

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION, CONFLICT, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A CASE STUDY OF CHINESE FAMILIES IN SEMARANG, INDONESIA

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Religious conversion among Chinese in Semarang, Indonesia is an interesting phenomenon as the social processes of Chinese in the context of Indonesia constituted a specific process. Recently there is an increasing number of Chinese convert to Muslim. Many challenges faced by Chinese man once he decides to becomes Muslim, and it will be more challenges for Chinese woman. Applying the methods of structured interview, participant observation, and deep interview, this article aims to reveal the causes of Chinese woman convert to Muslim; the conflicts caused by the religious conversion and the conflict resolution applied in resolving the conflict.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict resolution, Conversion, Chinese Muslim, Women.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, Semarang is the home to one of the oldest Chinese Muslim communities in Indonesia (Joe, 2014; Oemar, 1994; Sen, 2009; 2010). The development of the first Muslim community in Semarang is attributed to the coming of Cheng Ho and his great fleet in the fifteenth century. This community grew with time, and slowly but surely the Chinese Muslim community built good relations with the local population, and built a community within which both the Chinese Muslim community and Javanese lived together in harmony (Joe, 2014; Oemar, 1994; Sen, 2009; 2010). Only after Dutch colonization, Chinese community in general becomes restricted on a certain location within Semarang known as Pecinan for political reasons. The worries of Dutch for assisting the struggle of local people to oppose the Ditch is one of the reasons. After that course of time, the Chinese Muslim could not be traced clearly (Joe, 2014).

In 2014, the population of Semarang Municipality was 1 598 193 while the number of Chinese residing in Semarang was 58,356 (4.33 percent of the municipality's population (Semarang Statistical Database 2014). Of the total numbers, there are 2.5 percent who are Muslim (approximately 2,500 persons)¹. This data is interesting because socio-politically the existence of Chinese in Indonesia, especially after Dutch colonization give an negative impact such as feeling of suspicious among Indonesian toward Chinese (Joe, 2014; Panggabean and Benjamin Smith, 2010). Many problems rose along the course of time (Coppel,1983) both the cultural and formal one.

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The cultural problem is pertaining the act that the Chinese showed in their daily activities. This may be understood because the Chinese come to Indonesia originally come from some different origins in the mainland (Purwanto, 1990). Each of the group generate an exclusive way in their life, for example in the decision of their residence, and language. The distinctive characteristics and the specificity of the Chinese is very prominent which related to the strong attachment to their cultural traits of their ancestors (Skinner, 1965; Sanjatmiko, 1999). This resulted to the rise of typical characteristic related to the concept of group that bring up a negative stereotype against Chinese in Indonesia (Farley, 1988; Erikson, 2002). One of the specific characteristics of Chinese community is the exclusivity. According to Coppel (1983), this negative stereotype affected in the social and political problems along the history of Indonesia. Violence occur in Solo and Jakarta (Thufail, 2007) is one of the examples.

Status of nationality and citizenship is the political problem and issue arose (Muzakki, 2010). This political conflict generated even since Dutch colonization and was continued through the period of reformation (Suryadinata, 2001; Joe, 2014). The affiliation of the Chinese with the PKI, for example, put them into a difficult situation when the 1965 coup against state formal ideological and political power took place (Muzakki, 2010; Joe, 2014). The situation was worsened with the issue of genocide done by Indonesian toward Chinese (Cribb and Charles A. Coppel, 2009). The other political issue pertaining to Chinese in Indonesia is the enactment of legalisation of the five religions. The Chinese were legally forced by the regime to convert to one of the five religions (Muzakki, 2010; Joe, 2014) which force the Chinese to recognize one of the five legal religion. Most of the Chinese converted to Christian and only few to muslim. The conflict between Indonesian and Chinese are seterotype, ethnocentrism, as well as prejudice are strongly rooted among each of the ethnic group (Elizabeth, 2009).

There are so much effort of adaptation implemented by Chinese to Indonesian context both in the social context, like in the social life (Tirtajaya, 1981) and in formal surrounding, like in school (Giap, 1993). However, there is still much problems dealing with the relation between Chinese and Indonesian in general and muslim especially. Despite of the problems they are facing, number of Chinese converted to Muslim are keep increasing. It may be understood that this situation rose a conflict. From the perspective of conflict study, conflict is a relation between two or more parties (individual or groups) having different goals (2000) while conversion in this context is the changing identity related to religion (Granqvist, 2003), that formerly as Christian or Confusian become muslim. Although the issue of religious conversion may pertain to any other problems as politics, economics and otehr social processes but considering to the case of Chinese women convert to muslim in this study focussed only on the familial conflict between the parent and the convert.

Conversion among Chinese men affected in a worse relation with their family members (Elizabeth, 2009; Muzakki, 2010), and it will be more among Chinese women because women traditionally are more depended economically and socially than men (Faqih, 2000), although in some of researches (Dong and Stella Yiyang Li, 2007) Chinese women now are more independent in some extent. The researches concerned much of the economical decision making, for example in the family decision in buying any item needed by family, and not pertaining to any other decision. Logically, there will be a worse situation faced by Chinese women on the time they decide to convert to muslim than Chinese men. Although there are many Chinese who embrace Islam but very limited knowledge about the processes of community and cultural dynamics through religious conversion (Muzakki, 2010).

This article is based on the a study which involved five Chinese women who are converted to Muslim, as the informants. Two women married and worked, one women graduated from university, worked, and did not marry, one women graduated from high school and worked, and one other Chinese women are still studying in university. The five informants was selected on the basis of representative and by applying snowball technique. Applying the methods of observation and interviewing, this research tried to reveal the causes of Chinese woman convert to Muslim; the conflicts caused by the religious conversion and the conflict resolution applied in resolving the conflict.

THE CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND THE CONFLICT EMERGED

Although having a long history in Semarang, Indonesia (Joe, 2014; Oemar, 1994; Sen, 2009; 2010), factually, contemporary Chinese Muslims living in Semarang are descended from only three generations which most of them are new adherents of Islam (Joe, 2014; Elizabeth, 2009). Amidst the long history of the relation among Chinese and Indonesian, there are still hold some prejudice, and some research even showed difficult experiences when any Chinese especially Chinese women convert to Muslim (Won-Jang, 1984; Martaniah, 1994; Muzakki, 2010). Based on the research, Chinese Muslim women in particular, generally convert to Islam for one of four reasons. First, if their parent is Muslim, they are cultivated in Islamic living. Second, if they married with a man having Islamic faith, they are consequently likely to become Muslim. Third, because of reading some reading materials and the fourth, they may be influenced by Muslim friends with whom they interact with in their daily living. These last two causes, reading materials and friends are interrelated and very important in influencing Chinese youth. The last two causes that mostly raise problem among the Chinese family, which this article will emphasize more.

Religious Conversion that was Caused by Reading Materials

Some informant told that they has some curiosities on Islam and they try to find the information from books. The curiosities for some Chinese was emerged since they was very young because in the context of Indonesian living Chinese community had a good relation with Indonesian people in general. This kind of relation open the possibilities of interaction with other communities in Indonesia that make religious conversion become possible among them. One of the informan had a house maid who are muslim. She often play in her house maid's bed room when she was still child. She saw her maid pray and reading Qur'an. She only enjoyed what she saw and hear but internally she was curious. Once she held the Qur'an she will asked about that book. The memory remain in her life even after she admitted in state high school.

Seeing so many of her friends are muslim, her curiosities on Islam again generated. She tried to borrow books on Islam that she may find in school library, or buying in book stores. She learnt about the Five Principles of Islam, Six Principles of Faith, procedures of praying and procedures of ablution. Once she found something that she do not know or need further explanation related to Islam in their reading, she come to her friend. Some times she will discuss the material on Islam with her friends and found a satisfying answer. However, her friends sometimes did not give sufficient answer and her friend may suggest to read some other books or refer her to some senior or religious teacher. She did fasting since she was in the first grade and did prayer since she was in the third grade of high school. She only proclaimed as muslim when she was in the second year of her study in university.

That similar cases are true for two other informants, one of them is a married woman and an employee, and the other is university student and a part time employee. They like to read book regarding Islam much. Interestingly, what is happened to the married woman is her husband did not show any disagreement on what she read. Her husband only kept silent on what she read and did. Based on the described situation, the conversion is still only in the level of knowledge. At this level, the conflict is still in latent conflict (Fisher, 2000). The family members, especially the parent knew what happening on their daughter, but they kept silent.

Religious Conversion that was Influenced by Muslim Friends

Other informants were introduced on Islam by their friends. The processes started by being interested in knowing about Islamic observances, as prayer, fasting, and cover (veil). At first their friends were not sure on what the convert ask about, but at the next step they gave the answer based on what they know. Once they did not know exactly about the answer they asked another friends, siblings, their parent or

even their religious teachers (*ustadz*). Slowly, the informants did Islamic observances like fasting and prayer. They will use the play time in their friend's house or sleeping over there to do excersice of Islamic observances and worship.

Two of the informants let their parent know their intention to convert to muslim after graduated from high school. One of them admitted in university, and the other got a job. The familyof the informants knew about the changing attitudes happened on their daughter. One thing that made the family realize is that sometimes their daughter lock her bed room and did not open her door once her parent knock it. Besides, the obvious practice being notice is fasting and cautious in enjoying meal. In this case, the parent seem not worry much as the changes is the positive one.

Some Emerging Conflicts Due to Conversion

There are some expression of conflict caused by religious conversion among Chinese muslim. Among the expression is perceiving "does not care" attitude. Secondly, expressing some sarcasm sentences and rough words toward the convert. Besides, there were also expression of denial and doing hostility on the conversion case. Those expression of conflict did not appear separately in but simulateously. In one case of conversion, the expression of conflict not only appeared in the form of ignorance, but also sarcasm words, as well as rude words. The combination of conflict are different in other cases. The expression of conflict it self for some was expressed since they feel the change on the daughter, and some was expressed after the daughter announce her conversion.

Firstly: The Expression of No Care

This expression was expressed by the parent or family members of the convert are shown by some cases. The attitude of no care has dual meaning:

1. an expression on disagreement on the decision taken by one of their family member to convert to Muslim, but they dont know how to reject them, and
2. an expression of an understanding that religion is personal right although the convert is their own daughter.

They keep silent and did not involve the convert into any discussion on family matters in the family surrounding. This conflict however is in light level because there is a different goal (Fisher, 2000).

In the form of conflict mapping, it appeared that various patterns of conflict in this research resulted in a complicated relation caused by the conversion. Conflict that arises as a result of religious conversion among Chinese Muslims in Semarang appeared in the relationship between *ego* (person who doing religious conversion)

with family members and other members of the community outside the family circle. Family cycle here can include nuclear family² as well as extended family³ (Koentjaraningrat, 1980; Kodiran, 1981, Geertz, 1989). All the elements and positions within the family can be involved in the conflict. While the scope of the other members of the community outside the family circle includes the relationship among the Chinese in general, which included the elements of partners and religious community.

Secondly: Expressing Some Sarcasm Sentences and Rude Words

This expression is the extension of the attitude of being does not care. The parent did not know how to behave in facing their daughter. The ways they express the utterances are also vary according to their interest. The frequent of bad utterance may raise since the family catched the changes on their daughter and may also raise after the testimony that the daughter become a Muslim. The sarcasm utterances that are usually expessed are related to stereotype on Islam, such as polygamy, donation, or backwardness (Willmott, 1960). These topics of stereotype toward Muslim are the things that are so widely disseminate among Chinese community, so conversion into Islam is seen as something silly (Poerwanto, 1990; Willmott, 1960). The relation of Chinese and other ethnic groups in daily life are smooth and even congenial. Co-operative relations and mixed organizations are increasing in number, but so far they do not involve close social intercourse or genuinely equalitarian relations. At the same time there still exist considerable prejudice, mutual suspicion, and latent hostility (Willmott, 1960; Farley, 1988; Erikson, 2002). To this extent, no other expression but the sarcasm utterance that was shown by the parent and family, meanwhile rude words was shown by parent only.

Thirdly, Expressing Rejection and Hostility

Some Chinese families hardly rejected their daughter once they know their daughter had convert to Muslim. There are some kinds of hostility in this case: becoming the object of anger, mocking and insulting, limitating any activities, including doing Islamic worship, like prayer and reciting Quran, suffering physical harassment and the worst is kicking the daughter out from home, and the parent do not want to be responsible for their daughter's life. This situation happened on most of the case of conversion (Shanniek, 2011) although in some other cases it was not so (Bielik-Robson, 2011; Shanniek, 2011)

All of the above actions are violence (Fisher, 2000), and surely affected negatively the both party involved in the conflict (Branje, 2009; Laursen, Coy, and Collins, 1998). To become the object of anger of parent is so hurt to the daughter because parent oftenly expressing their anger without any reason (Noddings, 2002; Branje, 2009). They felt a deep sad, distressful, and anxious which resulted many

other negative expression of the daughter (Gerbner *et al.* 1994; Serbin, *et al.*, 2001; Tucker, 2003). What is worse, they forbid their daughter to do Islamic ritual like prayer and reciting Qur'an, and kick the daughter out of the family and breaking off family relation. This was very problematic for the daughter because they still depends on their parent economically, psychologically, socially, and culturally

The rejection of the conversion does not only come from family members but also from surrounding people included the boyfriends of the convert girls. It can be understood as becoming muslim meant there is an existing lag between himself and the girl after the conversion (Yen-Ling, 2011). Becoming muslim meant becoming different person, becoming "the other". Consequently, many relations broken after the conversion. This became a problem too for the convert as in one side they did not get support from their family, and in the other side they felt afraid of their marital status as culturally it is not good for a girl to be late in getting married (To, 2013; Ji and Wei-Jun J. Y, 2014).

RESOLUTIONS ON RELIGIOUS CONVERSION CONFLICT

In a conflict there are two or more parties involved (Fisher, 2000; Ramsbotham, 2005). Therefore, in resolving the conflict it is impossible if the effort only involves one side. There are three patterns found on how to handle conflict of religious conversion among Chinese women in Semarang. Firstly, the religious convert let the conflict preceded. Secondly, empowering the convert to solve their own conflict and lastly is involving Chinese Muslim figures or muslim woman

Resolution by the Convert Themselves

There are some case which one of the party tried to resolve the conflict. This is what Fisher (2000) mentioned it as "self help". In this case, the convert do so by themselves by considering that the surrounding people will be familiar with the conditions and the conflicts will eventually recover by itself. If they found an appropriate time, they may attempt to explain to those ask her about the decision that she made, and try to counteract negative views on Islam that had been existed among them.

The way of handling the conflict caused by religious conversion by keeping silent choosen by the convert based on the cultural value of Chinese community which underline the principle of harmony (*Le*) as values held down by the Chinese community (Song, 1998a; 1998b; Cheng, 1998) besides the thick genealogical attachment. Genealogical attachment for example is expressed in the event of *Cheng Beng* event, in which Chinese families visiting ancestor burrial in respecting their ancestors. Therefore, in the case of religious conversion, informants considered for not leaving the family and parents to avoid harmony disruption in the family in particular as well as in the community.

This principle is applied with consideration that conflicts arose due to some ignorance or misunderstandings among Chinese about Islam. For that reason, the explanation given to eliminate the conflicts arose. For that reason, keeping in the family cycle is the best way in order to make possible for them to meet their family member and give them any explanation on what they ask about. Otherwise the conflict will be deepening and intensifying (Fisher *et al.*, 2000). Meeting in family cycle and giving an appropriate explanation will gradually repair the relationship. Keeping inside the family cycle also will prevent the feeling lost from the parent. Respecting parent which is a very dominant value among Chinese community will recover the disrupted relationship between parents and children because of religious conversion. In broader context, keeping inside the family cycle will resolve the conflict sooner due to some social capital existed among the Chinese community in Semarang. Living area which is relatively close to others, relatively same language used in the communication sphere, common tradition, as well as relatively similar historical experiences are the social capital which has a huge significance in the process of conflict resolution and reconciliation (Elmas, 2004).

Resolution by Empowering the Convert to Solve Their Own Conflict

The second and third ways of resolving conflict caused by religious conversion might be implemented in the both case of conflict when the convert are still in their family cycle and when they go out from home. The possibility to empower the convert are if the convert tell their friend or any other persons about their difficulties in facing their problem and ask for help to solve the conflict, or if there is any other person knowing the difficulties facing by the convert. The empowerment given by the others whether in the form of giving support, advices, and protection. Some friends gave advice to the convert by themselves but others asked for help from other friends, teacher, or religious teachers. In the case of someone knew the conflict and they offer some advice, usually the ones are activist in conflict resolution who are introduced by some one others to the convert.

The main advice given to the convert is to be firmed in dealing with the conflict. They strongly emphasize the importance of keeping good relation to the family despite of fulfilling their interest to become Muslim. All the convert aware of the importance to keep good relation with their family. This statement is based on their knowledge that the family will be able to understand their decision if they remains to establish good relations with the family and relatives. The friends also support the convert with knowledge on Islam in preparing the convert to answer any question asked by their family members. The advices is related to keep the good attitudes toward parent and family as well as to the ways to let them know about Islam and the reasons for convert to become Muslim. The protection was shown by showing attention with the promise for giving them some help once the

convert need it. The friends was ready to give the support and advice any time and place once the convert need them.

Based on the experiences of the convert, the family eventually change to a more positive attitude as the convert maintain a good relationship with his family and relatives. Feeling of harmony in the family cycle as well as among relative and Chinese community now is formulated with a new understanding on the conversion and about Islam. Burden felt by the convert make them need friends to support and advice on what the best way to resolve the conflict as well as reconcile the breaking of the family relation because of the conversion. This kind of conflict resolution strategy involved only one party (Rusbult, *et al.*, 1986) which having the orientation of "constructiveness". The convert took sway from "activity" to "passivity" and applying the strategies of "dialog" and "loyalty". Dialog in one side is an attempt to eliminate the problem and maintain relations in good order (Rusbult, *et al.*, 1986). It was applied by managing good relationship and communication as well as being ready to explain whatever that the family need to know. Loyalty in other side is a passive and constructive strategy that meant patiently waiting out the problem preceeded with the hope that the conflict will resolve with time (Rusbult, *et al.*, 1986). It is not an activity, but an attitude which showed the patient in waiting for the conflict resolved.

Resolution by Involvement of Chinese Muslim Figures or Muslim Woman Figure

The third model of conflict resolution in the case of religious conversion is by involving Chinese Muslim or muslim woman figures into the processes of conflict resolution. It was applied once the case was very difficult when the convert cannot manage the conflict anymore. They tried hard to resolve but they did not pursuit any success and the conflict getting worse. The other case was when the convert was kick out from the family cycle and seek protection in another family or other.

The Chinese muslim or muslim women figures got the information on the conflict from the convert or any other person. Chinese muslim or muslim women figures might become the persons in charge to mediate the conflict because Chinese family is very exclusive (Willmott, 1960; Poerwanto, 1990) so it will not be possible to involve lay people into Chinese family. They then came to the parent house to offer the help on their conflict with their daughter. They need to visit the parent many time before they would like to meet the daughter in the resolution meeting. In some cases, the parent at first rejected the present of the figures, but after getting some advices they agree to continue the dialog as well as the meeting with the daughter.

They called the meeting as mediation, with parent and daughter as the parties, and the figure as the mediator. But factually this model of conflict resolution is

like consultation. The source of the idea is the figure while the parent and the daughter as the object. They agree with what the figure talked about for resolving their conflict because the figure wisely show them the best way in resolving the conflict. There is no processes as like in the formal mediation, in which finding interest is the crucial point that must be implemented (Fisher, 2000; Rhombothams, 2005).

Referring to the three ways of resolving conflict above, all have the orientation for meeting the interest of the both parties. The interest are the right to choose one religion, respect, and harmony. The strategy in resolving the conflict are in the sway of activity and passivosity, and toward the orientation of constructiveness (Rusbult et.al., 1986) but in the different forms. Loyalty in the concept of Rusbult (1986) was expressed by the case of keeping stay in family surrounding but still maintain a good relation with the parent and family. Dialog was done once any questions related to the conversion were asked to them. These processes need a personal ability and capability to overcome the difficulties they are facing. The difficulty of being “a stranger in their own house, borrowing the term of Mary Somers Heidhues (2011), needed a bright strategy, both in attitude and action.

Meanwhile, the second way of conflict resolution has a common to the first because the resolution are done by the convert themselves. The specific element is the involvement of “behind the stage” persons. That persons persuaded dan supported the convert to overcome their own conflict and the parent did not know about that. So the processes of supporting the convert are by adding more capability and ability to be better in the stage of loyalty as well as in dialog. Being patient and firm are the attitudes supported by the person while giving advice for reading book and giving explanation on the question related to conversion are the points that was underlined. From time to time, there is an acceptance of the family about the change in the identity of their family members. These processes in fact may be understood because as stated by Willmott (1960) and CKYang (1970) that Chinese people in general had being eclectic religion. With this eclectic attitude they easily accept another religion in his life.

The third way of conflict resolution is the hardest way because of the involvement of other persons than family members. Although the final result was good but the first steps are so difficult. The presence of other persons seemed very crucial to Chinese family because they feel the intervention of other toward their family. This is very much relevant to the exclusiveness of Chinese community in one side and contestation of power between parent and daughter in other side. This is really the basic identity of Chinese community. For that reasons, at the former step of the resolution, the Chinese family reacted strongly toward the involvement of other persons. The processes are become harder once the daughter escaped from the family because the parent feel hurted of what the daughter did. Parent is

defeated in the competition with their daughter (Erikson, 2002). At this point, the role of the figure is very important to calm down the emotion as well as to enlighten the parent on anything related to the conversion.

Pertaining to the strategy of conflict resolution, the third way oriented toward constructiveness because it tried to stress on loyalty toward parent and on dialog, but for some cases the convert neglected and went out of the family cycle. Neglection and escaping from family circle are the identification of destruction (Rusbult, 1986), although the neglection and escaping from family cycle also a conflict settlement (Fisher, 2000; Rombothams, 2005) of the possible violence executed by the parent. The third way of conflict resolution has the scope of strategy from passivity to activity; from destruction to construction. In general, all the three ways tried to overcome the core problem and to change the attitude and behavior pertaining to the case of religious conversion.

The ways of resolving conflict due to conversion among Chinese community described above are the conflict resolution applied among Chinese community in Semarang. Harmony became the main principle. The way of resolving conflict internally was seemed to be the most ideal way of conflict resolution. The involvement of other may be implemented in a very crucial case, both indirectly and directly.

CONCLUSION

This study which conducted to Chinese Muslim women focuses on the cause of the conversion, the conflict rising, and the resolution of the conflict that was caused by conversion. Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that there are four causes that led to the Chinese women to become Muslim. The first reason is because of their parent is Muslim, Secondly, their husbands are Muslim and thirdly because of some readings; and fourthly because of a close friend. Of the four causes of conversion, those the two latter cases that affected on conflict between the convert and the family.

The types of conflicts that arise as a result of religious conversion among Chinese Muslims in Semarang are as follows: the attitude of not caring; sarcasm sentences and rude words; rejection and hostility. It can be concluded that considering to the types of conflict in the case of religious conversion, the type of conflict (Fisher, 2000) is open conflict because it has root and come out in the forms of sarcasm sentences, rude word, and hostility.

Dealing with the conflict resolution of the conversion conflict could be refer to the theory of conflict resolution (Fisher, 2000; Rhombothams, 2005). Open conflict may resolved by conflict settlement, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation. The ways of resolving in this case are in accordance to the theory

as the root cause is the understanding about interest of the convert and about Islam. Besides, all the resolution orientations is toward understanding of the choice to convert and of Islam.

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¹ This number is factually increasing with time, in accordance to the increasing number of population in general

² Nuclear family referred to to the concept of basic family that consisted of parent and children

³ Extended family referred to family unit consisted of basic family and other family member living within somah (house unit: Javanese). Other family members can be parent or other brother and sister of the house owner.