interviews with several Hindu and Buddhist devotees. This study found various Phra Phrom statues in the North Jakarta area indicating a syncretism of Hinduism and Buddhism in the West Coast of Jakarta. The results of this study enrich the social sciences.



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INTRODUCTION

The history of Buddhism closely relates to the history of Hinduism, having begun in the sixth century BC in South Asia at a time of Hinduist prevalence in the region (Raudino & Sohn, 2022). According to S. Rahdhakrishnan, Buddhism, in its origin at least is an offshoot of Hinduism (Nandan and Jangubhai, 2013). Despite their distinct theological and philosophical differences, Hinduism and Buddhism shared common cultural, social, and geographical contexts in ancient India (Shetty, 2014). Their interactions led to syncretic developments, wherein elements of one tradition were assimilated into the other (Shetty, 2014).

One of the examples of syncretic developments of Hinduism and Buddhism is *Phra Prom*. Hindus consider Brahma as one of the *Tri Murti* (Sinaga & Nainggolan, 2024). The *Tri Murti* is three main gods who maintain balance in the world (Sukrawan, 2023). Brahma is the Hindu creator god, known as *Prajapati* (Bavchandbhai, 2020). On the other hand, Thai Society call Brahma as “(*Phra*) *Phrom*,” and consider him higher than other deities and gods (Srichampa, 2015). From a Theravada Buddhist perspective, *Phrom* was believed to be the high heaven being who was reborn as *Phrom* in the *Phrom* world (Srichampa, 2015).

Both have similarities. As creator, Brahma is represented alone but always with four heads and arms (Eastman, 1928). The heads in this especial instance representing his sovereignty over the four quarters of the earth (Eastman, 1928). *Phra Phrom* also portrayed as a four-faced deity (Gu, 2025). Therefore, this research *Phra Phrom* as an example of syncretic developments of Hinduism and Buddhism. *Phra Phrom* is being worshipped by the people of South East Asia. One of them is Chinese Singaporean (Foo, 2013).

Phra Phrom also being worshipped by the people of the Republic Indonesia. The history of the Nusantara is closely tied to the influence of Hindu-Buddhist teachings. The arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism in Indonesia was one of the important events that shaped the culture and civilization of the Nusantara people (Susilawati, *et. al.*, 2022). Hence, Hinduism and Buddhism became two of the major religions in Indonesia. The explanation of article 1 of the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1/PNPS/1965 acknowledges Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as official religions of Indonesia.

According to the Ministry of the Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the number of Hindus reached 0.179 percent of the total population of DKI Jakarta in 2025 (Ministry of the Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). In addition, the Statistics Indonesia claims that the number of Buddhists reaches 0.7% of Indonesia's total population on 2024 (Statistics Indonesia, 2024). Both worship Brahma and *Phra Phrom*. In general, Prambanan Temple is regarded as a collection of Hindu holy structures devoted to *Tri Murti*, or the three Hindu deities known as Brahma, Visnu, and Isvara (Surpi, Widianana & Marselinawati, 2023).

There are shrines for *Phra Phrom* in the Republic of Indonesia. One of them is the *Vihara Si Mian Fo* or *Phra Phrom* in Simpang Empat Riverwalk Island PIK, Jakarta

(Murdaya, 2025). Another shrine of *Phra Phrom* also exists. One of them is being located in Pluit, North Jakarta. According to the Population and Civil Registration Office inform that there are 35 Hindus and 17.613 Buddhist in in Pluit Subdistrict, North Jakarta (Pluit Population and Civil Registration Office, 2026). They had their own places of worships. One of them is *Shiva Mandhir*, a temple for Hindus in the Pluit Subdistrict (Herman & Dewi, 2026). Another one is *Vihara Satya Dharma*, which being located beside the Shiva Mandhir (Directorate General of Buddhist Community Guidance, 2021).

Previous researches already describe *Phra Phrom* worship in the regions of South East Asia. Srichampa explains that the Brahma Erawan shrine is one of the most sacred places and a major Bangkok landmark for more than 50 years (Srichampa, 2015). Phromsuthirak compares Brahma according to the Indian and Thai literatures (Phromsuthirak, 1981). Foo Chek Wee describes the worship of Brahma as *Phra Phrom* by the Chinese Singaporeans (Foo, 2013). Herman and Dewi explains the places of worship in North Jakarta for the Balinese and Indian Hindus (Herman & Dewi, 2026).

This article found that there is a temple for worshipping *Phra Phrom* in Muara Karang, Pluit, North Jakarta. Muara Karang is the name of a housing area in the Pluit, one of the Subdistricts of North Jakarta (Herman, 2026). This article sees that *Phra Phrom* statues in the North Jakarta indicating a syncretism of Hinduism and Buddhism in Pluit. After the introductory remarks, the next part explains the research method. The second part compare Brahma according to the literatures of Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism. The third part discusses *Phra Phrom* worship in the North Jakarta. Especially in Pluit and Kamal Muara, North Jakarta. This part explains the history of *Phra Phrom* temple in Muara Karang, North Jakarta.

METHODS

This research type is qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin define qualitative research as a type of research whose findings are not obtained through statistical procedures or other forms of calculation (Sutikno & Hadisaputra, 2020). The qualitative nature of this research is reflected in the way this study collects data. This study uses three types of data collection tools.

The first data collection tool is a literature study, by analyzing various library materials about the worship of *Phra Phrom*. Particularly regarding *Phra Phrom* as syncretic developments of Hinduism and Buddhism. Literature study is all the efforts of researchers to gather information relevant to their research topic (Purwono, 2008). This research will analyze the content of a number of reference materials.

The forms of these reference materials are books, journal articles, news on the internet, and final assignments regarding the worship of *Phra Phrom* in the Republic of Indonesia. The form of library materials is not limited to text alone. The library materials also include recordings such as documentary films (Roosinda, *et. al.*, 2021). The purpose of the literature study is to analyse the worship of *Phra Phrom* in the Republic of Indonesia.

The second data collection tool is observation. Observation is the direct observation conducted by the researcher on the research subjects or a certain environment, which can mean active or passive observation. The purpose of observation is to collect data about behaviours, events, or certain situations that can help in understanding what happens in a particular context (Iba & Wardhana, 2023). This research will conduct observations of various *Phra Phrom* temples in Jakarta. The purpose is to collect data related to the places of worship for *Phra Phrom* in Jakarta. For example, this research will observe the Vihara Satya Dharma of Pluit, North Jakarta. The reason why this research chose the temples is because the devotees of *Phra Phrom* choose to worship there.

The third data collection tool is the interview. An interview is a data collection technique that involves direct interaction between the researcher and the respondent, in which the researcher asks questions to obtain in-depth information about the topic being studied (Romdona, Junista & Gunawan, 2026). In qualitative research, interviews are conversations that have a purpose and are preceded by several informal questions (Rachmawati, 2007). This research will analyse the results of interviews with a number of informants. For example, this research conducts an interview with followers of Hinduism and Buddhism in North Jakarta. This research assesses that they have knowledge related to Brahma and/ or *Phra Phrom* in North Jakarta.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Phra Phrom: Syncretic Developments of Hinduism and Buddhism

In Hindu Philosophy, God is often represented as Trinity (Siddiquee, 2024). Brahma is being known as the creator God of the universe (McLean, 1969). Some considered Brahma as the maker of the universe and protector of the world (Gonda, 1969). Bailey argues that there is considerable evidence that Brahma was widely worshipped in north India in the few centuries preceding the beginning of the Christian era (Bailey, 1983). One of the notable temples of Brahma was being built in Pushkar (Sharma, 2026).

Of the three gods of the Hindu *Trimurti*, it has almost become an orthodoxy in scholarly circles that Brahma never attained large following of devotees or was worshipped as a Sakti god in the same way as Vishnu and Siva (Bailey, 1983). This was also happened in Bali, the Republic of Indonesia (Suyatra, 2017). According to Kuckreja, there is a part of the Mahabharata that worship Brahma as the Supreme God although not in the *Puranas* (Kuckreja, 2025).

Shiva Purana explains the reason behind these phenomena. The twenty fourth until the twenty fifth verse of the sixth chapter of *Vidyeshvara Samhita* describes Lord Brahma instuction to the Ketaki flowers regarding Lord Brahma seeing the top of Shiva Linga (Shastri, 1950). In addition, the next chapter explain Lord Shiva punishment for Lord Brahma. The tenth until the eleventh verse of the eighth chapter of *Vidyeshvara*

Samhita said that Lord Shiva decreed that Lord Brahma shall not be honoured to have a temple or festival (Shastri, 1950).

But Brahma still held an important position in Hindu Pantheon. Because Brahma is being worshipped beyond the borders of India. For example, Hindu Balinese believe in one supreme God called *Sang Hyang Widhi Wasa* (Pamungkas, Ardianata & Widodo, 2023). All other gods are manifestations of this supreme being, including Brahma the Creator (Surya & Tedjakusuma, 2026). Brahma was also being mentioned in other scriptures. The Verse 12th of Sukta 90, Tenth Mandala of Rigveda said that: *[b]rahmano'sya mukhamāsid bahu rajanyah krtah, uru tadasya yadvaisyah pudbhyam sudro ajayata* (Bhasya & Griffith, 2020).

Ram translate the verse into (Ram, 2013): *[T]he Brahmana, man of divine vision and the Vedic Word, is the mouth of the Samrat Purusha, the human community. Kshatriya, man of justice and polity, is created as the arms of defence. The Vaishya, who produces food and wealth for the society, is the thighs. And the man of sustenance and ancillary support with labour is the Shudra who bears the burden of the human family as the legs bear the burden of the body.* In other words, the four caste's were created by Lord Brahma.

This research also found a similar verse in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The verse 13th of the Fourth Chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* said: *[c]aturvarnyam mayā sṛtam gunakarmavibhagasah, tasya kartāramāpi mām viddhyakartaramavyayam* (Prabhupāda, 1973). The Review and Translator Team of the Vedic Scriptures of the Republic Indonesia Ministry of Religious Affairs translate this verse into: *[I] created the four varnas according to divisions of function and karma (nature and deeds). Even though I am the creator, know that I am not the doer; I am the eternal one* (Tim Pengkaji dan Penerjemah Pustaka Suci Veda, 2022).

There is a scripture called *Padma Purana*. In Hindu tradition, *Puranas* are ancient stories and teachings meant to convey knowledge about the universe, gods, demigods, heroes, and the nature of life (Trivedi, 2026). The *Padma Purana* is one of the eighteen important scriptures called *Maha Purana's* (Kaipa, 2017). It's 5000 verses describes the creation, genealogy of kings, many sacred places of pilgrimage and ceremonies to be observed by the devotees (Reddy, Reddy & Naik, 2023). The *Padma Purana* mentions that Brahma was born inside a golden egg (Sarmah, 2020).

The Theravada Buddhist also knows Brahma. Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna are three major Buddhist traditions, and the early Buddhist teachings are found in the Pāli canon or the *Tripitaka* (Thirathamrongwee & Mongkolpradit, 2021). All Buddhist traditions, and the *Theravada* as emphatically as any, have denied the existence of the *atman*; and in this I believe them to be true to the spirit of the Buddha (Gombrich, 1988). The concepts of Brahma in Theravada Buddhism are divided into two types of Brahma characteristics. First, it's Brahma as teaching with reference to ideas or *pugaladhiṭṭhāna*. Second, it's Brahma as exposition in terms of ideas or *dhammādhiṭṭhāna* (Silatejo & Leeka, 2019).

They also know Brahma as *Phra Phrom*. According to Theravada Buddhism, Brahma is a deity who resides in the Brahma realm, does not indulge in sensual

pleasures, has a lifespan of a *kalpa* to a great *kalpa*, has a divine form, divine complexion, divine clothing, a bright aura, has meditation as food, and meditation as an object, and lives with mental bliss (Wisutthimethi, 2024). Buddhism in Thailand has a category of spirits labelled as *thêwadā*, a term that includes both the Hindu-derived deities such as *Phra Phrom* or Brahma (van Esterik, 1982).

As a result of Thai–Khmer conquest, many Khmer officials and the brahmans of Cambodia migrated and brought brahmanical faith with them (Mukhopadhyay, 2017). The chief among the brahmanical gods in Siam were *Phra Phrom* or Brahma, *Phra Isuan* or Shiva, *Phra Narai* or Vishnu, *Phra In* or Indra, and *Phra Barun* or Varuna (Mukhopadhyay, 2017). The Erawan shrine in central Bangkok houses a statue of *Phra Phrom*, who is the localised Thai representation/version of Brahma, the Hindu god of creation (Gu, 2025).

Therefore, this research sees *Phra Phrom* as a form of syncretic developments of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Random House Dictionary (1966) defines syncretism as "the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties," (Pandian, 2006). In other words, religious syncretism is an effort to reconcile two different religious doctrines. According to Kuckreja, *Phra Phrom* is a representation of Lord Brahma in Thai Culture (Kuckreja, 2025).

Legacy of the Creator in the Western Coast of Jakarta: History and Discussion

To understand the legacy of Brahma as *Phra Phrom* in North Jakarta, this research analyses the history of Buddhism in the island of Java. In the 7th century, Mahayana Buddhism came to Srivijaya and entered Java, which led to the rise of Borobudur, Kalasan, and Sewu temples (Hayati, *et. al.*, 2023). Rizzo claims that the Borobudur temple and manuscript *Sang Hyang Kamahayanikan* are important cultural artefacts which show how Buddhism is represented and localised in contemporary Indonesia (Rizzo, 2021).

The introductory remarks of this article already stated the numbers of Buddhists and Hindus in Pluit, North Jakarta. That part also stated the numbers of Buddhists and Hindus in the Republic of Indonesia on 2024 and 2025. Both are the reasons why *Phra Phrom* and Brahma are being worshipped in North Jakarta. They built house of worships or altars to worship *Phra Phrom* and Brahma in North Jakarta. Especially in Pluit and Kamal Muara. Both are subdistricts of Penjaringan (Bappeda Jakarta, 2025). Penjaringan is one of six districts of North Jakarta (Kurniawan & Komala, 2023).

Buddhism and its denominations, particularly the Theravada Buddhism, was known to the people of the Republic of Indonesia. Kuckreja claims that the *Saṅgha Theravāda Indonesia* (STI) continues to dominate most vihara's and the remainder of the book (Kuckreja, 2024). That's why the people of the Republic of Indonesia worship *Phra Phrom* as Brahma.

This part aims to explain the history of *Phra Phrom* and Brahma worships in Pluit, North Jakarta. Brahma is being worshipped by the Hindus of Pluit, North

Jakarta. Herman and Dewi found that the Hindus of Pluit has a house of worship called *Shiva Mandhir* (Herman & Dewi, 2026). This research observes the *Shiva Mandhir* and found the statue of Brahma in the temple. This articles also conducts an interview with Pandit Ramachandra Baskara Iyengar, a Vaishnava Hindu priest of the Vaishnava Sri Sampradaya in Jakarta, on May 29th of 2024. The Priest said that the Hindus on the temple put the Statue of Brahma for worship (Iyengar, 2024). Figure 1 shows the statue of Lord Brahma in Shiva Mandhir next to statue of Lady Parvati. Figure 2 shows the full-bodied view of the statue of Lord Brahma in Shiva Mandhir. Both proves that the Hindus of Pluit worship Brahma in North Jakarta.

Figure 1. Statue of Lord Brahma on the right side of Lady Parvati statue



Figure 2. Statue of Lord Brahma in *Shiva Mandhir*, Pluit



Phra Phrom is being worshipped by the Buddhist of Pluit, North Jakarta. This article conducts an observation on May 6th of 2023. This research found an altar for *Phra Phrom* that being built on the basketball court in the Pluit Karang Manis (or Sixth Block of Muara Karang) Residence. It's being located in Pluit Karang Manis, Pluit, Penjaringan, North Jakarta, DKI Jakarta, 14450. Muara Karang is the name of a housing

area in Pluit, North Jakarta (Herman, 2026). Figure 3 shows the altar of *Phra Phrom* on May 6th of 2023. Figure 4 shows full picture of the statue on May 18th of 2025.

Figure 3. The altar of *Phra Phrom* on May 6th, 2023



Figure 4. The statue of *Phra Phrom* on May 18th, 2025



This article conducts an interview with a senior resident of the Pluit Karang Manis residence. The interview was being done on 8 PM of August 24th of 2025. The informant was called Mr. Tonobu. Mr. Tonobu explains the history of the altar. It was being built proximately on 2015 by one of the residents of the Pluit Karang Manis residence. The woman who commissioned the altar moved to Surabaya two years after the altar was being built. Mr. Tonobu was moved to Pluit Karang Manis residence on 2024. When he came the altar, he saw the altar unsuitable conditions. The statue needed to be repainted and the roof of the altar need to be rebuilt. He decided to renovated the altar and maintain it. Other Buddhists in Muara Karang Residence decided to follow his example (Mr. Tonobu, 2025).

This article also conducts observations in another altar of *Phra Phrom* in North Jakarta. This research found another altar of *Phra Phrom* in Vihara Satya Dharma, Pluit, North Jakarta on February 10th of 2026. The altar is being located on the left side of the gate of Vihara Satya Dharma. Figure 5 shows the gate of Vihara Satya Dharma. While the figure 6 shows the altar of *Phra Phrom* in Vihara Satya Dharma. Figure 6 proves that Lord Brahma was being worshipped as *Phra Phrom* in Vihara Satya Dharma. Unlike the statue of *Phra Phrom* in Pluit Karang Manis Residence, the statue in Vihara Satya Dharma was being encased in a glass box.

Figure 5. Gate of Vihara Satya Dharma, Pluit



Figure 6. Altar of *Phra Phrom* in Vihara Satya Dharma Pluit, North Jakarta



This research also found another *Phra Phrom* altars in North Jakarta. It's being built in Riverwalk Island, Jalan Simpang Empat Gate 5, Pantai Indah Kapuk, Kamal Muara, North Jakarta, DKI Jakarta, 14470. Figure 7 shows the altar of *Phra Phrom* in Si Mian Fo PIK (Riverwalk Island). This research found the altar when conducting an observation on December 17th of 2024. It proves that Lord Brahma was being worshipped as *Phra Phrom* by the Buddhists of Kamal Muara. Kamal Muara is one of the six districts of North Jakarta (Wahyudi, Aprillia & Setiawan, 2023).

Figure 7. Statue of *Phra Phrom* in Si Mian Fo PIK (Riverwalk Island).



This article also conducts more observations. The purpose of those observations is to prove that Brahma as *Phra Phrom* also being worshipped in another city of DKI Jakarta. On April 12th of 2025, this article conducts an observation in the Vihara Vajra Padma Suci. The temple was being located in Ruko Garden Boulevard Blok C2, No. 1,2,3 & 5, Kapuk, West Jakarta, DKI Jakarta, 11720. West Jakarta is one of the five cities of DKI Jakarta Province (Januari, *et. al.*, 2024). Kapuk is one of the sub-districts of West Jakarta (Fitria & Setiawan, 2014). The altar was being built on the outside, precisely on the southwest direction of the temple. Figure 8 shows the picture of *Phra Phrom* altar on April 12th of 2025. It proves that *Phra Phrom* was being worshipped by the Buddhists near the Kapuk, West Jakarta.

Figure 8. The *Phra Phrom* altar in Vajra Padma Suci, West Jakarta



This article conducts an observation on May 12th of 2025. This research found another altar of *Phra Phrom* in Little Siam, PIK 2 Extension, Tanjung Burung, Teluknaga, Tangerang Regency, Banten, 15510. The purpose of this observation is to prove that there are some Buddhists of Tangerang Regency that worship Brahma as *Phra Phrom*. Figure 9 show the gate of Little Siam. Meanwhile, the figure 10 shows the altar of *Phra Phrom*. The statue was still being wrapped because the temple is still being built. Figure 10 proves that Brahma was being worshipped as *Phra Phrom* in the Tangerang Regency. One of the reasons why people of Penjaringan, Kapuk, and Tanjung Burung worship Brahma as *Phra Phrom* is for good fortune. Because *Phra Phrom* is known to be a God that bring good luck (Tavachalee, R., *et. al.*, 2019).

Figure 9. The gate of Little Siam



Figure 10. The Altar of *Phra Phrom*, Little Siam, Tangerang Regency



CONCLUSION

This research concludes that *Phra Phrom* statues in North Jakarta are a form of syncretic development of Hinduism and Buddhism in Penjaringan District. Interactions between Hinduism and Buddhism led to syncretic developments, wherein elements of one tradition were assimilated into the other. One of those examples is *Phra Phrom* in Thailand. Brahma is one of the *Tri Murti* of Hinduism. Meanwhile, Theravada Buddhists known *Phra Phrom* as Brahma. Both have similarities. One of them is Brahma and *Phra Phrom* are portrayed as four headed gods.

The Hindus and Buddhists of North Jakarta are the reason why Brahma was being worshipped as *Phra Phrom* in Pluit. The residences of Pluit Karang Manis, North Jakarta, worship Brahma at the altar of *Phra Phrom* in the basketball court. The Buddhists of Pluit and Kamal Muara also worshipped Brahma as *Phra Phrom* in Vihara Satya Dharma and Si Mian Fo PIK Golf Island. Brahma also being worshipped as *Phra Phrom* by the people of Kapuk, West Jakarta and Tanjung Burung, Tangerang Regency.

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