

SERVING AS A ROLE MODEL

Historical Perspectives on Muhammadiyah's Multicultural
Da'wa Towards Chinese Indonesians, 1960–1970¹

Nurjanah | Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Jakarta – Indonesia

Email: jajanurjanah@uhamka.ac.id

Abstract: Muhammadiyah has historically played a significant role in bridging conflict through multicultural da'wah. Although the organization originated in Yogyakarta and was initially intended only for the local community, it has evolved into a national and global *da'wa* movement that spans across ethnicities, including Chinese Indonesians. Literature discussing Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* is abundant, yet little is known about Muhammadiyah's multicultural *da'wa* and its impact on Chinese Muslim Indonesians. This study aims to reveal the historical role of Muhammadiyah in establishing multicultural *da'wa* for Chinese Indonesians. Using a qualitative historical research method and an interdisciplinary approach, the findings illustrate that due to the encouragement of the chairman of the Muhammadiyah Central Executive, K. H. Ibrahim, Chinese Muslims propagated Islam to the people within their ethnicity, through the establishment of PITI. Further, Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* method inspired Chinese Indonesians to carry out *da'wa* in a similar way. Chinese Indonesians who have converted to Islam preach Islam through the organization and *da'wa bil hāl*.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah, Multicultural *Da'wa*, Chinese Muslims, PITI.

Introduction

Historically, Islam is not a new concept for Chinese Indonesians. They have known Islam long before it came to Java. Islam was chosen as the religion to be followed partly because Islam does not teach a

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caste system.² The colonial era witnessed a gradual growth in the number of Chinese Indonesian Muslims.³ What we see today, including their involvement in politics,⁴ is a result of long process.

Chinese tradition, including their philosophy of life, can be clearly seen in the Sultanate of Cirebon's track record, which incidentally represents Islamic rule. On several sides of the Cirebon Sultanate, some ornaments depict the traditions and beliefs of the Chinese people. Among the ornaments are ceramics attached to the walls of the palace room, with a picture of a dragon, a symbol of the Chinese empire in Chinese tradition.⁵

In the 1960s, Muhammadiyah became concerned about the fact that Chinese Indonesians preferred religions other than Islam and viewed Islam as a lowly religion. K. H. Ibrahim, the chairman of Muhammadiyah, was the first to have these concerns regarding Chinese Indonesians.

Muhammadiyah has historically played a significant role in bridging conflict through multicultural *da'wa*. Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* to Chinese Indonesians helped give rise to a *da'wa* institution aimed specifically at Chinese Indonesians: the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (*Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia*; PITI). Although the organization originated in Yogyakarta and was initially only intended for the local community, it has developed into a national and global *da'wa* movement as well as across ethnicities *da'wa*.⁶ It also shows Chinese Indonesians' loyalty to the nation.⁷

² Ong Mario Karsono, "Chinese Tradition Practices by Chinese Muslim Community of Surabaya," *Humanity and Sciences Journal* 2, 2 (2007): 110–123.

³ Muhammad Ali, "Chinese Muslims in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia," *Islam in Southeast Asia* 7, 2 (2007): 1–22.

⁴ Hertzman, Emily Zoe, "Performing piety in public: Ethnic politics and interreligious harmony in Indonesia," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 13, 3 (2023).

⁵ Didin Saepudin, Mukhoyyaroh and M. Ikhsan Tanggok, "Chinese Culture in The Cirebon Sultanate: Symbolic and Philosophical Meanings," *Insaniyat Journal of Islam and Humanities*, 6, 1 (2021): 15–28.

⁶ In Yogyakarta there are already Islamic education for Chinese Muslim. see for instance; I. Machali, F. Rosyadi, W. Hidayati, & M. Umar, "Informal Islamic Education for Minority Muslims: Lessons from Chinese Ethnic Minority Muslims in Yogyakarta," *Ulumuna* 27, 2 (2023).

⁷ Achmad Muhibin Zuhri, Winarto Eka Wahyudi, Abdulloh Hamid, "Chinese Muslims' Ways of Being Nationalist: Combining Islamic Cosmopolitanism, Acculturation and Social Roles," *QIJS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 9, 2 (2021).

Literature that discusses Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* is abundant. However, studies on Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* in relation to multiculturalism remain limited. Moreover, research on Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* towards Chinese Indonesians, to the best of the author's knowledge, has not been conducted.⁸

This study examines how Muhammadiyah carried out its *da'wa* to various ethnicities and the impacts of Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* on Chinese Indonesians. This research is important for at least two reasons: First, the negative sentiment among Indonesians towards ethnically Chinese people, and vice versa, has remained in society. Himawan's research findings illustrated that the negative prejudices of Indonesians towards ethnically Chinese Indonesians still exist today.⁹ These prejudices often cause conflicts with Chinese Indonesians. Moreover, they are underrepresented in Indonesian history books which obscure their existence and role.¹⁰

Second, Muhammadiyah, as a *da'wa* organization, historically had a close relationship with Chinese Indonesians and can serve as a bridge between Chinese Indonesians and other ethnic groups in Indonesia. Of course, the historical role of Muhammadiyah in fostering Chinese Indonesians is important to explore because the organization has had a positive impact on creating harmonious relations between Chinese Indonesians and non-Chinese Indonesians.

This study uses a qualitative historical research method. The historical approach critically examines and analyses historical records to find authentic and reliable data. In a more specific sense, the historical research method proposed by Gilbert J. Garraghan is a systematic set of rules and principles used to collect historical sources

⁸ Some research results that discuss the role of Muhammadiyah in *da'wa* for example Suyatno, "Progressive Islamic Education: Bridging the Gap of Islam, Indonesianness, and Modernity," *The Qualitative Report* 27, 1 (2021): pp. 226–242; PP Muhammadiyah, *1 Abad Muhammadiyah: Gagasan Pembaruan Sosial Keagamaan* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2010); Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises Over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, C. 1910–2010* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010).

⁹ Eunike Mutiara Himawan, <https://theconversation.com/22-tahun-setelah-kerusuhan-anti-cina-mei-1998-riset-ungkap-prasangka-dan-trauma-masih-ada-138962>, accessed on 6 July 2021.

¹⁰ Achmad Ubaedillah, "The Minority And The State: Chinese Muslims in the Modern History of Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah* 61, 1 (2023).

effectively, evaluate them critically, and propose a synthesis of the results in a written form.¹¹

Muhammadiyah's Da'wa Method

Since its establishment, Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* was developed based on how to overcome various problems faced by the community. Muhammadiyah was founded by Muhammad Darwisy, who changed his name to K. H. Ahmad Dahlan after performing a pilgrimage. Muhammadiyah was founded with two purposes: first, promoting and encouraging the teaching and learning of religion in the Dutch East Indies, and, second, promoting and encouraging a way of life according to Islamic teachings.

Muhammadiyah's goal was deliberately crafted, considering that Dahlan had great concerns about the condition of the Indonesian people at the time. Religiously, Indonesian people were very attached to occult and shamanic practices. In terms of education, they were very backward.

Dahlan considered the education system very dichotomous. On the one hand, the *santri* community only prioritized the teaching of Islam and thought that what came from the (Western) colonialists, including modern science and using Latin letters, was *haram* (forbidden).¹² On the other hand, there was a small group of Indonesian people who were educated in the West. This group lived their lives in a Western way. They did not know Islam well, except for nominal Islam. They prioritized modern science and considered religion a feature of backward life. Seeing the unequal society, Dahlan tried to accommodate both groups of people by establishing a *Madrasah* (school) that taught religious sciences as well as modern sciences, such as algebra, earth science, and others. In addition to teaching Arabic letters and languages, Dahlan taught Latin letters and foreign languages such as Dutch and English.¹³

Da'wa in education was additionally carried out by Dahlan in government schools. Most of these schools' students were Muslims, but the schools did not provide Islamic lessons for their students.

¹¹ Dudung Abdurrahman, *Metode Penelitian Sejarah*, (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu 1999), 44.

¹² Ahmad Adaby Darban, *Sejarah Kauman: Mengungkap Identitas Kampung Muhammadiyah* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2011), 96–99.

¹³ Ibid., 99.

Dahlan taught Islam in government schools, with official permission given by the principals. This teaching was not included in the school curriculum but as a kind of extracurricular activity. Dahlan's way of introducing Islam was very interesting, gaining sympathy from students. Some students even asked him for permission to study more deeply at his home. In addition, Dahlan felt deep concern regarding the economic conditions of poor Indonesian people. To address poverty, he tried to build a poorhouse aimed at empowering the poor, as well as nursing homes intended to promote the welfare of the elderly.

Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* was not only realized in the form of conventional religious teaching but also social aspects, including the establishment of hospitals, modern schools, and poorhouses. Muhammadiyah's presence and contribution to various aspects of the life of Indonesians are concrete. Due to its spectacular role, Deliar Noer considers Muhammadiyah one of the largest and most important modern organizations in Indonesia and even in Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Muhammadiyah, according to Kuntowijoyo, has worked in all areas of life through each of its programs.¹⁵ Muhammadiyah has produced cadres who have played an active role in seizing Indonesia's independence. Among these cadres were General Sudirman, Ir. Soekarno, Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, and many others. Thus, Muhammadiyah is not only an Islamic movement and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* movement but also a national movement.

Muhammadiyah continues to contribute to the country through various charities to create a just and prosperous society under the protection and forgiveness of Allah SWT. This is the realization of *Baldatun Thayyibatun Warabbun Ghafur*, as stated in the fifth principle of Muhammadiyah's Faith and Aspirations for Life. The General Chairperson of Muhammadiyah for the 2015–2020 period described these principles as Muhammadiyah's affirmation that the Republic of Indonesia is a national consensus that has been completed.¹⁶ This shows Muhammadiyah's consistent support of nationalism.

Muhammadiyah's nationalism has consequences for its view of multiculturalism. This view requires fair treatment of the various

¹⁴ Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam di Indonesia 1900–1942* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1991).

¹⁵ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam Interpretasi untuk Aksi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1991).

¹⁶ Haedar Nashir, *Muhammadiyah Gerakan Pembaruan* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2014), 134.

realities of Indonesian society, including the diversity of its population, including Chinese Indonesians. Therefore, the format of *da'wa* is created to accommodate the multicultural Indonesian society.

Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* is oriented to *da'wa bil hal*. This *da'wa* method is conveyed orally and by carrying out concrete advocacy on social issues. This method of *da'wa* is congruent with the ideals and vision of Muhammadiyah to realize a truly Islamic society that is free from superstition and disbelief. When Muhammadiyah established a health clinic, for example, K. H. Ahmad Dahlan and his successors wanted to raise awareness to the public that 'if you are sick, it is not a shaman or a normal place to seek treatment from, which contains polytheistic values, but people should go to a doctor who is scientifically rational and can be accounted for'. Likewise, when K. H. Ahmad Dahlan and his successors built a poorhouse, he wanted to teach that wealth is not obtained by worshipping objects that are considered sacred but should be created by helping each other.

Chinese Indonesians' Encounter with Muhammadiyah

The first Chinese Indonesian to be acquainted with Muhammadiyah was Abdul Karim Oei Tjeng Hien, better known as Abdul Karim Oei. He was born in Padang in 1905 as a second-generation Chinese Indonesian. His parents had migrated to Indonesia from Fujian (Hokkien), South China in the mid-19th century. Before embracing Islam, he practiced Confucianism and Buddhism but later converted to Adventist Christianity while attending HCS, a school built by the Dutch government specifically for Chinese people. Although Oei was a Christian, he admitted that he was not diligent in practicing his Christian faith.¹⁷

As Oei admitted, the influence of his Minangkabau and Chinese descent led him to migrate and engage in business activities in Bintuhan, Bengkulu. He later became a successful businessman, as evidenced by his ability to purchase a Chevrolet car at the beginning of his business career. Oei was able to establish a business communication network with the natives, the Dutch government, and fellow Chinese businessmen. After two years of living in Bintuhan, he continued to embrace Adventist Christianity, although he had never been to church, partly because there was no church in Bintuhan at the

¹⁷ Abdul Karim Oei Tjeng Hien, *Mengabdi Agama, Nusa dan Bangsa* (Jakarta: P.T. Gunung Agung, 1982), 198.

time.¹⁸ The main reason for his lack of commitment to Adventist Christianity was that he felt that his Christian religion did not bring him peace of mind.¹⁹

Additionally, Oei read many Islamic books and magazines, which convinced and led him to embrace Islam. Furthermore, he compared the teachings of Islam with those of Christianity and concluded that Islamic teachings were more suitable for his life.²⁰ In this regard, Oei went to Ustadz Abdul Kadir to declare his Muslim faith. Kadir was surprised by Oei's seriousness in embracing Islam, as he did not expect someone like Oei—a successful Chinese businessman—to convert to Islam.²¹ Oei's commitment to Islam was profound. Indeed, this was evident in how he continued to deepen his understanding of the religion by studying under a teacher named Fikir Daud. This dedication made him a natural example of an ideal Muslim convert. For instance, he refused when given *zakat*, saying, 'I am not a convert (*muallaf*) but a preacher (*muballigh*)'. Every month of Ramadan he calculated his *zakat* to distribute it among those entitled to receive it.²²

Oei's embrace of Islam was an unusual leap for a Chinese Indonesian person, especially at that time. According to Hamka Oei, he was a pioneer in the Islamization of the Indonesian Chinese. Although he was mocked, he remained firm in his stance and ideals. Hamka further emphasized that Oei succeeded in his struggle to achieve his goal.²³ When he decided to become a Muslim, he faced a strong reaction from both his parents and his environment.²⁴ Nonetheless, herein lies Oei's persistence in adhering to the principles he believes in. He was not afraid of the risks faced when the principles

¹⁸ Mely G Tan, "A Minority Group Embracing the Majority Religion: The Ethnic Chinese Muslim in Indonesia," in Mely G. Tan, *Etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia Kumpulan Tulisan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008), 78.

¹⁹ Muhamad Ali, "Chinese Muslims in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia," *Islam in Southeast Asia* 7, 2 (2007): 1-22.

²⁰ Leo Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa dan Identitas Indonesia* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2010), 141.

²¹ Hien, *Mengabdi Agama, Nusa dan Bangsa*, 198.

²² Suryadinata, *Tokoh Tionghoa dan Identitas Indonesia*, 142-143.

²³ Yayasan Rahmat Semesta, *Da'wah dan Asimilasi* (Jakarta: Yayasan Rahmat Semesta, 1979), 12.

²⁴ Amen Budiman, *Masyarakat Islam Tionghoa di Indonesia* (Semarang: Tanjung sari, 1979), 60.

caused conflict with those around him. Such an attitude is not possible if one's conversion to Islam is only for pragmatic purposes.

The next leap was when he became interested in Muhammadiyah's reform ideas, which led him to join the organization. At first, Oei was more interested in establishing a branch of the Islamic Party, namely Sarekat Islam, in Bintuhan. In his view, Sarekat Islam was mostly engaged in trade and anti-colonial activities. His friends disagreed with this goal. They believed that to improve the people, the establishment of Muhammadiyah was more strategic, considering that religious practices at the time were already mixed with local traditions. It seems that Oei's friends' opinions appealed to him. What Muhammadiyah does is in line with what he wanted, which was to advance society religiously, socially, and economically.

When Oei officially became the administrator of Muhammadiyah in Bintuhan, he faced various challenges. He was not only shunned by his family and community but also by the Muslims around him. At night, his house was pelted with various objects, including human waste. Once again, Oei remained firm in his stance to continue being a Muslim and a member of Muhammadiyah. This choice may be attributed to Oei's view that religion must be based on valid arguments, namely the *Qur'an* and *al-Sunnah/al-Hadith*.

The Muhammadiyah *da'wa* designed by Dahlan seems to have influenced Karim Oei to preach Islam progressively and modernistically. His main motivation was to promote an Islamic society, and he found a method to do so through the Muhammadiyah organization. Oei's activities and contributions to Muhammadiyah are very significant. His involvement at Muhammadiyah was very intense; in the end, he not only became the administrator of Muhammadiyah in Bintuhan but also became the Consul of Muhammadiyah in Bengkulu. His election as Consul of Muhammadiyah in Bengkulu cannot be separated from the role of Bung Karno, who encouraged him to pursue the position. His activities attracted the attention of the central leadership of Muhammadiyah, and Oei was subsequently asked to join the Muhammadiyah Central Executive.

Muhammadiyah was led by K. H. Ibrahim when Karim Oei became one of the organization's central leaders. At the time, K. H. Ibrahim believed that Chinese Indonesians were more attracted to the church than the mosque. Although there were Chinese Indonesians

who converted to Islam, most of them were poor. In the name of converts, they carry *kampil* everywhere while asking for help.

This contrasted with non-Muslim Chinese people, who wore neat, nice, and dapper clothes. They also had respectable professional backgrounds, such as doctors, engineers, and merchants. The words of K. H. Ibrahim motivated Oei. He realized that people of his ethnicity did prefer other religions than Islam. Hence, he tried to establish a *da'wa* organization aimed at the Chinese people.²⁵

The Impact of Muhammadiyah's *Da'wa* on Chinese Indonesians: Serves as a Role Model

Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* has had a significant impact on Chinese Indonesians in at least two ways. First, Muhammadiyah serves as a role model for giving *da'wa* to people of Chinese descent. Second, it has led to the emergence of *da'wa* activists from within the Chinese Muslim community. This study discusses two individuals with strategic roles in *da'wa* within Chinese Muslim communities; Syarif Tanudjaja and Junus Jahja.

Muhammadiyah's *da'wa*, which emphasizes concrete steps to overcome societal problems, has attracted the attention of Chinese Indonesians through preaching. As explained earlier, Oei chose to become a member of Muhammadiyah rather than his initial choice of the Sarekat Islam Party because he believed that Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* method was best suited to bring about changes in society, especially for the Chinese.

Oei subsequently established a *da'wa* organization aimed at fellow ethnic groups, namely the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (PITI). The establishment of this organization was intended to provide advocacy for converts, especially Chinese converts, who were ostracized by their families and communities for embracing Islam. It was common knowledge that when Chinese people embraced Islam, they would be ostracized from their families and communities. Chinese people who converted to Islam suffered losses in their businesses because they would take on new restrictions in managing the business, for example, refraining from selling *haram* products, such as alcohol and ham. Another disadvantage was that, in general, Chinese businesses were family-run, so when Chinese people converted to Islam, according to Ong Mario Karsono, they would be ostracized

²⁵ Hien, *Mengabdikan Agama, Nusa dan Bangsa*, 198.

financially and would suffer economically. Thus, the choice to become Muslim posed a significant dilemma for Chinese people.²⁶

After becoming Muslim, Chinese Indonesians, like other Muslims, have the responsibility of performing their religion correctly²⁷ and later prophage it to others in form of *da'wa*, especially to their fellow ethnic groups. The responsibility of *da'wa* was getting stronger, as K. H. Ibrahim reminded followers of the disparity between the choice of religions adopted by the Chinese Indonesians. The disparity was not only in the number of individuals who embraced Islam but also in the characteristics of adherents, as previously discussed.

When the *da'wa* movement was carried out by people of Chinese descent, especially in the 1960s, they made Muhammadiyah a role model in *da'wa*. One of the models that were replicated was the establishment of an organization as a medium of *da'wa*. Carrying out *da'wa* in an organizational way was indeed a decision within Muhammadiyah itself.²⁸ The use of organizations is intended at gathering all the strengths and potentials of followers to optimally carry out *da'wa*. The Chinese Indonesians under the command of Karim Oei established an organization aimed to gather all the potential and strengths of the Chinese people, resulting in the organization PITI.

The creation of PITI was inseparable from the concern of several Chinese Muslim leaders regarding Islamic *da'wa* aimed at Chinese citizens. The establishment of this organization was specifically intended to provide Islamic teachings and *da'wa* to Chinese Indonesians and provide guidance for converts, especially when implementing Islamic teachings in non-Muslim environments. The organization also guides Chinese Indonesians in assimilating into Indonesian society.²⁹

In addition to the purpose of Islamic *da'wa*, the presence of PITI aims to guide converts in adapting to their new environment. This

²⁶ Ong Mario Karsono, "Chinese Tradition Practices by Chinese Muslim Community of Surabaya," *Humanity and Sciences Journal* 2, 2 (2007): 110–123.

²⁷ Choirul Mahfud, et.al., "Islamic Law Practice among East Javanese Chinese Muslims; PITI's Contribution on Its Enforcement," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial* 19, 1 (2024)

²⁸ Haedar Nashir, *Memahami Ideologi Muhammadiyah* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2014), 101–102.

²⁹ Choirul Mahfud, "Chinese Muslim Community Development in Contemporary Indonesia: Experiences of PITI in East Java," *Studi Islamika* 25, 3 (2018): 471–501.

adaptation is mainly related to the beliefs that converts held in the past, especially those that are contrary to the Islamic creed. For example, an important tradition in Chinese culture is praying for deceased parents and performing devotion to ancestors. This tradition must be abandoned when converts embrace Islam. Likewise, converts must cease consuming food and drink that are forbidden by Islam and adapt to the various religious practices and ceremonies of Islam.

PITI is, therefore, an organization founded by Chinese Indonesians to carry out Islamic *da'wa* among other Chinese Indonesians. The inclusion of the word 'Chinese' in the name of the organization aims to attract attention, especially among Chinese people, but it is not without criticism. Those who agree with the use of the word 'Chinese' believe that this word has benefits in attracting Chinese people to embrace Islam. However, some disagree with including the word in the organization's name, arguing that it gives the impression of exclusivity.³⁰

The birth of PITI cannot be separated from the role of K. H. Ibrahim, the chairman of the Muhammadiyah Central Executive at the time, who suggested that Karim Oei establish an organization in the context of Islamic *da'wa* activities among Chinese Indonesians. Ibrahim further said that Chinese Muslims should actively attract Chinese Indonesians to Islam.

According to Karim Oei, at the time, K. H. Ibrahim explained that the Chinese were more drawn to the church than the mosque. Although some Chinese people converted to Islam, most of them were poor. In the name of being converts, they carried *kampil* everywhere while asking for help. Meanwhile, K. H. Ibrahim compared these individuals to those who attended the church and wore neat, nice, and dapper clothes. They also had respectable professional backgrounds, such as doctors, engineers and merchants.³¹

The words of K.H. Ibrahim seemed to motivate Abdul Karim Oei Tjeng Hien. He realized that people of his ethnicity did prefer other religions than Islam. Thus, he established a *da'wa* organization aimed at the Chinese community.

Muslim Chinese people are aware that other Chinese Indonesians tend to prefer Christianity, Buddhism, and Catholicism in their choice of religion. Very few Chinese choose Islam as their faith. Therefore,

³⁰ Budiman, *Masyarakat Islam Tionghoa di Indonesia*, 43.

³¹ Hien, *Mengabdikan Agama, Nusa dan Bangsa*, 195–197.

Chinese Muslims feel the need to carry out Islamic *da'wa* within their community. Sociologically, K. H Ibrahim's argument is reasonable. For example, his argument aligns with the theory of identity proposed by sociologists. In line with this theory is the theory of '*ashabiyah*' (solidarity of groups), about which ibn Khaldun explicitly writes "(In fact, religious *da'wa* without the '*ashabiyah*' approach cannot be carried out perfectly)".³²

Furthermore, he gave an example that the success of the religious *da'wa* movement carried out by the apostles of Allah was the result of the apostles having similar cultural customs with the people to whom they were speaking. Thus, *da'wa* will not reach perfection without '*ashabiyah*' (solidarity of groups or primordialism).

Historically, Chinese Muslims have carried out *da'wa* efforts, especially toward non-Muslim Chinese people, since the colonial period. These *da'wa* efforts were carried out through modern media, both through organizations and mass media. The creation of PITI in the 1960s was not a breakthrough in the *da'wa* movement among the Chinese, considering that in the 1930s, Chinese Muslims had already done so.

Da'wa efforts through modern media, such as the establishment of the Islamic Party in Sulawesi, were initiated by Ong Kie Ho. The Chinese Islamic Association was founded by H. Yap A Siong/H. Abdus Somad in Medan in 1936 and the Chinese Islamic Party of Indonesia was founded by Liem Kie Chie. In mass media, the *Wasilah* magazine was created by Tjoa Goan Lian and Tam Kin Peng, who also served as the editor-in-chief of the magazine.³³

The difference between PITI and previous *da'wa* organizations is that the latter, especially during the colonial period, were still local, while PITI was a national *da'wa* organization. Accordingly, PITI was established in several regions following the establishment of the central PITI in Jakarta. With the presence of a national Islamic *da'wa* organization, leaders hoped to attract the attention of the Chinese Indonesians on a larger scale.

According to Tanudjaja, PITI is a combination of the Chinese Islamic Association (PIT) led by H. Abdusomad Yap A Siong and the Chinese Muslim Association (PTM) led by the late Kho Goan Tjin.

³² Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, n.d), 159.

³³ Ali, "Chinese Muslims in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia, 1-22.

PIT and PTM, which were first established in Medan and Bengkulu before Indonesian independence, were still local in nature. At the time, the influence of PIT and PTM had not been felt by either Chinese Muslims or Indonesian Muslims. For this reason, to realize the development of *ukhawah Islamiyah* among Chinese Muslims, PIT and PTM volunteered to move to Jakarta and merge into one organization, forming PITI.³⁴

In Oei's explanation, K. H. Ibrahim's message to carry out *da'wa* to his fellow ethnic groups always resonated with him. However, at the time, he had no one to discuss it with. In the end, he met Yap A Siong (Abdul Somad) in Bengkulu in 1953 and found that they shared the same spirit of *da'wa*, particularly among Chinese Indonesians. Finally, in 1953, an organization was formed, named the Chinese Islamic Association (PIT). In this case, Oei served as an advisor while declining the position of chairman, although all organizational needs were facilitated by him.

The impact of Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* on the Chinese Indonesians is most notably the emergence of *da'wa* activists among the Chinese Muslims themselves. In addition to Abdul Karim Oei Tjeng Hien, two other individuals have made significant contributions to *da'wa* activities directed at Chinese Indonesians.

First, Syarif Tanudjaja was born to a Chinese family who embraced Buddhism. He was born in Cianjur, on 20 March 1950, with the Chinese name Tan Lip Siang. Tanudjaja received God's guidance when he faced a period of great difficulty. He was in a lot of debt, which he took out to help others. However, his good intentions did not yield positive results, leaving him in a complicated situation. In his distress, Tanudjaja sought answers from his religion. However, after reading the holy book of his faith, he found confusion rather than clarity.³⁵ Tanudjaja, then, turned to the religion of his parents, Buddhism and Confucianism. Yet, even there, he found no answers. Eventually, he began exploring Islam.

His introduction to Islam began when he worked as a contractor selling building materials and office stationery. At that time, he had many Muslim friends.³⁶ From his Muslim friends, Tanudjaja began to learn about Islamic practices, such as performing *wudhu* (purification)

³⁴ <http://pitidki.wordpress.com/>, accessed on June 10, 2022.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Junus Jahja, *WNI Beragama Islam* (Jakarta: Yayasan Karim Oei, 1991), 28.

before prayer, the obligations of fasting and *zakat*, and the core teaching of Islam—monotheism (the oneness of Allah).³⁷

One of his friends, Syarif, frequently engaged him in discussions comparing Christianity and Islam. From these discussions, he was motivated to attempt reading more Islamic religious texts. Despite his growing interest in Islam, Tanudjaja did not immediately convert or embrace Islam, until one day, he had a dream. In the dream, he was about to be killed by a group of people, but those people caught fire and disappeared when he recited '*takbīr*' three times. The experience in the dream seemed strange to him because, in his life, he had never previously learned the *takbīr*, but in his dream, he was able to recite the sentence fluently. This dream kept repeating up to four times. This dream further influenced him to embrace Islam.³⁸

Tanudjaja interpreted the dream as a form of divine guidance from Allah. He believed that without Allah's guidance, the dream would not have had any impact on his spiritual journey.³⁹ Thus, spiritual aspect is crucial in the process and in being Muslims.⁴⁰ However, according to Syamhudi, the conversion to Islam is not merely a factor of guidance. There are sociological factors that lead Chinese Indonesians, in particular, to embrace Muslim.⁴¹

In 1980, after converting to Islam, Tanudjaja tried to make acquainted with Karim Oei. According to his account, when he first searched for the PITI office, which he often heard about, the office was rather difficult to find; although PITI was very popular, formally, the organization did not yet have a permanent office. Later in the same year, Tanudjaja became the administrator of the central PITI as Secretary General. His activities at PITI continue to this day, both in the Central Executive Board (DPP) and in the DKI Jakarta Regional Leadership Council (DPW). Tanudjaja was a historical actor who has all PITI historical documents. Although he never held the position of

³⁷ <http://pitidki.wordpress.com/>, accessed on June 10, 2022.

³⁸ <http://pitidki.wordpress.com/>, accessed on June 10, 2022.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Acep Aripudin, et.al., "The Spiritual Experience of Chinese Muslim Minorities Post-1998 Reformation: A study of Chinese Muslims becoming Indonesians," HTS Teologiese Studies, 78 4 (2022).

⁴¹ M. Hasyim Syamhudi, *Satu Atap Beda Agama Pendekatan Sosiologi Dakwah di Kalangan Masyarakat Muslim Tionghoa* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Ilmu, 2013), 274.

General Chairperson of PITI, his activities in PITI and Islamic *da'wa*, especially among the Chinese, were very influential.

Tanudjaja's activities in preaching Islam to the Chinese were quite reasonable, considering that some Chinese Indonesians view Islam as a religion that is far from progress. According to Tanudjaja, Chinese people still think of Islam as a religion that is synonymous with backward thinking, laziness, ignorance, slums, coercion, and violence (such as radicalism and terrorism).

The negative view of Islam among most Chinese people was mainly caused by the colonial government's policies on social classification. The regulation explained that Chinese Indonesians who embraced Islam would automatically have their social states relegated to the indigenous social class. In addition to these factors, according to Budiman, there is a widespread view among Chinese people that people of Chinese descent who embrace Islam are often economically disadvantaged. They become beggars expecting the mercy of others while saying, 'I am a convert (*muallaf*) to Islam'. Likewise, when Chinese women convert to Islam, they are often ridiculed for entering into polygamy.⁴²

Furthermore, the behaviour of Muslims gives a strong impression of prejudice towards people of Chinese descent. In fact, this behaviour is often an obstacle to the *da'wa* of Islam toward Chinese Indonesians. For example, missionaries often give lectures explaining that when Muslims are in debt, they should pay it off. However, in reality, Chinese shops often owe a lot of debt to indigenous people, and many of them are unable to pay their debt. Likewise, the looting that is often carried out by natives against the shops owned by Chinese Indonesians has strengthened the Chinese Indonesians' negative views towards Islam.⁴³

Given these circumstances, Tanudjaja's decision to convert to Islam brought with it significant responsibilities. He often rejected people who wanted to convert to Islam only because of pragmatic interests, for example, for marriage. Instead, he encouraged prospective converts to study Islam seriously and gain a deep understanding of its teachings. Only after they had demonstrated a

⁴² Budiman, *Masyarakat Islam Tionghoa di Indonesia*, 54–55.

⁴³ Ibid., 55.

genuine commitment to learning about Islam would he agree to guide them in embracing the faith.⁴⁴

The second figure among Chinese Indonesian da'wa activist is Junus Jahja. He was born in Jakarta in 1927 with the Chinese name Law Chuan Tho. After completing high school, he pursued higher education in economics at the Nederlandse Economische Hogeschool University in Rotterdam, Netherlands.⁴⁵

While in the Netherlands, Jahja was active in Indonesian student organizations. He even encouraged his Chinese friends to leave ethnic-based organizations and those rooted Chinese descent to join national organizations.⁴⁶ Thus, since a young age, Jahja was a pioneer of Indonesian nationalism among others in his ethnic group. Jahja is an exception to the Dutch group. Although he was educated within the colonial education system, he firmly chose Indonesia as his nation.

Jahja embraced Islam in 1979, a decision celebrated with great joy by Islamic figures, especially among Chinese Indonesian Muslims. PITI as an institution that facilitates Chinese converts specifically celebrated Jahja's conversion in the commemoration of the *Isra Mi'raj* of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The event garnered significant publicity in the mass media.⁴⁷

After embracing Islam, Jahja made a significant contribution to the dynamics of Chinese Muslims and PITI in particular. Jahja's contribution to Islamic da'wa was mainly in the distribution of da'wa writings in the form of brochures, books, and writings in the mass media. He also offered counselling for converts because Chinese Indonesians are often ostracized from their extended family after converting to Islam. He offered counselling at the Karim Oei Foundation in Jakarta.⁴⁸

Furthermore, he initiated the pattern of fostering children for those who converted to Islam, especially the younger generation. In the practice of fostering children, young Chinese people who have just

⁴⁴ <http://pitidki.wordpress.com/>, accessed on June 10, 2022.

⁴⁵ Junus Jahja, *Acong Kemana...?* (Jakarta: Lembaga Pengkajian Masalah Pembaharuan, 1999), 20.

⁴⁶ Junus Jahja, *Peranakan Idealis dari Lie Eng Hok sampai Teguh Karya* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2003), 269.

⁴⁷ Semesta, *Da'wah dan Asimilasi*.

⁴⁸ Junus Jahja, *Pembaruan dan Islam, Aneka Pemikiran* (Jakarta: Yayasan Haji Karim Oei, 1999), 28–29.

converted to Islam are ‘entrusted’ to Muslim families for a few years to learn Islam well.⁴⁹ A notable example is A-Lun, who changed his name to Jusuf after converting to Islam and was entrusted to Buya Hamka.

In Jahja’s view, Islamic *da’wa* is closely linked to assimilation. He argued that Chinese people in Thailand and the Philippines live in harmony with the local indigenous people because they share the same religion. As a Chinese person who was active in the total assimilation movement, Jahja believed that it was proper for the Chinese to merge with the tribes in Indonesia. In Jahja’s view, converting to Islam was one of the methods for total assimilation. Jahja’s logic, immersing oneself in the local community would eliminate all forms of prejudice, fostering a harmonious inner atmosphere framed by the principle of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*.

Ukhuwah Islamiyah is important to foster feelings of love, brotherhood, glory, and mutual trust towards one’s brothers and sisters in faith. It erases all forms of differences, whether ethnicity, race, or skin colour. Considering that these teachings should encourage Muslims to become an integral part of each other, they should also accept each other’s shortcomings.

Jahja explicitly explained that there was a need to disseminate correct information about Islam to Chinese Indonesians, especially to rectify the opinion that Islam was inferior that resulted from the propaganda of the Dutch colonial government. Jahja straightforwardly explained, ‘Information about Islam for [those of] Chinese descent is very important is to counter colonial propaganda for centuries [*sic*]. Among these propagandas is that a Muslim has four wives, likes to marry and divorce’.⁵⁰

The presence of PITI is certainly suitable for this function mentioned by Junus Jahja. Most Chinese people continue to believe this propaganda. Considering the persistence of Chinese Indonesians in preaching and building social relations between the Chinese and other ethnic groups in Indonesia, it is evident that Muhammadiyah has played a strategic role in the cross-ethnic Islamic *da’wa*.

Closing this writing, it is important to note that the influence of Muhammadiyah on Chinese Muslims can be observed in their religious

⁴⁹ Junus Jahja, *Islam di Mata WNI* (Jakarta: Yayasan Haji Karim Oei, 1993), 91–94.

⁵⁰ Junus Jahja, “Ethnic Chinese Assimilation in Indonesia and Islam; a Personal Experience,” *Paper* presented at an International Symposium on Politico-Islamic Movements in the Malay World, Taipei, on May 6 2000.

beliefs and practices. The connection between Chinese Muslims and Muhammadiyah is evident both in religious concepts and existing traditions to this day. In terms of religious concepts, for example, the Chinese Muslim community bases their religious beliefs on the Quran and Hadith. PITI does not adhere to any particular school of jurisprudence (*mazhab*) as a binding reference. Similar to Muhammadiyah, PITI accommodates various legal school (*mazhab*) as long as they are based on acceptable evidence (*maqbulah*).

In terms of religious traditions, the Chinese Muslim community is heavily influenced by Muhammadiyah. For instance, in mosques built by Chinese Muslims, the pulpit (*mimbar*) is generally constructed at the same level as the mosque floor. Similarly, the post-prayer *dhiker* (remembrance of Allah) in Chinese Muslim mosques is done silently (*sir*) and individually. Friday prayers in mosques built by Chinese Muslims are also announced with a single call to prayer (*adzan*). Additionally, certain religious traditions such as "the funeral ceremony" the *tablilan* for 1 to 7 days, 40 days, and so on, are not practiced among Chinese Muslims. Similarly, pregnancy-related rituals like the 4-month and 7-month pregnancy ceremonies are not observed by Chinese Muslims. This is likely due to the influence of Muhammadiyah's *da'wah* among the Chinese ethnic community.

The religious beliefs and practices of Chinese Muslims appear to differ significantly from those of the majority of Muslims in Indonesia. Nevertheless, similar to Muhammadiyah followers, Chinese Muslims still appreciate the existing differences. In some cases, Chinese Muslims also celebrate significant Islamic events (Islamic holydays) such as the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid Nabi*) and the Night Journey (*Isra' Mi'raj*). This is in contrast, for example, to Salafi Wahhabi groups that adopt a strict stance towards those who differ from their group.⁵¹

Conclusion

Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* to Chinese Indonesians has had significant impacts. Muhammadiyah *da'wa* serve as a role model for Chinese Muslims. The significance of this *da'wa* is marked in the methods and forms of *da'wa* carried out by Chinese Indonesians. In terms of *da'wa*

⁵¹ Discussion regarding the Salafi-Wahhabi response to Muslims with different beliefs please refer to Ibnu Burdah, "Growing Exclusion of the Majority the 'Triumph of Wahhabism' and Its Threat to Indonesian Islam in the Democratic Society" *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 17, 1 (2023): 54-75.

methods, the Chinese Muslims use Muhammadiyah's methods of preaching, namely through *da'wa bil hāl*.

Due to the encouragement of the chairman of the Muhammadiyah Central Executive, K. H. Ibrahim, Chinese Muslims also propagated Islam to the people within their ethnicity. This encouragement was later realized by Chinese Muslim leaders in the establishment of PITI. This organization subsequently received a positive response from Chinese Indonesians.

The establishment of PITI produced progressive *da'wa* activists. These activists not only broadcast the teachings of Islam but also demonstrate how Chinese Muslims can strengthen social relations with both non-Muslim Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians. []

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