

# Chinese–Indonesian Cultural and Religious Diplomacy

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## Abstract

*This paper aims to find out the cultural and religious influences and their opportunities and challenges in the Chinese-Indonesian public diplomacy perspective. This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach by taking literature review as main source of data, and interviews with several religious leaders and community leaders related as secondary sources. The author finds that culture and religion have influenced the practice of Chinese-Indonesian public diplomacy (in terms of art, culture, tradition and practice of diplomacy). Admiral Cheng Hoo holds major roles in the spread of Islam that time. The roles of non-state actors are crucial when conducting people-to-people approach: as dialogue and cooperation partner, and as promotor.*

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh budaya dan agama serta peluang dan tantangannya dalam perspektif diplomasi publik Tionghoa-Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan mengambil studi pustaka sebagai sumber data utama, dan wawancara dengan beberapa tokoh agama dan tokoh masyarakat terkait sebagai sumber sekunder. Penulis menemukan bahwa budaya dan agama telah mempengaruhi praktik diplomasi publik Tionghoa-Indonesia (dalam hal seni, budaya, tradisi, dan praktik diplomasi). Laksamana Cheng Hoo memegang peran utama dalam penyebaran Islam saat itu. Peran aktor non-negara sangat penting dalam melakukan pendekatan people-to-people: sebagai mitra dialog dan kerjasama, dan sebagai promotor.

**Keywords:** Chinese-Indonesian; cultural and religion diplomacy; public diplomacy

## Background

Indonesian and Chinese relations have occurred hundreds of years ago when Indonesia was still known as the Archipelago. This relationship continues to be intertwined, in accordance with the various dynamics of the development of the era. Harmony and alternating intervals. In the period of relations between the two nations, the results of the culture of knowledge, thought patterns and beliefs (religion) were born that influenced each other and became an important and significant part of the Indonesian nation today.

The communities in this archipelago adopted many things from the Chinese people who came to the archipelago, both from technology (many seen from buildings, including mosques and other historical buildings) or food and language. On the contrary, the archipelago also had a significant influence on China. For example, during the heyday of the Srivijaya kingdom in Sumatra (present-day Palembang), where its power reached Cambodia, Southern Thailand, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and the coast of Borneo, Srivijaya was the center of Vajrayana Buddhism in the world.<sup>1</sup> The Srivijaya kingdom attracted many scholars and pilgrims from Asia. One of them was a Buddhist priest from China, I Tsing who made a visit to Sumatra on his journey to Nalanda College, India in 671 and 695.<sup>2</sup>

From this historical record (and various countless other historical records scattered throughout the archipelago), the relationship between the archipelago and China is indeed long and influences each other strongly. Of the many diverse cultures resulting from Chinese acculturation in the archipelago, there are a number of things that seem to have not been widely known by Indonesian society today.

In further developments the context of cooperation relations between the two countries; China and Indonesia are more formally known as diplomatic relations between the two countries. Diplomatic cooperation between the governments of Indonesia and China that has long been established and has experienced ups and downs of relations for more than six decades. Relations between the two countries have basically been officially opened on June 9, 1950. However, the events of the PKI rebellion on September 30, 1965 led to the freezing of both diplomatic relations due to the emergence of suspicion of China's involvement in the event. Normalization of relations was carried out in 1990 after reviewing the situation of both countries and improving global politics. The relationship between the two has continued to increase in the fields of politics, economics, socio-culture, and culminated with the signing of the Strategic Partnership Declaration in 2005, which was later upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2013).

In its development, the openness and modernity shown by China has encouraged the creation of deeper strategic partnerships between Indonesia

and China. Diplomacy is carried out not only in the political and economic fields, but also utilizing a new source of strength that is widely known with soft power. This is evidenced by China through its "charm offensive" diplomacy which has successfully sold its appeal through culture, history, work ethic, and is supported by expansion in the fields of education and research.

In addition to partnering politically, economically and socio-culture, Indonesia and China are connected because of the history of the existence of Islam in both countries. The influence of Islam in Indonesia, according to some historians, was disseminated through Chinese Muslim envoys who came to Indonesia during their voyages in the early 15th century. The envoy widely mentioned in Indonesian history is Admiral Zheng He (Cheng Ho).<sup>3</sup> The similarity of history as Muslims has created its own bonds for the two countries. During his visit to China in May 2017, President Joko Widodo visited the Niujie

Mosque in Beijing, the mosque which was also visited by President Abdurrahman Wahid in 1999. The existence of diplomatic relations between Muslim communities in Indonesia and China has long been established, but these activities are still limited and have not become the priority of the two countries. This is recognized by the Chinese government which limits their faith diplomacy. Even so, the authors see the potential that can be explored from both countries along with the increasing interaction of Muslim citizens in both countries, as well as the global push to use soft power (cultural and religious diplomacy) as a means of diplomacy in interstate relations.

This article intends to unravel the extent to which culture and religion<sup>4</sup> from both countries (China-Indonesia) play a role and influence the development of soft power diplomacy to collaborate between the two countries and strengthen their relationship, while trying to analyze current opportunities and challenges in the future.

### **Culture and Religion as Public Diplomacy**

According to Barston, diplomacy is closely related to regulating relations between one country and another, as well as other international actors. From a state perspective, diplomacy relates to activities giving input, forming, and implementing foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Diplomacy also means methods / methods used by state actors or their representatives and other actors in articulating, coordinating, and protecting greater common interests, using correspondence, closed talks, exchanging views, lobbying, visits, threats and other activities.

Modern diplomacy is developing substantially and can be reflected in various forms of diplomacy, such as 'oil diplomacy', 'sports diplomacy' (sport diplomacy), 'knowledge diplomacy', and 'transition diplomacy' (transition diplomacy) ) The author himself concludes that diplomacy, broadly, can be

defined as an instrument / tool / strategy / method / foreign policy pursued by a sovereign country to achieve its national interests through diplomatic protocols and procedures by official envoys, in peaceful means. The current form of diplomacy that is considered effective in achieving the objectives of national interests is public diplomacy.

Formerly public diplomacy usually refers to diplomatic ways in which the government transmits positive values and information to the public abroad, closes cognitive and emotional shortcomings between the domestic and foreign communities, increases mutual understanding, and shapes public opinion from abroad through various means, including cultural exchanges and media news, with the aim of perfecting the international image and influence of the state and promoting its national interests. The most interesting thing about public diplomacy is "direct contact with foreign public rather than foreign government".<sup>6</sup>

Traditionally, public diplomacy is divided into three elements: (1) the government as a player; (2) foreign public as the main object; (3) for the purpose of influencing foreign public opinion and improving the image of a country. Public diplomacy in the era of globalization pays more attention to the diversity of subjects and the nature of two-way communication, especially in dialogue and cooperation. Public diplomacy emphasizes "listening" rather than "monologue", promoting "contact" rather than "target", seeing patterns of community networks rather than models of state hierarchies, along with the development of information and communication technology. This is referred to as the new era of public diplomacy or second generation public diplomacy. This also indicates that public diplomacy is delivered by the public, rather than public diplomacy, which makes the public as the target.<sup>7</sup>

### **Concept of Cultural Diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy is often positioned as the largest sub-area of public diplomacy. Thus, it could be defined as those actions of liaison between governments and people abroad, established specifically through artistic and intellectual resources and activities. In his classic definition, Cummings characterises it as "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understandings."<sup>8</sup>

However, the notion of cultural diplomacy lends itself to different understandings and acceptances operated by actors and governments. For example, in Singapore, Canada and Australia, it is defined as International Cultural Relations, whereas in the Netherlands, Sweden and Austria, it is termed International Cultural Policy.<sup>9</sup> Along the same lines, this

policy frequently makes allusion to the diverse uses of culture as a means for liaison between governments (not only between governments and people) and between diplomats themselves. Moreover, it is possible to find activities designed as part of cultural diplomacy that are formalised in the territory of origin, such as the exhibition *After September 11*, which was produced in New York and toured 60 countries, or the renowned artistic exchanges programme *Visiting Arts*, developed in the United Kingdom. In this sense, the marked current interrelation between domestic policy and foreign policy has promoted the strengthening of national systems of culture as a requirement for successful foreign projection.

Cultural diplomacy was introduced by Samendra Lal Roy in his book entitled *Diplomacy* (1995) as a diplomatic activity with cultural action. However, the term cultural diplomacy is considered to be simpler to give understanding of diplomacy by using cultural activities such as sending art missions to other countries to create and obtain good impressions or images. Cultural diplomacy is intended to improve the image building and nation branding of a country abroad as a nation that has a high level of culture. Broadly speaking, cultural diplomacy is an attempt to fight for the national interests of a country through culture, through sports and arts facilities which can be seen as non-political, economic, or military.<sup>10</sup> Culture is chosen as an alternative step for a country to diplomacy because culture is basically communicative in nature, which is easily understood, even by people who have different cultural backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> For example John F. Kennedy in 1960-1963 used cultural media to support his political diplomacy by sending volunteers who had expertise in the fields of education, sports and arts, especially music, to many developing countries known as "Peace Corps".

### **Concept of Religious Diplomacy**

Since the events of 9/11 in the United States, followed by the Bali bombings in the early 2000s, many observers of International Relations have seen that religious issues mostly had corresponding with international issues. Diplomacy involving the issue of religion as a central activity has become a separate study in 21st century international relations. Religion has become a significant influence factor for a country in interacting with other countries. Although many consider religion to be a theological matter only (God and its creatures), but in the facts, it's prove that religion has more influence in global political affairs, including in a country's diplomatic activities.

Reflecting on this phenomenon, activists of diplomacy see that the issue of religion occupies a crucial issue in international relations. All public diplomacy activities associated with religious issues are often called religious diplomacy. The core agenda of religious diplomacy is the interaction between the

government, the private sector, religious organizations, or the wider community in an effort to realize religious harmony or efforts to resolve religious based conflicts.

### **Chinese-Indonesian Culture and Religion Diplomacy Practices**

In the books on the title; Chinese in the Political Whirlpool, China has known the archipelago (with the name Huang-Tse) since the reign of Emperor Wang Ming or Wang Mang, namely from the 1st - 6th century BC. Traveling back and forth from China to the archipelago takes a one year. This is due to the influence of the season, they use monsoons which change every six months to sail. As a result, many Chinese people settled and later married the inhabitants of the archipelago to have offspring called the of "Chinese descent" (Peranakan Chinese).<sup>12</sup>

The oldest "peranakan Chinese" community in the form of the Dutch East Indies government was in Batavia. During the reign of the Dutch East Indies, the Chinese became a group of intermediary traders and holders of the majority of the results of government land taxes. It is also through trade contacts that Chinese culture and Indonesian culture are acculturated at that time.<sup>13</sup>

The term of acculturation in the Indonesian Language Dictionary (KBBI) is interpreted as the absorption that occurs by an individual or group of people, on certain characteristics of other group cultures as a result of human contact or interaction in the form of mixing various types of cultures slowly into new forms of culture.<sup>14</sup> Acculturation is also a social process that arises when a community group is confronted with elements of foreign culture so that the elements of foreign culture are gradually accepted, processed, and applied to their own culture without causing loss of indigenous culture. Referring to this understanding, it can be concluded that acculturation is also defined as cultural contact or a meeting between two different cultures that form a new culture but does not eliminate the old culture.

Acculturation is common in society because of social interactions that start from contact and communication. Likewise with Indonesia, it is not strange if Indonesian culture is formed on the influence of foreign cultures, one of which is the influence of Chinese culture. Historically, before the Chinese people arrived Ya-va-di (Jawa) in 414, one of the Buddhist priests named Faxian or Fahien conducted a search through the coastal region of Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup>

From research conducted by Southeast Asian experts, namely Higham, Coedes, D. G. E. Hall and Denys Lombard, it can be concluded that Indonesian culture is formed from two major civilizations, namely Sinic and Indic. Sinic refers to Chinese or Chinese civilizations while the Indic refers to Indian civilization. Chinese civilization enters regularly, on a small scale but continues,

even today. The entry of Chinese culture into Indonesia adds to the richness of Indonesian culture in this time.<sup>16</sup>

The form of acculturation of Chinese culture to Indonesian culture can be seen from architecture, language and literature, medicine and culinary. The influence of Tingkok art and architecture can be seen from the motives found in several things, such as batik motifs and carvings on worship buildings that are currently standing, one of which is a Chinese house of worship such as a temple and a place of worship Muslims in the form of mosques.

Furthermore, acculturation of Chinese culture and Islam in the archipelago can be seen from the use of “*Beduk*” and also “*Koko*” clothes in the Indonesian Muslim community. Even in the Betawi community, the bride's traditional dress is a blend of acculturation of Arab culture (groom) and Chinese culture (bride).<sup>17</sup> The function of *beduk* that we find in Indonesian mosques are for calling muslim community to take prayer five time in a day, it's a characteristic of Indonesia.

In terms of acculturation in literature, it can be observed through Chinese Malay Literature. This literature is called the Indo-Chinese name (*de Indo-Chineesche literatuur*). This literature developed itself outside the official institution (Kwee Tek Hoay, 2001: XI). Pramoedya Ananta Toer in the post-independence period said that Chinese-Malay literature developed as a period of assimilation, a period of transition from old literary forms to new literature.

In terms of acculturation in treatment area it's can be seen from the practice of “acupuncture treatment” which is very famous in Indonesia. In Chinese, Acupuncture is known as *Cen Ciew*. *Cen* means needle while *Ciew* means Heating. The needle that was inserted earlier had received a heating process with moksa, namely heating made from atenia leaves or Rokotmala. This technique is the result of pure Chinese invention, even this technique is a basic effort in finding other medical techniques. From unclear sources, this acupuncture technique was discovered in 5000 years BC.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of cuisine, acculturation of Indonesian culinary was influenced by culinary delights of foreign nations, such as Arabic, India, China and others, and one of them was *Soto*. This is clearly written in a book by Dennys Lombard entitled “*Nusa Jawa Silang Budaya*”. In this book it was written that *Soto* was a food adopted from China, named “*Caudo*”. *Caudo* was first popular in the area of Semarang, and then gradually caudo metamorphosed into *Soto*. The distribution of caudo is very possible, considering that since centuries ago the Archipelago was a transit point for traders throughout the world.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of religion, it can be seen from the spread of religion (one of which is Islam in Indonesia). In Chinese circles in Indonesia, especially in Semarang, stories were told about the arrival of the Cheng Ho or (Zeng He)

fleet in the 15th century. Zeng He sailed to the South Sea at the behest of the Ming Dynasty China. Zeng He was assisted by Wang Jinghong. Ceng Ho and Wang Jihong are Muslims. While in the archipelago, they actively spread Islam, especially in the Chinese community.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the role of Chinese Muslims to spread Islam in the archipelago was inseparable from "Wali Songo Institution", of which four out of nine Guardians were Chinese, such as Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang (son of Ampel and a Chinese woman), Sunan Kalijaga, and Sunan Gunungjati. In addition to spreading Islam, the ethnic Chinese are also authorized to run a port or seaport in Semarang and Lasem to cripple the sea ports which are still controlled by the remains of Singasari and Majapahit. In addition, the spread of Islam in the Mojopahit kingdom was carried out by marriage between Chinese people and members of the kingdom.<sup>21</sup>

Traces of Muslim Chinese and Chinese culture are also quite widely scattered in Indonesia.<sup>22</sup> In fact, based on the research of Sumanto Al-Qurtubi, it was found the fact that the existence of Chinese Muslims at the beginning of the development of Islam in Java was not only indicated by the testimonies of foreign travelers, Chinese sources, Javanese local texts and oral traditions, but also evidence of ancient Islamic relics in Java, such as the presence of carvings on the ancient mosque, Jepara, the towers of Chinese mosques in Banten, the Cirebon palace architecture along with the sunyaragi garden and various other ancient relics.<sup>23</sup>

There is also historical evidence such as the relief motive at Sewu Yogyakarta Temple allegedly influenced by Chinese silk cloth motifs. Cirebon batik which displays wild animals in Chinese mythology.<sup>24</sup> In addition there are also puppets which are the result of acculturation between Chinese and Javanese cultures, such as potehi puppets and Javanese-Javanese shadow puppets. Even today what is clearly seen is the construction of the Cheng Hoo mosque in various major cities in Indonesia, which is about 13 Cheng Hoo Mosques as a symbol of Chinese Islam with a typical Chinese ethnic mosque architecture. Like Cheng Ho mosques in Surabaya, Pasuruan, Malang, Jember, Palembang, Jakarta, Sumatra, Kalimantan and so on.<sup>25</sup>

The close relationship between Chinese Muslims and the archipelago continues to this day. Former President and great cleric of the Nahdlatul Ulama, Abdurrahman Wahid, familiarly called Gus Dur, once declared himself to be of genuine Chinese descent. Likewise from the Muhammadiyah side, Din Syamsuddin once said in a speech that the figure of Karim Oei, founder of the H. Karim Oei Foundation (YHKO) was not a stranger in Muhammadiyah's body. He was once a Muhammadiyah consul in Bengkulu, and even friends with Buya Hamka, an Indonesian Muslim leader.<sup>26</sup>

Points of cooperation between citizens are realized in various fields,



including economic, social, cultural, educational and other strategic sectors. In relation to Islamic diplomacy, China has shown its position as the main dialogue partner for Indonesia. This is evidenced by the many dialogues, cooperation, and visits of Indonesian religious leaders and leaders to China. In September 2018 for example, the Chinese government invited the Muhammadiyah central leadership to visit and carry out dialogue related to the improvement of Indonesia-China cooperation, especially in the fields of education and culture. The group led by Chairman of PP Muhammadiyah, Haedar Nashir, scheduled a meeting with the Chancellor of Tsinghua University, the head of the Confucious Institute, and the Xiehe Hospital visit. In addition, the group also had a dialogue with the Chinese Islamic Association and the Islamic Institute of China.<sup>27</sup>

Likewise with the diplomatic efforts of Nahdatul Ulama. Five senior figures from Nahdatul Ulama were invited to come in China in 2016 with the aim of Beijing's extensive efforts to prove to Indonesian Muslim leaders that Uighur Muslims in China enjoy religious freedom. Nahdatul Ulama and China often hold meetings and have made several agreements such as such as student exchanges and collaborating to build clean water facilities. In May 2018, the Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia, Xiao Qian, made a visit while providing compensation to orphans in the KH Said Aqil Siroj boarding school. Xiao Qian stated that China provided scholarships in 2018 as many as 13 lecturers in China, information systems technology, computers, informatics engineering and others. Likewise with the student exchange program.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to mass Islamic organizations, dialogues between Indonesian and Chinese citizens are also built from the Chinese Muslim community in Indonesia, for example, communities that are members of the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (PITI). The institute, founded in 1961, is a forum for aspirations for Chinese-Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. The Chairperson of East Java PITI, Haryanto Satriyo, revealed the fact that although at the beginning of its establishment it was not always smooth due to conflicts from several elements of society, especially in the New Order era, but changes occurred and widespread acceptance of PITI was felt during the Reformation.<sup>29</sup>

The East Java PITI which was built in 1988 not only contributed greatly to the formation of harmony among religious believers in East Java, but also in creating good communication between the Indonesian Muslim community and the Chinese Muslim community. Therefore, this contribution is fully appreciated by the Chinese government through the Chinese Consulate in Surabaya. This support for the East Java PITI was delivered in the form of sustainable cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

## **Prospects for Chinese-Indonesian Culture and Religion Diplomacy**

Islam which brought by Arabia to China (China), and from China had gave a big influence in the context of public diplomacy. Religious values, teachings, worship, and ways of life brought by traders and merchants to trade in an area turned out to bring change in perspective and the way people socialize with others, as well as political, economic, social and cultural life. According to Melissen, diplomacy carried out by non-state actors has actually been carried out by people in ancient civilizations by sending envoys and exchanging information.<sup>31</sup>

The initial practice of public diplomacy even existed before the concept of a nation state was coined in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Thus, connections between the Chinese dynasty and Arab and Persian Muslim traders could be used as examples that even diplomacy could be done from non-state envoys, such as traders and merchants.

Islam is not seen as a threat because it is conveyed through cultural channels. The bearer of Islam in China, Abi Waqqas, was indeed accepted by the Emperor of China at the time, but the teachings of Islam were not immediately accepted by the emperor. After going through the process of investigation and feeling in accordance with the teachings of Confucius, the emperor gave permission to spread Islam. This means that Islam is not seen as a teaching that wants to erase or dominate the teachings of existing beliefs. Although the Emperor himself did not embrace Islam, Abi Waqqas and his friends were still permitted to spread Islam in Guangzhou. The emperor also gave permission to build mosques in his area. Not only spreading religion, Abi Waqqas also introduced the conditions of mainland Arabia and the development of Islam in Arabia at that time.

Religious diplomacy does not dismiss the importance of traditional diplomacy carried out by state officials, but often they cannot guarantee the sustainability of the peace process created. So, in this case the government actors need to communicate in order to create good synergy. This is what the Indonesian government did in the era of Abdurrahman Wahid's leadership (Gus Dur). On one occasion, Gus Dur once stated that he was of genuine Chinese descent. When leading, he facilitated the needs of Chinese descendants who had long lived in Indonesia regardless of the religion they believed.

Religious diplomacy by the Indonesian government and the Chinese government together aims to not only build a good image through the dissemination of the values of peace, justice and harmony among religious groups but as a form of efforts by state and non-state actors to convey their identity in international relations.<sup>32</sup>

## **The Role of Non-State Actors in Chinese-Indonesian Cultural and Religious Diplomacy**

In public diplomacy which emphasizes the interaction between a country's domestic community and global society, the involvement of non-state actors becomes crucial. Non-state actors consist of multi-national companies, international government organizations, international non-governmental organizations, transnational organized crime, international terrorist networks, mass media, interest groups, religious groups and diaspora groups.<sup>33</sup> Thus, mass organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama, as well as the East Java PITI became an important part of achieving this goal of public diplomacy.

The Muhammadiyah Central Leader has been invited several times by the Chinese government to visit and carry out dialogues related to increasing Indonesia-China cooperation, especially in the fields of education and culture. They visited universities, hospitals and Confucius Institute headquarters there. The latest visit was made by the PP Muhammadiyah group in September 2018. Minister of Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of China, Wang Zuo An, who met the group expressed their interest in collaborating with Muhammadiyah because of its contribution to creating peaceful and harmonious religious conditions, as well as building religious traditions and managing Hajj.<sup>34</sup> In addition to the field of religion, Muhammadiyah also collaborates with educational institutions in China. Muhammadiyah was asked to spread the value of moderate and tolerant Islamic culture to the Chinese people, both through sending students and through special branches in China.

The central leadership of Nahdatul Ulama also often meets in China and has made several agreements such as in the field of education such as student exchanges and collaborating to build sanitation infrastructure and facilities such as providing clean water. Such as the travel agenda of the leader of the Nahdatul Ulama visiting the Youngning historic mosque. This mosque is one of the mosques which was built during the Ming Dynasty as well as the mosque which first opened the madrasa for beginner level (madrasa ibtida'iyyah). From this school the ulamas were born which spread in mainland China. Another diplomatic effort is to open a special branch of the Chinese Nahdatul Ulama (PCINU). This Chinese PCINU has been participated by more than 250 NU Indonesian students. The establishment of this branch is based on the spirit of disseminating moderate Islamic values.

A similar visit was also made by the Chinese. A number of delegates from the Ethnic and Religious Commission and the China Islamic Association, Guangdong, China once visited the PBNU headquarters in Jakarta to strengthen cooperation relations. The meeting also discussed the

attachment between scholars in China and Indonesia related to scientific structures.

PITI East Java and the Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia Foundation cannot be separated from partners in dialogue and cooperation with the Chinese state. Each party has agreed to create a sustainable partnership for the creation of harmonious conditions in East Java, for example during the earthquake in Palu and disaster on Pulau Sapudi, PITI East Java, Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia Foundation, and the Chinese Consulate in Surabaya, held a fundraiser. The activity which also marked the 16th anniversary of the establishment of Cheng Hoo Mosque was strongly supported by the Chinese Consulate General in Surabaya who saw that the existence of Cheng Hoo Mosque had provided harmony for the Indonesian people not only for the ethnic Chinese community but for all ethnic groups in Indonesia.

Non-state actors also play a major role as promoters. In the context of Islamic diplomacy, Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama play a crucial role in accommodating Indonesian and Chinese interests at once. The role of this promoter has been well carried out by these two mass organizations.

During his visit to China, the envoy of the Nahdatul Ulama introduced the concept of Moderate Islam in Indonesia which focuses on moral education which in the end can be an appropriate way to prevent extremism. Indeed, Chinese leaders who believe in communism understand that religion will become a vehicle for the entry of foreign ideas and lead to the growth of a misguided loyalty that is loyalty to God, not to the state. Nahdatul Ulama which contributed to spreading a model of friendly, tolerant and moderate Islam in Indonesia, while expressing its desire to learn.

China's desire to understand more about Islam cannot be separated from the role of the leadership of the Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama organizations to be promoters of peaceful Islamic values. The thing that China is most wary of is the growing potential of resistance to the country's moral authority, especially those that come from outside parties. So, other religions and teachings often get pressure from the Chinese government. The 2009 conflict between Chinese Muslims and Chinese non-Muslim communities in Urumqi has made the Chinese government tighten the rules of worship for Uighur Muslims in the Xinjiang Special Region. This fact brings concern to the Muslim community in Indonesia and fosters a sense of solidarity to help find a comprehensive long-term solution.

In order to find a solution, Chinese Muslims need a third party that can be a reference and have experience managing the pattern of relations between religion and the state. The government and the people of China in general need to get the right knowledge and information that the existence of religious

people can actually be the pillar of the teacher for the establishment of the state, and not otherwise. Uighur Muslims are not a threat to the integrity of China.

Through cultural and religious diplomacy and the people-to-people dialogue approach, the two countries have benefited from this approach because it has proven to be more effective in bringing the people of both countries closer together. This closeness then fosters a sense of mutual understanding and good communication. This is a good signal considering the relations between the two countries have experienced ups and downs due to unfavorable past historical experience. The approach to characterization and dialogue between community institutions can reduce tension, suspicion and political economy content that often arises when similar meetings are carried out by state actors aka political elites.

## **Opportunities and Challenges in Chinese-Indonesian Cultural and Religious Diplomacy**

### **Opportunities**

Cultural and religious diplomacy that has been carried out by the two countries so far can be increased by strengthening cooperation in various fields, especially social culture and education. Indonesia and China both prioritize elements of religiosity as a means of achieving their respective national goals and interests. So, the three priorities of the field deserve maximum effort.

In order to achieve sustainable cooperation, both Indonesia and China must develop a comprehensive framework. This needs to be discussed because social cultural and educational cooperation has not been fully integrated with the spirit of the One Belt and Road Initiative currently being promoted by the Chinese government. So, all the efforts of cooperation between the two countries should lead to the realization.

In the context of Islamic (diplomacy), understanding between the people of Indonesia and China is very important because the true spirit promoted by the New Silk Road is the unification not only of regions through infrastructure development so that distance is no longer an obstacle, but communication between countries within the lane that is. So, the intensity of relations between citizens of the two countries must continue to be improved. If so far there has been a negative stigma from the public regarding both parties, then the people-to-people approach through the cultural and educational fields is expected to eliminate misunderstandings of public opinion in both countries.

The recommended approach is to introduce Islam not in a theological

perspective, but in a cultural perspective. This approach has been proven to win hearts and accept peacefully a foreign teaching. This opportunity must be utilized properly considering that both are countries that are rich in cultural values and traditional norms.

With the maintenance of good relations between the two countries through the people-to-people approach, this will bring positive results to other fields such as economics, social and culture. The openness system that has been implemented by China in the past few decades has succeeded in convincing the global community that China has changed.

## **Challenges**

Although closely bound in the historical record of the spread of Islam, but the fact that Islam is a minority teaching in China and a lack of literacy and reference that only adds to the widespread suspicion of Chinese society that Islam is a religion full of violence and warfare; making diplomatic efforts carried out by both parties not smooth.

According to Xu Yihua, China's current political pattern is "powerful state, weak religion". Religion in China has received attention from the international community because it has increased in terms of the number of followers and government policies that favor them. But China is still far from a country that elevates its religious resources into an asset in state relations.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of Indonesia, China's economic and political revival globally is still considered a threat to most people. The flood of Chinese imported products in almost all fields has made the public accuse that China is the source of Indonesia's economic downturn in the past decade. This suspicion is increasingly complicated when the news that China will also bring back communism to Indonesia. The issue of a flood of Chinese foreign workers in Indonesia also makes people increasingly anxious. The public is anxious about the increasing competition in getting jobs.

Another challenge in Islamic (religious) diplomacy between Indonesia and China is that there is still a negative opinion towards Chinese people in Indonesia. A small number of Chinese in Indonesia during the Soeharto era enjoyed various investment facilities so that they became very rich. This small group was finally regarded as a representation of the entire Chinese ethnic group, as a group that had power and wealth in a deceptive manner. The fall of the New Order in 1998 made this conflict increasingly surface.

The final challenge is that Indonesia is in a multiple identity, it's one of dilemma in formulating its public diplomacy strategy. On the one hand, Indonesia is a unitary state based on Pancasila democracy as well as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world. Indonesia's active

involvement and participation in issues concerning the Muslim community is very understandable, even appreciated by the international community. But on the other hand, Indonesia has never affirmed Islamic identity as a material for formulating foreign policy. This is where the dilemma occurs. Indonesia has no obligation to base its foreign policy based solely on the consideration of one particular religion, considering that Indonesia is a pluralist country. The Indonesian government needs to balance between determining strategic issues that are prioritized and responding to issues that are desired by the domestic majority.

## Conclusion

From the results of the discussion in this article it can be concluded that; Firstly, cultural and religious developments in China and Indonesia have been exchanged and mixed, which later became the media for soft power diplomacy between the two countries. In art and culture, the traces of Chinese culture and Chinese Muslims are also quite widely scattered in Indonesia, ranging from language, architecture, spiritual and worldly conceptions, street names, various clothing accessories to food names, as well as evidence of ancient Islamic relics on Java. Admiral Cheng Hoo had a big role in the spread of Islamic art and culture at that time. Religious values, teachings, worship, and ways of life brought by traders and merchants to trade in an area turned out to bring change in perspective and the way people socialize with others, as well as political, economic, social and cultural life. Religious diplomacy carried out by the Indonesian government and the Chinese government together aims to not only build a good image through the dissemination of the values of peace, justice and harmony among religious communities but as a form of efforts by state and non-state actors to convey their identity in international relations. That is the spirit of Chinese and Indonesian public diplomacy.

Secondly, the opportunities and challenges for religious (Islamic) diplomacy between Indonesia and China can be collected in a number of key points. *First*; religion (Islamic) diplomacy between the two countries can be continued, its also can to be deepened given the two leaders have agreed to improve relations between their citizens. The understanding between the people of Indonesia and China is very important because the true spirit that is carried out by the New Silk Road is the unification of not only the territory but the establishment of communication between countries in the area of the route. The people-to-people approach through the field of culture and education by introducing

Islam not in a theological perspective, but in a cultural perspective. *Second*; with the maintenance of good relations between the two countries through the people-to-people approach, this will bring positive results to other

fields such as economics, social and culture. *Third*; Islam is a minority teaching in China and the lack of literacy and reference makes Chinese society widely only understand that Islam is a religion that is full of violence and war. *Fourth*; from the side of Indonesia, China's economic and political revival globally is still considered a threat to the majority of Indonesian people. *Fifth*; there is still a negative opinion towards Chinese people in Indonesia. The Indonesian government is often accused of defending the interests of the Chinese minority groups who in fact have a large power economy in Indonesia. *Sixth*, Indonesia is in a multiple identity dilemma in formulating its public diplomacy strategy. On the one hand, Indonesia is a unitary state based on Pancasila democracy as well as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world. But on the other hand, Indonesia has never affirmed Islamic identity as an ingredient of foreign policy formulation, so that as a pluralist country, Indonesia does not have an obligation to base its foreign policy based solely on the consideration of one particular religion. The Indonesian government needs to balance between determining strategic issues that are prioritized and responding to issues that are desired by the domestic majority.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kompasiana.com/nikodemus/54f77091a33311d3358b4951/beberapa-akulturasi-budaya-indonesia-nusantara-dan-china-tionghoa-yang-belum-banyak-dikenal>. diakses tanggal 2 Mei 2019

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Mi Shoujiang dan You Jia, *Islam in China, Mengenal Islam di Negeri Leluhur*, dalam pengantar Redaksi, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2017), v.

<sup>4</sup> The author will focus more on the study of the role of culture and religion "Islam" between the two countries of China and Indonesia that have occurred since hundreds of years ago and there has been acculturation of culture that has been accepted in the communities of both countries

<sup>5</sup> R.P. Barston. *Modern Diplomacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3

<sup>6</sup> Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy, Soft Power in International Relations*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7

<sup>7</sup> Xu Yihua, "Religion and China's Public Diplomacy in the Era of Globalization", *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, Vol.9 No.4, 2015, 16

<sup>8</sup> Cummings, Milton C. Jr. "Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey. Washington: Center for Arts and Culture". 2013, 1

<sup>9</sup> Wyszomirski, Margaret J., Christopher Burgess y Catherine Peila. *International Cultural Relations: A Multi-Country Comparison*. )Ohio: Center for Arts and Culture. 2003), 2

<sup>10</sup> Tulus Warsito dan Wahyuni Kartikasari, "Diplomasi Kebudayaan Dalam Konsep dan Relevansi Bagi Negara Berkembang: Studi Kasus Indonesia", (Yogyakarta: Ombak. 2007), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Tulus Warsito, Usmar Salam, dan Wiendu Nuryanti Dialog Budaya dan Gelar



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<sup>12</sup> Stiono, Benny G. *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik*. (Jakarta: ELKASA, 2002), 18

<sup>13</sup> Kartika, Nyai. *Kebijakan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Terhadap Etnis Tionghoa di Jakarta Tahun 1966-1977*, (Jakarta: 1991), 1

<sup>14</sup> Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, 2003

<sup>15</sup> Priyanto Wibowo, *Tionghoa dalam Keberagaman Indonesia*: Universitas Indonesia, 641 lihat juga, Groenendevdt, W. P Nusantara dalam Catatan Tionghoa, (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2009),2

<sup>16</sup> Priyanto Wibowo, *Tionghoa dalam Keberagaman Indonesia*: 641

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.kompasiana.com/iralathief/588cb87454977339132b8ad1/beduk-baju-koko-dan-pengaruh-bangsa-cina-dalam-budaya-islam-di-indonesia>, diakses tanggal 8-5-2019

<sup>18</sup> Idris, Amin. Biografi Populer Mochammad Yusuf; Pengobatan Kanker Pendekatan Tradisional Cina dan Modern, (Yayasan Bina Bangsa, 1997), 29

<sup>19</sup> [https://imthehistorian.wordpress.com/2017/08/24/wujud-akulturasi-kebudayaan-tionghoa-indonesia-kelenteng-dan-masjid-sebagai-wujud-akulturasi-budaya-tionghoa-indonesia/#\\_ftn2](https://imthehistorian.wordpress.com/2017/08/24/wujud-akulturasi-kebudayaan-tionghoa-indonesia-kelenteng-dan-masjid-sebagai-wujud-akulturasi-budaya-tionghoa-indonesia/#_ftn2)

<sup>20</sup> Wijayakusuma, 2000: 63-64.

<sup>21</sup> Ipong Hembing Putra, *Laksamana Cheng Hoo*, Majalah Cheng Hoo Oktober 2018, 42

<sup>22</sup> Rezza Maulana, *Tionghoa Muslim/Muslim Tionghoa*, (Yogyakarta: Impulse, 2010), 23

<sup>23</sup> Sumanto Al-Qurtubi, *Arus Tiongkok-Jawa Islam, Bongkar Sejarah Atas Peranan Tionghoa dalam Penyebaran Agama Islam di Nusantara Abad XV&XVI*, (Yogyakarta: INTI, 2013), 16

<sup>24</sup> Choirul Mahfud, "Hubungan Islam Tionghoa dan Islam Nusantara", Lihat di <http://lp3.um.ac.id/berita-577-hubungan-islam-tionghoa-dan-islam-nusantara-.htm> Diakses tanggal 19 Agustus 2018

<sup>25</sup> Anon. "Masjid Cheng Ho Jejak Syiar Islam Sang Laksamana Tiongkok, Lihat di <http://presidenri.go.id/berita-aktual/masjid-cheng-ho-jejak-syiar-islam-sang-laksamana-tionghoa.html>, Diakses tanggal 12 Oktober 2018

<sup>26</sup> Rini Friastuti, "Berbaurnya Islam dan Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia", Lihat di <https://news.detik.com/berita/3313136/berbaurnya-islam-dan-etnis-tionghoa-di-indonesia>, Diakses tanggal 15 Oktober 2018

<sup>27</sup> Anon, "Penuhi Undangan Dubes China Berikut Agenda Ketua Umum PP Muhammadiyah di China", Lihat di <http://www.suaramuhammadiyah.id/2018/09/12/penuhi-undangan-dubes-china-berikut-beberapa-agenda-ketua-umum-pp-muhammadiyah-di-china/>, Diakses tanggal 27 Oktober 2018

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Haryanto Satriyo. Wawancara. Tanggal 5 Oktober 2018

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Jan Melissen, *Ibid.* 5

<sup>32</sup> Iva Rachmawati, *Indonesian Public Diplomacy: Preserving State Existence through*

*Sharing Identities to Gain Mutual Understanding*, Global dan Strategis, Th.11 No.1, 2017, 55

<sup>33</sup> Gustaaf Geeraerts, *Analyzing Non-State Actors in World Politics*, Pole Paper Series, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1995, Lihat di <http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/pole-papers/pole0104.htm>, Diakses tanggal 12 Oktober 2018

<sup>34</sup> Anon, "Muhammadiyah dan Menteri Urusan Agama China Sepakati Kerjasama Bidang Agama dan Pendidikan", Lihat di <http://www.muhammadiyah.or.id/id/news-14779-detail-muhammadiyah-dan-menteri-urusan-agama-china-sepakati-kerjasama-dalam-bidang-agama-dan-pendidikan.html>, Diakses tanggal 27 Oktober 2018

<sup>35</sup> Xu Yihua, *Ibid.* 20

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