COOPERATION ON ISLAMIC CULTURE AND ITS CHALLENGES BETWEEN CHINA AND INDONESIA: FROM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS STRENGTHENING THE COLLABORATION*

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Presenting life reflecting more human universal values, from justice, peace to prosperity is certainly a commitment of all countries in the world. The governments in each country surely struggle to make their people survive according to what they desire; to live in welfare, success, and pleasure, physically and spiritually along with their lives.

Related to the matter, in this globalizing world, any country is impossible to carry out that mission without cooperation with other countries. In another phrase, strengthening collaboration between one country and other countries is essential in which any country must work out, both at the government level and the community level. Within the collaboration, each country can share its advantages to other countries, while at the same time it covers its weaknesses from advantages other countries share. There can be no country or any government that indisputably comes through in all fields.

On that side, cooperation between China and Indonesia has very high strategic values from several aspects. One of them is from the historical side. The two countries historically have had a very long relationship since the early century. The other thing is related to the culture of the two countries. To a certain degree, there is a common thread binding one to another. One more thing, Islam is as a melting pot blending some various cultures of the two countries.

This paper focuses on the discussion around these things. Departing from these historical and cultural capitals, we will discuss suitable forms of cooperation. But before that, we examine the challenges faced by the two countries, which at the same time become the entrance to seek a appropriate cooperation model.

The Advent of Islam in China

Most historians agree that Islam, or more precisely Muslims, came to China in the first century of the presence of Islam. In the *Sirah of the Prophet* stated that when the Prophet migrated to Abyssinia together with of 101 people, not including children and women. According to Muslim Annalists, after the asylum, not all of them returned to Mecca or Medina. There are ten people whose fate is unknown. Based on this data and relating it to various Chinese Records, Fatimi assumed that 5 out of ten people whose fate was unknown went to China. He stated that four Muslim wise men were reported to have come to China during the Wu-te period (618-626) during the Tang Dynasty. Their leader was Su-ha-pai Sai Kan-Ko-shihn (Said Sa'd bin Abd

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Qays [the most accurate name Said ibn Abi Waqqas]). He is supposed to have been buried in Canton (Guangzhou, Khanfu of the Arabs) after having preached there. The other three were: Kai-Ssu (Qays bin Hudhafah), Wu-Ai-Ssu or Wu-Wai-Ssu (Urwah bin Abi Uththan), and Wan-Ko-Ssu (Abu Qays bin al-Harith). Two of the last three are believed to have been died and have been buried in Ch'uan-chou (Quanzhou, Olives of the Arabs) in Fu-kien province.[1]

Though the evidence above is still controversial and debatable, most historians agree that the the coming of Muslims to China was very early. As an instance, Hyunhee Park argues, even if we exclude the legendary story about the visit of Saad ibn Waqqas to Guangzhou (Canton) in the seventh century, official Chinese histories declare thirty-three Arab diplomatic missions to keep peaceful relations with the Tang dynasty between 651 and 750.[2] From time on the contact continue to develop.

During the Song Dynasty period (960-1279) ruling after the Tang Dynasty, Islam in China continued to flourish. In 1070, the Song emperor, Shenzong invited a group of 5,300 young Arabs, under the leadership of Amīr Sayyid So-fei-er (this name being as mentioned in the Chinese source) of Bukhārā, to settle in China. These Muslims had helped the emperor in his campaign against Liao empire (Khitan) in northeastern China. Shenzong gave the prince an honorary title, and his men were encouraged to settle in the war-devastated areas in northeastern China between Kaifeng, the capital of the Song, and Yanjing (today's Beijing) in order to create a buffer zone between the Song and the Liao Empire. In 1080, another group of more than 10,000 Arab men and women on horseback are said to have arrived in China to join So-fei-er. These people settled in all the provinces of the north and northeast. As settlers in the area between the Chinese and the northern nomads, these Muslims became an important local element in the 11th and 12th centuries, being involved in the land commercial traffic along the Silk Road.[3] In this period the Muslims start playing a significant role in the area.

In the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) founded by Mongol Kubilay Khan, the Muslim community in China was increasingly involved in the Dynasty. The military forces were built largely upon the thousands of Muslim soldiers. At least two of the commanders-in-chief of the three Mongol war zones were Arabs: Amīr Sayyid Bayan (Po-yen, Boyan) (1235-94) and Amīr Sayyid-i Adjall Shams Dīn Umar (1211-79). Even, the Ḵhān decreed them to be the second in rank citizens of the Mongol empire (after the Mongols themselves in Yüan China).[4]

When the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) held the rein, overthrew and replaced the Yuan Dynasty, Islam in the area developed much better. The Ming emperors gave orders for the establishment of a mosque at Nanjing. Early Islamic learning centers were first established on the southeast coast by Arab and Persian scholars. Apart from the establishment of mosques and Islamic learning centers, other proofs of the pro-Muslim policy include the employment of a substantial number of Muslims in the imperial court,

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[1] Cesar Adib Majul, *Islam in the Philippines and Its China Link*, paper presented at the Asian Center Conference Hall, University of the Philippines-Diliman, Quezon City on (February 3, 1999), p. 12-13

[2] Hyunhee Park, Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-modern Asia, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 6.

[3] Raphael Israeli, "Islam in China" , *Politics and* Religion, (N0. 2/2012 Vol. VI), p. 253.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

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administration, and army, as well as patronage given by Ming emperors to Muslim scholars. There was also an issuance of imperial edicts prohibiting the slaughtering of pigs and consumption of wine.[5] In addition, Muslim missionaries began to travel afar throughout China and spread the new religion among its people.[6]

During the Ming Dynasty, there was the remarkable naval expedition led by Admiral Muslim Zheng He (Cheng Ho). Through 7 expeditions achieved from 1405 until his death in 1433, Zheng He visited over 37 countries. He also visited ports in the Nusantara (later called Indonesia), including Java. This visit to the Nusantara has important significance not only to the strengthening of relations between the Nusantara and China, but this contact also has links to the process of Islam in the archipelago in the subsequent periods.

After the fall of the Ming Dynasty, Muslims in China encountered something gloomy and deteriorated. Because of complex internal problems, or even due to their own attitudes, they encountered a fate being not as good as they were before.

China and Indonesia Relationship

Based on various reliable sources, relations between the Nusantara, (particularly Java) and China, both in terms of diplomatic relations between the two countries and of trade contacts have been going on for a long time.[7] Chinese sources state that the Chinese have known Java since the beginning of the early century. It was mentioned that the Chinese Buddhist priest, Fa Hsin in 413 was stranded and lived on an island called Ya-wa-di for 5 months on his way from Sri Lanka to Canton. Ya-wa-di is a Chinese transliteration of the Jawadwipa toponym, as a term for Java in Sanskrit texts. It was supposed, based on Fa Hsien's information, there was an official contact between the two countries. When the Tang Dynasty came to power (618-906), contact between the two countries in the form of trades and establishing friendships continued to grow. The contact between the two countries was not only restricted to the Kingdom in Java but also to the Kingdom in Sumatera, specifically with the Srivijaya kingdom. Even there were many Chinese immigrants living there. Some of them were political escapees during the Mongol Dynasty and early Ming Dynasty. They fled from China to Palembang. They feel secure there because they have political protection from the King. Since the middle of the 7th century in Palembang, there was also a large wave of immigrants from Arab and Persian Muslim traders. They previously settled in Canton, then fled to Palembang for disturbances went on there.[8]

The relation between China and Nusantara became increasingly closer during the Ming Dynasty, especially when Zheng He and his expedition stopped at several ports in the archipelago, such as along the coastal Java. At places in where Zheng He's fleet anchored, notably in Java, the local

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[5] Fauziah Fathil, "Islam in Imperial China: Sinicization of Minority Muslims and Synthesis of Chinese Philosophy and Islamic Tradition", *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities*, 26, Supp. 1, (2019), 167–187, https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2019.26.s1.9, p. 178

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

[7] Sumanto AlQurtuby, *Arus Cina-Islam-Jawa: Peranan Tionghoa dalam Penyebaran Islam di Nusantara Abad 15 & 16*, First Edition, (Semarang: Elsa Press, 2017), p. xxx

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 40-43.

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Muslim community and religious leaders welcomed him enthusiastically. For example, when Zheng He and his secretary Ma Huan met Maulana Malik Ibrahim (one of the nine Saints, being called Wali Songo famously as propagators of Islam in the Nusantara) in Gresik, part eastern of Java, the Saint welcomed his visit generously. On each of his visits, this Chinese Muslim generally left Chinese Muslim preachers and other followers who desire to live in Java, joining and mingling with the local Muslim community to spread Islam there. Concretely, he placed Muslims on every coast of Java, from Sunda Kelapa Cirebon, Demak, Jepara, Tuban, to Surabaya.[9]

The Chinese migrants on Java, both Muslim and non-Muslim, most of whom male married local women, aristocrats or ordinary people. From this cross-marriage, then the term "*Cina Peranakan*" emerges as a counterpart to "*Cina Totok*" term. The Chinese community –as Ma Huan's information – seemed to have lived in Java before the arrival of Zheng He's fleet. They may have become Muslim since coming from China and then became immigrants or they became new Muslims after staying in Java when they got in touch Muslim, Persian, and other Muslim traders. But they later played an important role in pioneering the establishment of a maritime Islamic empire along the coastal Java.[10]

Zheng He's or the Ming's great virtues related to the relationships between China and Java or generally the Nusantara lay in the strategy he undertakes. Without military action, he was successful in establishing a partnership with the kingdoms in Southeast Asia, especially in Nusantara.[11] Here, the trade is an aspect that we cannot completely ignore. The Ming Dynasty produced new regional trading networks among the Chinese, Java, and Southeast Asians. It might be said that the 15th century produced the first East Asian trading system.[12] Besides, the Dynasty introduced a variety of technologies to Java and Southeast Asia. One of them is a firearm. Wade, quoting from Sun Laichen, states the founding of the Ming dynasty in 1368 started the military revolution by introducing the firearm not only in Chinese but also world history in the early modern period. Another technological influence of the Dynasty was ship-building.[13] The Chinese Ming, moreover, had considerable involvement in supporting Islamization in Java and its surroundings, and also in assimilating Chinese culture with Islam and with Javanese one.

Islam, China, Indonesia, and Cultural Assimilation

Talking of cultural assimilation between China and Islam, we cannot forget what we call sinicization. It refers to a process of assimilation of dominant Chinese or Han culture by Hui Muslims who formed the minority group in China. The process of assimilation is central in the sinicization of Muslims. In spite of the diverse meanings of the assimilation, all the processes from localization, nationalization, integration, acculturation, to amalgamation, point to the adoption by the minority in one or another, of the

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 70.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.
[11] Tarmizi Taher, Masyarakat Cina, Ketahanan Nasional dan Integrasi Bangsa di Indonesia, (Jakarta: PPIM, 1997), p. 47.
[12] Geoff Wade, "*Ming China and Southeast Asia in the 15th Century: A Reappraisal", ARI Working Paper No. 28* (July 2004), p. 33.
[13] *Ibid.*, 34.

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culture of the majority and that they entail full or partial assimilation, as well as quick or gradual changes.[14]

To see how the sinicization took place, we can trace the Chinese Muslim, especially Hui Muslim identity and their social life. Some Hui adopted Han names, wore Han clothes, and some of them married women from the Han community. At the same time, the Hui insisted on keeping any of their customs and traditions, especially religious ones.[15] Through such assimilation, there are no, to some extent, striking differences between Muslims and other Chinese.

Fathil states, several factors contributed to the Sinicization during the Ming period. One of them is the Ming government's ethnic or racial policy. The other is an isolationist policy of the Ming Dynasty. One more thing is an accommodating of Muslims' attitude towards local culture, and finally some incidents of conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in China.[16] But, apart from the racial policy (is it true or not), it is erroneous to think that the Sinicization was merely an outcome of government policies since it was also partly due to the very existence of Muslims in the country itself where centuries of socializing with the non-Muslim majority led to gradual change in their way of life as accommodation of popular or dominant culture set in. Unlike government policies being sometimes unwelcoming, assimilation of Muslim minority due to long contact with mainstream culture is naturally inevitable.[17] That means that the consciousness of the community itself to assimilate with the local cultures and traditions we can not be ignored at all

It is very important to note that the assimilation was not only referred to practical life but also some philosophical aspects. Some Hui Muslims, intellectuals and scholars create works synthesizing between Chinese and Islamic ideas or traditions. Synthesizing Islamic concepts with the philosophical ideas of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, their works are later known as *Han Kitab* (Hanjin in Chinese) or Books of Han and became major religious references and reading materials on Islam for the Hui Muslims in China. *Han Kitab* explains Islamic concepts using classical Chinese philosophical ideas especially those of Confucianism in order to make it easier for local Muslims, many of whom were not well-versed in Arabic to understand Islam.[18]

We can also discover another kind of assimilation on architecture. This kind of assimilation is most visible in the construction of mosques where elements of traditional Chinese architecture were incorporated resulting in pagoda-like mosques.[19] As an example, Muhammed Khamouch is very impressed with the Da Qingzhen Si (Great Mosque) of Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) in Shaanxi Province being founded in 742 CE. It is the largest (12,000 sq meters) and the best early mosque in China and it has been beautifully preserved as it expanded over the centuries. The present layout was

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[14] Fauziah Fathil, "Islam in Imperial China ..... ", p. 175.

[15] Erkan Tuguslu *et. al.*, "Being Hui Muslim in China" in Guy Rong *et. al* (ed), *Hui Muslim in China*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016), p. 195.

[16] Fauziah Fathil, "Islam in Imperial China ..... ", p. 178.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

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constructed by the Ming Dynasty in 1392 CE, under its (ostensible) founder Hajj Zheng He who has a stone tablet at the mosque in commemoration of his generous support, which was provided by the grateful Emperor. A dragon symbol is engraved at the footstep of the entrance opposite the prayer hall demonstrating the meeting between Islam and the Chinese civilization. All in all, it is a dazzling encounter of the architecture of Oriental China with that of the indigenous fashionable taste of Harun ar-Rashid (764-809 CE) of Baghdad.[20]

In Java (present time Indonesia), this assimilation seems so unquestionable in some mosque buildings, especially the Zheng He mosque, which the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (PITI) built. Muzakki argues that the Zheng He Mosque represents the first ethnic Chinese mosque, promoting Chinese culture in a local context and making use of Chinese architectural design, both internally and externally.[21] Moreover, AlQurtubi, as Muzakki quotes, finds Chinese influence in some Javanese historical buildings and monuments. These include the interior design of the ancient Mantingan mosque in Jepara, Central Java; the architecture of the minaret of the mosque at Banten; the design of the gates of the Sunan Giri sacred site complex in Gresik, East Java; and, most importantly, the construction of the Demak mosque in Central Java. All of these follow the Chinese model to some extent, and are taken as further evidence by AlQurtubi of the Chinese key role in the spread of Islam more generally to Java.[22]

From Challenges Towards Collaborations

Unquestionably, the contact and cooperation between China, Java (Indonesia), and Islam (or Muslims) took place deeply since very early time. Their collaboration has contributed really not only to those who collaborate but also to the world as a whole. They established overseas trade, created beautiful architectures, fostered some technologies, contextualized Islamic values to the real local and time that humankind gets along and so on.

As time goes by, the challenges before two countries, specifically Indonesian Muslim and China are far more complex and related to each other. Among the demanding challenges, we need to address is the fourth industrial revolution changing the way we live, work and relate to one another. Most of everything is changing. These are all fundamental changes affecting our economic, social and political system that are difficult to undo, even if the process of globalization itself were to somehow be reversed.[23] Disruption occurs everywhere that not everyone and all countries are able to deal with.

Besides, the other challenges we facing is the outbreak of Islamophobia and Sinophobia in some countries that almost definite to disrupt relations and partnerships that have been and will run. Islamophobia in the form of hatred against Islam and Muslims has been spreading in several countries, especially in Europe. In the view of Islamophobic people, Islamic teachings are hideous and bad, and the Muslims are evil. Many aspects are causing

[20] Muhammed Khamouch, *Jewel of Chinese Muslim's Heritage: A Personal Encounter with the First Mosque in China*, (FSTC Limited, June 2005), p. 5.

[21] Akh. Muzzaki, "Cheng Hoo Mosque: Assimilating Chinese Culture, Distancing it from the State", *CRISE Working Paper* No. 71 (January 2010), p.11.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[23] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, (New York: Crown Business, 2016), p. 13.

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Islamophobia. Besides partisan media framing[24] (most of them are Western media), a person's or group's lack of understanding of Islam also influences the erroneous view of Islam and Muslims. Another aspect we should not ignore, it also happens due to some attitudes and behaviors of certain Muslim people and groups igniting violence and terroristic acts, which are contrary to Islamic teachings and values.

Correspondingly, Sinophobia as sentiment against China, its people, overseas Chinese or China culture[25] also takes place in people and groups, even some government. Similar to Islamophobia, anti-Chinese sentiments also refer to various problems. It maybe arises for the success of overseas Chinese and China economically causing the other being resentful. The sentiment might also appear because of other people having a lack of understanding of China and the Chinese and it could be due to the attitude of the Chinese themselves or the policies of China which are considered detrimental to others as well. Whatever our views of it, Islamophobia and Sinophobia are going to disrupt the good relations between most Indonesian and the Chinese people, and their lives as well. Even both will impact the global community. The peaceful life we are aspiring will be difficult to achieve. We will always encounter violence, which eventually impacts other aspects of life.

Responding to those challenges, we, the Indonesian Muslim and the Chinese cannot ignore them. We have to face and resolve them. Related to address to the R 4.0, borrowing a phrase from Schwab, we can only meaningfully address the challenges if we mobilize the collective wisdom of our minds, hearts and souls. To do so, we must adapt, shape, and harness the disruption by nurturing and applying four types of our intelligence; contextual, emotional, inspired and physical one.[26]

Here is the importance of cooperation. We can do that completely with the cooperation which is impossible for us if we only do it individually. Likewise, we are dealing with the sentiment of anti-Islam-and-Muslim and anti-China. We have stop or reduce the negative effects if they cannot eliminate those phobias.

At this level, we have to strengthen cultural cooperation since our cultures have strong interwoven common thread from which they could overcome and respond to the challenges, especially anti-Islam and anti-China sentiments. By this cooperation, China and Indonesia develop an understanding of true Islam and Chinese culture to the world and within their communities. They, from this side, could also develop better mutual understanding and mutual respect one to each other impacting strengthening in other fields.

Concluding Remarks

From now onwards, the two countries need to continue to enhance the collaboration. What they have to determine is to seek for relevant forms of programs and activities of collaboration being able to bring Indonesian

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[24] Christopher Smith, "Anti-Islamic Sentiment and Media Framing during the 9/11 Decade" *Journal of Religion & Society* (Vol. 15 (2013), p. 2.

[25] *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Online Edition. Retrieved 2012-07-12

[26] Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* p. 106.

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Muslims and Chinese people to produce more meaningful contributions to get a better life for the people of both countries, and even for all human being. In that context, the East Java Regional Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia, is ready to formulate and discuss deeply the forms of cooperation, activities, and others.

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