

# The Implementation of Strengthening the Nation Character of Indonesian Chinese-Muslims Ethnic Through Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya

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## ABSTRACT

Nation character building had already been as an Indonesian government's focus on strengthening Indonesian citizen's nationalism. Especially for the minority that is still trying their best for showing their Indonesian nationalism. Sometimes the majority still can not believe with the minority. As a minority, Chinese-Muslims ethnic in Indonesia had some activities for strengthening their national character to make a harmonious social life with their surrounding community. The purposes of this research were to find out the implementation of strengthening the national character of Chinese-Muslims in Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya. This research used qualitative methods with descriptive research as a type of research. The data consisted of Informant, Observation, and Document. The results of this research were: Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation had some activities that are related to nation character building especially for tolerance character. This foundation also had Kindergarten and Elementary school which they had been teaching their student by implementing nation character education whether in curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities.

**Keywords:** Nation Character, Strengthening, Chinese-Muslims

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a heterogeneous country has been a melting pot for several ethnicities, whether it was coming from Nusantara or another nation. Each ethnicity has its own language and culture, which also has a different religion depends on their beliefs. We know that each ethnic has a different background, so that perhaps they may have a different character. Historically, Indonesia, as we called Nusantara in the past, has been an archipelago that was inhabited by many people from ethnic. Each ethnic had its own character depending on their habit and custom. Centuries ago, there were many immigrants come to Nusantara for spreading their trading relations. They did an international trading activity. Especially for the trader from Gujarat, Arab (Persia), and China. They had their own mission for trading. But sometimes they also had a private mission that happened accidentally because of their life in society. They had a communication with the indigenous people in wherever they stay. They tried to live harmoniously and make a good relationship with their own and another community. By living peacefully, time by time they had a new life in their new society. Some of

them had a marriage with the local people and grew their life for a long time. With their new type of life, indirectly they made assimilation and acculturation. Actually, the immigrant also had their own culture and habit that maybe can not be accepted by the local indigenous people. But when they came to Nusantara, they respect the local people by doing their own culture without disturbing the local people. They also acted respectively to the culture and habit of the local people. Time by time they spent their life in Nusantara and slowly did not do some of their habit that was not existing in Indonesia at that time. But, for praying activities, they held their own religion or beliefs and did their pray peacefully.

Becoming a multiethnic society, they could believing each other and did all their activities together. Then talking about Chinese people whom they become one of the biggest immigrants in the world, they also had a big history in Nusantara, coming to Indonesia from 206-220 BC (Han Dynasty). This history was written on the notes of Fahsien and I Tsing (337-402) in the time of the Dong Dynasty and Tang Dynasty). Since their first coming in Nusantara archipelago, the history said that they came for one intention, it was trading. In many centuries, they grew

up their business and made a relationship with the local people. Indirectly they made assimilation and acculturation. The biggest history of Chinese Immigrants in Nusantara has happened when Admiral Cheng Ho did his voyage in many kingdoms and countries for making the diplomatic relation between Ming Dynasty and other kingdoms and countries on 15 Century. Chinese-Muslims Admiral Cheng Ho did his voyage with his followers by using many large ships. The number of his followers was around 30 thousand followers with about 350 large ships. Admiral Cheng Ho had his seven-time voyage and come in several places. Most of his stopovers were in Malacca (part of Malaysia), and for the stopovers in Indonesia was in Semarang, Batavia, Cirebon, Surabaya, and Palembang. On each stopover, they tried to make relations with the local people and know their character. Cheng Ho and his followers stay for a long time in each place they arrived. They made trading and intense communication with the local people and made a diplomatic relation with the leader of the region. For the time where Cheng Ho and his followers stayed in Nusantara, many of his followers also had a marriage relationship with the local people and then they chose to continue their life in Nusantara. In this position, assimilation and acculturation also happened, and what they did was also learning about how the local people do their life.

Because of Admiral Chengho and many of his followers were also a Muslim, they also had a private mission for spreading Islam in the local people who had not become a Muslim before. Through their assimilation and acculturation, Islam had already well-known in society. Since the coming of Admiral Cheng Ho, he could make Nusantara had a revolution especially for making life peaceful and harmonious. The way that Cheng Ho brought has become a pioneer for making a more tolerant society. Many centuries later, the creolized-Chinese or Chinese-descent in Nusantara, especially in Indonesia had so many ups and downs on their lives. The words creolized-Chinese was made by G. Willaim Skinner a well-known sinologist for other designations of Chinese-descent people. They faced many challenges for defending their-self. Since the coming of the Dutch colony, their existence was under fire. They prohibited to live like the indigenous people, including for embracing Islam. Exactly, the population of Chinese-Muslims in Nusantara at that time was at a good growth. They could be making a more harmonious life with the local indigenous people. But since the Dutch colony had a new rule for differentiating European, Eastern group, and local indigenous people, a long term living that they had growing been for a long time must be destroyed with the rules. Until the time when Indonesia's independence was proclaimed, the beliefs of local people to Chinese-descent people had not been coming back or being better, including Chinese-Muslims. Actually, there were also many creolized-Chinese people who want independence for Indonesia. They also helped Indonesia for being independent of the colony. Some of them became the BPUPKI members, a body investigating Indonesia's independence preparations.

After the independence of Indonesia, on the leadings of Soekarno, the livings of local people, Chinese, Chinese-descent was in a good relationship. But, since the G 30S PKI rebellion at the end of the Soekarno era, the Chinese people in Indonesia were under the threat from being perceived as communists. When the new era of Soeharto, the existence of Chinese ethnic became more threatened. Soeharto wanted to remove everything that was related to Chinese ethnicity. Also for Chinese beliefs, Kong Hu Cu was not recognized as an official religion in Indonesia. All the Chinese-descent people should not be showing their Chinese culture. This condition made local people have less trust in Chinese people, they had a relationship only for trading or with the local people that had been living together as neighbors for a long time. Exactly, the people of Chinese ethnic who lived in Indonesia most of them were a kind person, and not all of them doing or having something like what the government worried about. But, this sentiment made the local people who did not have a neighborhood live or another habit with Chinese people accidentally affected by abstaining Chinese ethnic.

The 1998 riot, has been the biggest ethnic conflict ever happened from the last thirty years. But actually, the ethnic conflicts in Indonesia already happened a long time ago since the becoming of the Dutch colony and it was also happened ethnocentrism on around 1900-1945. The causes of the 1998 riot, was because of the criticism of the New Order government, not limited to vote-rigging in the 1997 legislative election and economic collapse as a result of the Asian financial crisis. Then, the uncontrolled economic crisis made the resignation of President Soeharto on the people's demand. The economic problems that occurred were made Indonesian Chinese ethnics become the main targets of the violence. This sentiment was led by most people's assumptions of Indonesian Chinese holding the most economics sector in Indonesia. This 1998 riot also made some Indonesian people lost their trust in Pancasila. After the 1998 crisis, Indonesia tried to recover all sectors that have been affected by the riot. Especially for recovering the peaceful life in Indonesia. From the 1998 riot, the word Bhinneka Tunggal Ika has been destroyed by its own people, it's mean by Indonesian people who have that motto. So that, when the leading of Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia began to start growing the inter-ethnical harmonious life. The growth of multiethnic country had been started circa 2000. For being kept as a tolerant country, the Indonesian government had many efforts to make Indonesian people recover from all the bad impacts on the 1998 riot. The main thing that the government wanted to do was applying an education for strengthening the Indonesia nation's character. This kind of education could be implemented through civic education. Civic education was not only a kind of subject that could be taught only at school, but it could be implemented in the family and society.

Since the 2000s, many efforts for recovering people's national character. Finally, in 2010, the Indonesian government through the Education Minister had a Design for Nation Character Education. This design was made as to the basic framework for carrying out national character

education in various fields of life. This nation character education is apart from civic education. It can be taught also in society. In society, many community organizations can be taking part as a media for implementing Civic education especially for strengthening the national character. One of which is Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation in Surabaya. It has been doing its role since 1961 through the Indonesian Chinese-Islamic Association an association of Chinese-Muslim in Indonesia. This association temporarily vacuum on the New Order government exactly only changed their name because of the rule of the government for erasing the word "Tionghoa". Since 2002 until nowadays, this foundation already has an organization, mosque, and school in which they do their role for strengthening the Indonesian nation's character, especially for tolerant, socially caring, and peace-loving. These three characters are part of the Indonesian nation's character. So that, in this article the researcher wants to know more about how does Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya implements the nation character education for Indonesian Chinese-Muslims and the surrounding community in order to make a "more tolerant Indonesia" by caring each other and making a harmonious life.

## 2. METHODS

For knowing more the information about the implementation of strengthening nation character for Indonesian Chinese-Muslims with the surrounding community that holding by Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya, the researcher used the qualitative methods with a qualitative observation. Qualitative Observation is a process of research that uses subjective methodologies to gather systematic information or data. Since the focus on qualitative observation is the research process of using subjective methodologies to gather information or data. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) said that "*Qualitative research uses a variety kinds of qualitative inquiry in collecting data, (such as observation, interview, documenting, narrating, publishing, etc.)<sup>[1]</sup>*" In this research, related to the depth of the pluralism in Indonesia's social life, as Flick (2002) said that "*specific relevance to the study of social relations, owing to the fact of the pluralization of lifeworlds.<sup>[2]</sup>*" This method was applied for knowing more about the research subject and object included personal or community. "*Qualitative research was used to know more the participant perspective with some strategies that are interactive and flexible<sup>[3]</sup>*" (Imam, 2016). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) said that "*Qualitative research is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of a specific organization or event. It aims to provide an explicit rendering of the structure order, and broad patterns found among a group of participants. It is also called ethnmethodology or field research. It generates data about human groups in social settings.<sup>[4]</sup>*" It means that qualitative research was intended for knowing about social phenomenons from the angle of the participants. Based on the explanation above, we can

conclude that the qualitative method of this research was to gather information and data that are related to social life in a pluralist country, Indonesia. The researcher surfing deeper by observing Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo foundation Surabaya. This foundation is the part of the Indonesian Chinese-Islam Association in East Java. This foundation also has an organization, mosque, and schools. All the part of Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo foundation has its own role for implementing nation character education, especially for making "a more tolerant Indonesia" with strengthening tolerant, socially caring, and peace-loving character.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia is a pluralistic country with various ethnicities, nations, languages, religions, and cultures. Many people say that Indonesia is a melting pot of such diversity. Indonesian society is pluralist and multicultural. In accordance with the motto of Indonesia "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika", as Indonesians, we must be able to maintain and respect the diversity existing in Indonesia. Respecting diversity is a form of nationalism in Indonesian society that must be strengthened so as not to cause divisions. Lickona (Apeles and Pangalila, 2011: 85) said that "*strengthening the national character can be done by strengthening moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior<sup>[5]</sup>*". Then, strengthening the national character can be applied through school, family, and community. Here, the Chinese Muslim community as a minority in a minority, applies their love for the Indonesian homeland, by continuing to strengthen their national character, including by implementing an attitude of tolerance, social caring, and peace-loving. Through the Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation (*YHMCHI*) and the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (*PITI*), they as Creolized-Chinese strengthen their Indonesian nation character to show their nationalism towards Indonesia with various forms of education and activities. Therefore, for strengthening the national character implemented by the Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation and *PITI*, this can be realized as a form of application of civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic disposition. On doing nation character education, Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya as a community organization doing its role for having civic education. As we know that "*civic education and character education can be habituated on school, family, and society<sup>[6]</sup>*" (Ministry Education, 2010: 26). Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya also has them at all. HAJI Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya has kindergarten and elementary school for providing a media on strengthening nation character at school. Then as a foundation, It has its own organization that is in collaboration with Chinese-Islamic Association in East Java and also has a Cheng Ho Mosque. The reason why does implement a nation character means to strengthen is because the word "Character" was coming from the word Charassein meant "*sharpener or making deeper<sup>[7]</sup>*" (Bambang, 2013: 8). The character inherent in humans or

even a community and country, it shows their unique thing and differentiates them one to another. like what Character Education Design (2010: 7) It shows that "*character education is the unique values-both embedded in characteristics and embodied in behavior.*"<sup>[8]</sup>" Then if we have our own character, so we could show on our own characters that differentiate us from another country and proud of our national character. As Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary (2008: 68) Character is "*qualities that make somebody, a country, etc different from others.*"<sup>[9]</sup>"

Actually, how we differ our own character is depending on the individual on a community. Actually, all people in the world is coming from the same ancestors. So, if we are different in languages, cultures, tribes, ethnicities, etc it's because of human civilization. Each country may have a different nation character, but as a world citizen, we may have to make a peaceful life in our differences. Included for other nations that are having a life in a certain country as a minority. They come to another country, leave their homeland for certain reasons. Then, they spend their whole life in their new country or area from generation to generation, until there are assimilation and acculturation happened.

Living in a different ethnical background, sometimes make the minority having a different treatment like what we already discussed in the introduction. But, if the minority does not make any problem and can respect the local people it will be no worries anymore. The biggest Immigrant in Indonesia is Chinese-Ethnic. Since many centuries ago, they had been here for having their living. But they respect to the local people, as the biggest history for the coming of Chinese-ethnic was the era of Admiral Cheng Ho, they practice their whole life based on the diplomatic principle of Dinasti Ming, which is all human beings in all corners of the world come from one family and must not be hostile to each other, Chinese migrants must be able to adapt themselves to be good citizens, friendly relations with the nations they come to must be able to encourage the trade of both parties.

On the whole time the Chinese immigrant who lives in Indonesia until many of them choose to be Indonesian and feel that they are Indonesian although have a Chinese-descent. For strengthening their relationship with other indigenous Indonesian people, they keep their communication and try their best to show their respect to each other. They still also conserve their Chinese culture but only for celebrating the lunar year and praying as Kong Hu Cu for non-muslim Chinese.

Chinese ethnicity has already been admitted as one of the ethnicities in Indonesia. Many of Indonesian Chinese descents do their peaceful life in a neighborhood living. Since many tragedies or riots in the past, the Indonesian-Chinese people always on their effort for maintaining a harmonious life with all people as the same as an Indonesian.

Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya a part of the Indonesian Chinese-Islamic Association in East Java takes apart for strengthening Indonesian Nation Character. They have any education or activities they relate to all their habit in Indonesian or Islamic ways. For building and

strengthening, they used a good communication way for making a peaceful and harmonious life. This is like what Admiral Cheng Ho did in the fifteenth century, they did their diplomatic relation in a good communication way, respected the local people, and had a good habit with society. Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya also does what Admiral Cheng Ho had done in the past. They do a good communication way of making a harmonious life between a minority and a majority living in a multicultural country. This is like what Communitarian theory had said that "*Community is an important basis for citizenship. Communitarian thought tends to take for granted the existence of a relatively coherent and stable cultural group. A community is thus held to be a group conscious of itself, as a culturally defined entity, and is generally either a minority or majority. The cosmopolitan community can be used to express the reflexivity of community in terms of the recognition of group differences within as well as across groups. Communication is central to the community in the global age, allowing us to conceive of a community beyond unity and the communication of difference.*"<sup>[10]</sup>" (Delanty, 2002: 172 – Handbook of Citizenship Engin F Isin & Bryan S. Turner)

Based on this theory, Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya wants to apply a kind of national character education by doing such a civic education through the schools and the organization, which are they get a relation with the local people, the non-muslim Chinese people, and on the fellowship on Chinese-Muslims. On its school, Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya has a kindergarten and elementary school in which they have a curriculum for strengthening Indonesia nation character and combining with a Chinese cultural introduction. The teacher on Cheng Hoo School Surabaya, implementing civic education and nation character education in curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular. In the curricular, they teach the student about nation character education in all the subjects. They integrate the material for putting in the material for strengthening nation character. Then on the co-curricular and extra-curricular, they have some activities such as doing Indonesian traditional dance, Mandarin language, a martial sport, etc. In this teaching-learning activity, the teacher combines to teach about Indonesia, and some Chinese culture for remembering their ancestor was also Chinese-ethnic. Of course also for showing to the society that Chinese people and Chinese culture having a good character, loving peace, and respecting each other. Then, this foundation also collaborates with the organization and the Cheng Ho mosque for showing their respect to the society and make a tolerant habit. They usually do some social projects to collaborate with some organizations, such as Muslim organizations, Chinese organizations, and public organizations. They wanna strengthen the Chinese-Muslims character for always being tolerant, social caring, peace-loving, and respecting other ethnicities or religions. They can show to society and undirectly tell the public that Chinese-Muslims or Chinese people loving peaceful and harmonious life and not disturbing other religions or other

ethnic lives. In a certain event, although it is for commemorate Islamic day, national day, or Chinese lunar new year. They have many activities especially on doing a social project such as giving social support, basic needs support. Especially when this Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), they collaborate with Nahdhatul Ulama, Chinese Society Association Surabaya (*PMTS*), Bank Central Asia, and other organizations or institutions for giving support to the people who affected by the COVID-19 situation. These activities show how Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya maintain the brotherhood of the same Indonesian, although they are Chinese and they are a Muslim they try to show their social caring, peace caring, and tolerant for giving support to all people in their society without differentiating what ethnicities or what religions they are. From the activities they do, they show how they implementing nation character education and civic education for being a good citizen who has a good nation character and makes "a more tolerant Indonesia." This is what the minority dreams. They want to prove that they are Indonesian although they have a Chinese-descent. They also want to proves that Chinese-ethnic is not as bad as many people imagine before.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

From the results above, we can conclude that doing nation character education can be done through civic education by implementing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior that will become civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions. From this kind of character education, Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya doing their role for strengthening the nation's character for their community and society at their school, mosque, and organization. They can show, although they have Chinese ancestors they already deemed Indonesia as their homeland. They want to be an Indonesian completely and can live peacefully with the majority. They would like to show their respect character for implementing a tolerant, social caring, and peace-loving character. They do that national character as what their ancestors did many centuries ago. They apply nation character education depends on their ancestor values, Islamic values, and Indonesian values. So Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation Surabaya combine the good values that can pursue "a more tolerant Indonesia"

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