



RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN CHINESE MUSLIM IDENTITY IN PALU: ACCULTURATION AND SOCIAL HARMONY

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Abstract:

This article examines religious moderation in Chinese Muslim identity in Palu through the dynamics of acculturation and social harmony. By using a qualitative approach through interviews, observation and documentation, this research found that Chinese Muslims in Palu showed openness and adaptation to local culture without losing the roots of their identity. The process of religious conversion among Chinese Muslims reflects a diversity of motivations, ranging from cultural factors, marriage, to spiritual pursuits. Despite facing social and family challenges, they managed to maintain their Muslim identity while establishing harmonious relationships with families of different religions. Within the family environment, they practice tolerance while still celebrating religious traditions across faiths, reflecting the inclusive attitude that is at the heart of religious moderation. In addition, Chinese Muslims in Palu play an active role in various social activities, such as supporting religious education and humanitarian social action, which strengthens their position in society. Participation in religious and social activities shows that they avoid exclusivism and strive to build harmonious relations with the local community. This study confirms that cultural acculturation and religious diversity are the main factors in shaping religious moderation in Palu. Harmony between religious identity and local culture allows Chinese Muslims to contribute to creating a more inclusive social environment, where the values of togetherness and tolerance can flourish. This research highlights the importance of religious moderation as a key element in maintaining social cohesion amidst cultural and religious diversity.

Keywords: *acculturation, chinese Muslims, palu, religious moderation, social harmony.*

INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation is a very important concept in a multicultural society like Indonesia. As a country with high ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, religious moderation is a bridge in building social harmony. (SHIHAB, 2019) This concept emphasizes a middle ground in religion, which is not extreme to one side and is not trapped in excessive liberalism (K. R. Agama, 2023; Tim, 2019). Religious moderation not only reflects Islamic values that are rahmatan lil 'alamin, but also a tool to maintain social cohesion in the midst of a heterogeneous society. (B. L. dan D. K. A. R. Agama, 2013; Fathurahman, 2021; Puslitbang Bimas Agama dan Layanan Keagamaan Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama, 2019)

The Chinese ethnicity is estimated to have started visiting the archipelago in the early 9th century AD (Usman, 2009). Their arrival in Indonesia not only brought changes in the agricultural technology and trade system, but also formed a unique pattern of social interaction. The Chinese ethnic group lives and develops like other indigenous ethnicities in the archipelago. (Machali & Rosyadi, 2020). In Palu City, their existence also has a long history of adapting to the local community, both through economic, social, and cultural interactions.

The city of Palu itself, which is located in the heart of Sulawesi Island and has great economic potential, is one of the destinations for immigrants from various

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regions, including ethnic Chinese. With an area of 395.06 km² (BPS Kota Palu, 2020) and a population of 373,218 people, the people of Palu City are very heterogeneous, consisting of tribes such as Kaili, Bugis, Toraja, Mandar, Gorontalo, Manado, Javanese, and ethnic Chinese who have long blended with the local community. (BPS Kota Palu, 2020)

As immigrants, ethnic Chinese need to adapt to the local culture to be able to live in harmony. Adaptation in a social context includes self-adjustment to social norms, economic systems, and religious practices that apply in the surrounding community (Usman, 2009) This adaptation to culture often develops into a process of acculturation, where elements of the original culture and the new culture influence each other and form a distinctive identity (Gudykunst et al., 1992)

In the religious context, the most significant mixing occurs when some ethnic Chinese embrace Islam. This step makes it easier for them to be accepted by the indigenous community, which is majority Muslim. (Afif, 2012) However, not all ethnic Chinese choose this path, as most still maintain Confucian, Buddhist, Christian, or Catholic beliefs (Syamhudi, 2013). However, this diversity is not a barrier for Chinese Muslims to stay in tune with other communities around them. (Muslim, 2019)

Chinese Muslims in Palu show a unique pattern of adaptation. Their identity as Muslims has been preserved, but at the same time they have retained elements of Chinese culture that have been passed down from generation to generation (Ramli, 2019). This acculturation is not just a mixture of cultures, but also reflects acceptance and balance in practicing Islamic values in the midst of social diversity (Pratama et al., 2024).

In daily life, Chinese Muslims practice Islam with a distinctive pattern that displays harmonious interaction with the surrounding community. Their presence in the Palu Muslim community not only affirms their Islamic identity, but also shows how Islam can coexist with Chinese culture without losing its essence. They participate in various socio-religious activities, both in Islamic celebrations such as Eid al-Fitr and the Prophet's Birthday, as well as in Chinese cultural events such as Chinese New Year (Abidin, 2017).

The concept of social harmony applied by Chinese Muslims in Palu is rooted in the values of tolerance, openness, and mutual respect. These values are not only reflected in their relationships with other Muslim communities, but also with other religious and ethnic groups in Palu. One of the main strategies in maintaining harmonious relationships is through close social interaction and mutual assistance in various aspects of life.

It is not uncommon for them to be involved in charity activities and mutual cooperation with local residents, showing that cultural and ethnic differences are not a barrier to the formation of strong social solidarity. (Pratama et al., 2024). This shows that Chinese Muslims are able to maintain their religious identity while building harmonious relationships with other groups in society.

Although Chinese Muslims in Palu have managed to establish harmonious relations, challenges remain in maintaining a balance between religious and cultural identities. Stereotypes against ethnic Chinese that are still inherent in some communities are often an obstacle in strengthening social integration. In addition, the

dynamics of identity politics that are developing in Indonesia can also affect public perception of the existence of the Chinese Muslim community. (Ramli, 2019).

Therefore, efforts to continue to strengthen religious moderation and intercultural dialogue are very important so that the social harmony that has been established remains sustainable. (K. R. Agama, 2023). Therefore, efforts to continue to strengthen religious moderation and intercultural dialogue are very important so that the social harmony that has been established remains sustainable. (Purnomo, 2022). This is proof that religious moderation is not only applied in daily practice, but also passed on to the next generation through proper education (Ramli, 2019).

Studies on religious moderation in the Chinese Muslim community have been widely conducted in various regions in Indonesia, although the main focus is still on major cities such as Jakarta, Makassar, and Yogyakarta. Study by Farhan and Andi Faisal Bakti (Faisal Bakti, 2022) revealed that Chinese converts in Jakarta have inclusive social interactions with various Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, and are active in community-based da'wah. Meanwhile, research by Nur Hamid and Zurqoni (2022) in Samarinda shows that the tradition of thanksgiving involving Islamic religious leaders is a tangible form of religious moderation that strengthens social harmony between Chinese Muslims and the local Muslim community (Hamid & Zurqoni, 2022)

In Yogyakarta, a study by Imam Machali and Faiq Ilham Rosyadi (2020) highlights that the Chinese Muslim community shows religious moderation by upholding tolerance and being affiliated with major Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah (Machali & Ilham Rosyadi, 2020). Similar research in Makassar by Ramli (2019) revealed how the Chinese Muslim minority lives a harmonious religious life by integrating cultural aspects and Islamic teachings in daily life (Ramli, 2019). In addition, a study conducted by Uup Gufron (2019) in Jakarta found that the conversion community in Lautze Mosque maintained their cultural identity while practicing Islamic teachings in moderation, showing that religious moderation in this community did not eliminate elements of their home culture (Gufron, 2019)

Compared to previous research, the study on "*Religious Moderation in Chinese Muslim Identity in Palu through the Dynamics of Acculturation and Social Harmony*" offers several novelties. First, this study focuses on the Chinese Muslim community in Palu, an area that has not been widely studied in the context of religious moderation. Most previous studies have focused more on areas with larger Chinese communities, such as Jakarta and Makassar. Second, this study highlights the dynamics of acculturation between Islamic values and Chinese culture in shaping social harmony, an aspect that has not been the main focus in previous studies. Third, this study also considers the post-disaster social context in Palu, which has the potential to provide new insights into how collective experiences in dealing with disasters affect social interactions and religious attitudes of Chinese Muslims in the region. Thus, this research is expected to provide a more in-depth academic contribution regarding religious moderation and social interaction in the context of the Chinese Muslim minority in Indonesia.

This research aims to dig deeper into how the concept of religious moderation is applied in the life of Chinese Muslims in Palu. By exploring various aspects of

their lives, this research will provide insight into how cultural acculturation and social harmony can go hand in hand without causing identity conflicts

In addition to contributing to the study of Islam and multiculturalism, this research is also expected to be a reference for social policies that support inclusivity and tolerance between religious and ethnic groups. By understanding how Chinese Muslims in Palu have succeeded in building harmonious relationships, it is hoped that the values of religious moderation can be applied more widely in society

Religious moderation in Chinese Muslim identity in Palu reflects how Islam can develop within a diverse cultural framework without losing its essence. The acculturation that occurs not only strengthens social relations, but also shapes the character of a more open, tolerant, and inclusive society. Therefore, this study is important in understanding how the interaction between Islam, culture, and social harmony can be a model for other multicultural societies in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to understand how religious moderation is manifested in the identity of Chinese Muslims in Palu through the dynamics of acculturation and social harmony. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perspectives, and social interactions experienced by Chinese Muslims in carrying out the teachings of Islam in a multicultural environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Case studies are used to understand the phenomenon contextually in the daily life of the Chinese Muslim community in Palu, especially in religious and socio-cultural aspects (Yin, 2018)

The research was conducted in Palu City, Central Sulawesi, which has a Chinese Muslim community that has long blended with the local community. This city was chosen as the location for the research because the ethnic and religious diversity in it creates interesting social dynamics in the context of religious moderation. In addition, Palu is also an example of how the Chinese Muslim community builds harmonious social relations with the surrounding community through cultural acculturation.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with various informants who had direct involvement in the socio-religious dynamics of Chinese Muslims in Palu. The selected informants include the Chinese Muslim community who are active in social and religious activities, religious leaders and academics who research issues of multiculturalism. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from literature studies, previous research reports, and official documents relevant to religious moderation and cultural acculturation.

Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were made by observing the social and religious activities of Chinese Muslims in Palu, such as Islamic religious celebrations and Chinese cultural traditions that are still preserved. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to give informants the freedom to explain their life experiences and views on religious moderation. Meanwhile, documentation is carried out by collecting historical records, community archives, as well as photos and recordings of religious and social activities.

In this study, the data analysis technique used is thematic analysis. The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were categorized into themes related to religious moderation, acculturation dynamics, and social harmony. The analysis process is carried out through several stages, namely data transcription, coding, grouping findings by category, and interpretation of meaning based on relevant theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis aims to find patterns of social interaction of Chinese Muslims as well as how they apply religious moderation in their daily lives.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses the triangulation technique of sources and methods. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information from various informants from different backgrounds, such as religious leaders, academics, and members of the Chinese Muslim community (Yin, 2018). Meanwhile, triangulation of methods is carried out by combining interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

By using a comprehensive approach, this research is expected to contribute to understanding how religious moderation can be applied in the context of a multicultural society. The results of this research are also expected to be a reference for policymakers, academics, and the wider community in building social harmony through an inclusive and inclusive approach based on the values of tolerance and positive cultural acculturation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Existence of Chinese Muslims in Palu

The existence of Chinese Muslims in Palu shows how this group has undergone a deep acculturation process with the local community. Those born and raised in Palu feel a strong attachment to the area as their homeland, even though they still retain their native cultural identity. Most are of Kwantung and Hokkian descent, with a small portion of the Khe and Huaneng tribes. This adaptation process shows how Chinese Muslims are able to balance their identity as part of the Chinese community as well as being part of the Palu community.

In social life, Chinese Muslims in Palu tend to adapt more quickly to the local culture. Their attitude of focusing more on the business world and not interfering in the customs and traditions of the local community is one of the factors that makes them easily accepted by the surrounding community. In addition, their involvement in various social and religious activities also shows their openness to a multicultural environment. Their participation in various religious events, both related to Islam and other religions, shows a high attitude of tolerance in community life.

Mr. Lionard, one of the Chinese Muslims in Palu, stated that Chinese Muslims are more oriented to economic activities than local customary and political affairs. "We are more focused on work and business. Not interfere too much with the traditions of the local community, but still respect and support their social activities" (Interview with Lionard, 55 years old, March 13, 2021). This kind of attitude helps them in building harmonious relationships with the surrounding community, without causing significant social friction.

Economically, Chinese Muslims in Palu work as entrepreneurs in various sectors, such as contractors, shop owners, caterers, hotels, and restaurants. Their

presence in the business world contributes to the local economy and strengthens social interaction with the community around them. In their daily interactions, they are known to have high loyalty in helping social and religious activities, which can be seen from their participation in making donations for various religious activities.

Mr. Ismail Pengeran, a community leader in Palu, also emphasized that Chinese Muslims are known as a generous community in supporting socio-religious activities. "When we are asked for help for religious activities, whether Islamic, Christian, or Buddhist, we try to help as much as we can. This has become our habit in building good relationships with everyone" (Interview with Ismail Pengeran, March 13, 2021).

The process of converting to Islam among Chinese Muslims shows a variety of factors that influence their decision to convert. The main factor that often arises is cultural mixing through mixed marriage with Indonesian Muslims. In addition, other motivations such as the search for spiritual meaning and personal experience in understanding the teachings of Islam are also important factors in the conversion process.

Mr. Lionard recounted his experience before converting to Islam, where he initially had a skeptical view of this religion. "In the past, I did not agree with Islam because I saw several religious leaders in my neighborhood who behaved rudely. But after reading many books, I realized that Islam is actually a good and loving religion" (Interview with Lionard, 55 years old, March 13, 2021).

In some cases, individuals who choose Islam as their religion experience a considerable spiritual journey. Initially, negative perceptions of Islam are often formed due to personal experiences with the surrounding environment. However, after gaining a deeper understanding through literature and interaction with the wider Muslim community, there has been a change in views that leads to a deeper acceptance of Islam.

Mr. Lionard also recounted his spiritual experience that became a turning point in his religious journey. "I have dreamed several times of being invited to pray at the mosque. At first I didn't pay much attention to it, but after the dream recurred, I began to feel that this was a clue to me" (Interview with Lionard, 55 years old, March 13, 2021).

The journey to becoming a Muslim does not always happen instantly. Some individuals take years to truly commit to practicing the teachings of Islam consistently. Environmental factors and social support from friends and the local Muslim community play an important role in helping them to better understand and practice the teachings of Islam.

Guidance from the local Muslim community is an important factor in helping converts to be more active in carrying out Islamic practices, such as the five-time prayer and involvement in other religious activities. "At first I wasn't very active in prayer, but after meeting good Muslim friends, they started teaching me how to pray and worship properly" (Interview with Lionard, 55 years old, March 13, 2021).

In addition to marriage, social environmental factors are also the main driver in a person's decision to become a Muslim. Some individuals who frequently interact with the Muslim community begin to be interested in the teachings of Islam and gradually study them more deeply. This process often takes place naturally and

without coercion.

Hj. Helda, a Chinese Muslim woman in Palu, revealed that since she was a teenager she had had an interest in Islam even though she was still a Confucian at that time. "I like to hear the Prophet's prayers since I was young, around the age of 18 or 19 years old. I often go to recitation events and feel interested in the atmosphere" (Interview with Hj. Helda, 62 years old, March 13, 2021).

After going through a dynamic life journey, Hj. Helda finally chose Islam as her faith after marrying a Muslim. "I converted to Islam after marrying my second husband who is Muslim. Initially, I was tested a lot, but I remained firm with my choice" (Interview with Hj. Helda, 62 years old, March 13, 2021).

The challenges faced by Chinese Muslims after their conversion to Islam were not easy. Some of them have to face pressure from family or friends who question their decisions. "After I converted to Islam, there were some people who doubted my decision and tried to invite me back to my previous religion. But I remain firm in my choice" (Interview with Hj. Helda, 62 years old, March 13, 2021).

In addition to social challenges, there are also economic challenges faced by some converts. Some of them have undergone changes in business life and work after converting to Islam. However, most have persevered and are looking for ways to balance their economic lives with their newly embraced beliefs.

Chinese Muslims who have lived in Palu for a long time also face challenges in maintaining their cultural identity while still practicing the teachings of Islam well. They retain some aspects of Chinese culture, such as language and family traditions, but also adjust to the Islamic norms they embrace.

In general, the integration of Chinese Muslims in Palu with the local community is going well. They are known as a group that is easy to get along with, has a high work ethic, and values diversity. This is the main factor that allows them to coexist harmoniously with the Muslim-majority Palu community.

The success of Chinese Muslims in building good social relations shows that religious moderation can be an effective model in creating harmony in a multicultural society. They are examples of how religious and cultural identities can go hand in hand without causing meaningful conflict.

Religious Moderation through the Dynamics of Acculturation and Social Harmony

The existence of Chinese Muslims in Palu City reflects how religious moderation can grow through a harmonious acculturation process with the surrounding community. As a minority group, Chinese Muslims have long coexisted with local communities and have shown openness in interacting with various community groups. Their presence in various sectors of social and economic life has created mutually beneficial relationships, as well as strengthened the values of tolerance and harmony in religious life.

The acculturation process that occurred to Chinese Muslims in Palu shows that they are able to balance between their cultural identity and the Islamic values they adhere. They still carry out some Chinese cultural traditions, such as Chinese New Year celebrations and respect for ancestors, but by adjusting them so as not to conflict with Islamic teachings. This shows that cultural and religious diversity can go hand in hand without having to sacrifice any aspect of their identity.

One form of religious moderation carried out by Chinese Muslims in Palu is their involvement in various religious activities that are inclusive. They not only participate in the celebration of Islamic holidays, but also still respect the traditions of their families of other religions. According to Mr. Lionard, a Chinese Muslim who has embraced Islam since 1998, he revealed how family dynamics affect his Islamic journey. "In my family, we have quite diverse religious differences. My parents and siblings are still Buddhists and Christians, but we maintain a good relationship. We visit each other during holidays, be it Chinese New Year, Christmas, or Eid al-Fitr. This has become a tradition in our family" (Interview with Lionard, 55 years old, March 13, 2021).

In addition, they are also active in various socio-religious activities in their environment. According to Mr. Ismail Pengeran, a community leader, Chinese Muslims are known as a community that is active in various religious activities. "They often participate in the celebration of religious holidays, such as the Prophet's Birthday and Isra' Mi'raj. They also often donate to the construction of mosques and other social activities," he said in an interview on March 13, 2021.

Their role in building religious moderation is not only limited to the social aspect, but is also seen in their family environment. Religious diversity in Chinese Muslim families is not an obstacle for them to maintain harmony. This can also be seen in the experience of Hj. Helda, a Chinese Muslim woman who previously adhered to Confucianism and Christianity before finally embracing Islam. "When I converted to Islam, my nuclear family did not oppose my decision. They understood that this was my life choice. However, there were some relatives who regretted my decision. Even so, our relationship is still good, and I still visit my family often during Christmas or Chinese New Year celebrations" (Interview with Hj. Helda, 62 years old, March 13, 2021).

In daily life, Chinese Muslims in Palu work as traders, entrepreneurs, and business owners in the hospitality and service sectors. Their presence in this economic sector not only contributes to the development of Palu City, but also strengthens social relations between Chinese Muslims and the local community.

According to Muh. Jasmin, a TPA administrator in Palu City, said the involvement of Chinese Muslims in religious education is very significant. "Mr. Lionard is one of the main donors in the construction of our landfill. He is very concerned about religious education for children around his residence. In fact, he also often comes to see the progress of recitation here" (Interview with Muh. Jasmin, 41 years old, March 9, 2021).

In addition to supporting religious education, Chinese Muslims are also active in building worship facilities. Hj. Helda, for example, once donated a piece of land for the construction of a mosque in the Donggala area. "My second husband and I used to travel a lot in the hinterland. One day, we found a village that did not have a mosque. We felt called to help, so we bought a piece of land and started building a mosque there. Unfortunately, the construction was stopped due to household problems, but I am determined to continue" (Interview with Hj. Helda, 62 years old, March 13, 2021).

The contribution of Chinese Muslims in various areas of life shows that they have an active role in maintaining social harmony. They not only play a role in the

business world, but also become an important part of building inclusive social relationships in society.

According to Mr. Lionard, he still respects his family who are of different religions. "When my family celebrates Chinese New Year, I still come and gather. But I don't participate in the religious rituals, just to respect family traditions" (Interview with Lionard, 55 years old, March 13, 2021).

In addition to their contributions in the socio-religious field, Chinese Muslims also play a role in creating social harmony by building good relations with other communities. According to Mr. Ismail Pengeran, the people of Palu are very open to the existence of Chinese Muslims because they show a polite attitude and always establish good communication. "They really appreciate the social norms here, so they are easily accepted by the local community" (Interview with Ismail Pengeran, March 13, 2021).

In the midst of the various challenges faced, Chinese Muslims continue to strive to maintain harmony in religious and social life. Despite some obstacles, such as stereotypes and prejudices from some communities, they still try to show that Islam can be a bridge to build better relations between different social groups.

With all the dynamics that have occurred, Chinese Muslims in Palu have proven that religious moderation can be applied in real life. They are able to establish harmonious relationships with various community groups, be active in socio-religious activities, and maintain their cultural values without contradicting Islamic teachings.

The story of their spiritual journey is also proof that Islam is a religion that embraces all people regardless of ethnic or cultural background. The conversion process experienced by some Chinese Muslims, such as those experienced by Mr. Lionard and Hj. Helda, shows that Islam can be accepted with full awareness and conviction after going through deep reflection.

Chinese Muslims in Palu are a clear example that religious moderation can be a tool to strengthen unity and unity in the life of the nation and state. By maintaining their cultural identity and practicing Islamic teachings in an inclusive manner, they are able to create a harmonious and tolerant social environment.

Their stories are an inspiration in understanding how Islam and culture can go hand in hand, creating a more inclusive and harmonious life in a multicultural society. Therefore, the religious moderation approach they carry out can be a model for other communities in building peaceful and harmonious social relations.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that Chinese Muslims in Palu have succeeded in building religious moderation through the process of acculturation and social harmony with the local community. They are able to balance Chinese cultural identity with Islamic values, showing that diversity can be a force in building harmonious social relationships. Their integration in economic, social, and religious life reflects the values of tolerance and high inclusivity. Their active involvement in socio-religious activities, such as donations for mosque construction, support for Islamic education, and participation in religious celebrations, shows how religious moderation can be applied in daily life.

Despite facing various challenges, such as social pressures and stereotypes, Chinese Muslims in Palu remain committed to maintaining good relations with their wider community. They show that Islam and culture can go hand in hand without creating identity conflicts. By maintaining the values of tolerance, building positive social interactions, and maintaining harmony in interfaith families, they are a clear example of how religious moderation can strengthen unity in a multicultural society. Their success can be a model for other communities in building an inclusive, harmonious, and respectful society.

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