The Indonesian Chinese and Cross Cultural-Communication through CSR Activities

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Abstract

Globalization, China on the rise, and rapid democratization in Indonesia are among major challenging circumstances Indonesia is confronted with today. In terms of culture, China now increases to be a strong imagined reference for self identity among overseas Chinese. Where and how then, could national identity of Indonesia be brought forward? This paper focuses on the meanings or quality of the relationships of Chinese-non Chinese (pribumi). It will address answers to these questions: Are employment and community development programs, and poverty alleviation initiatives meaningful, and to whom? Are forms of civic engagement carried out by Chinese community instrumental in mending ill-feelings and healing sores endured by many native citizens? Can CSR activities improve people’s perception about the Chinese and subsequently improve inter-ethnic relations in Indonesia?

Keywords: CSR, cross-cultural communication, multi-cultural, Chinese identity

Introduction

The issue of Chinese and non-Chinese relations is very important in Indonesia for a number of reasons. First, the Chinese is an ethnic minority but a certainly an influential one. They represent a small fraction in population of the country but are the dominant player across the different level and sectors of the national and local economy. As the prime determinant of capital, industry and trade, the Chinese leads growth and its subsequent impact on the community economy. Sitting high in the social rung during the colonial era, the Chinese continues ever since to be the most affluent segment of the Indonesian community. Second, while accepting their successes on one side, the Chinese in Indonesia ironically has long been the subject to scape-goats and political blame. They have in the past been made soft target for different political reasons. For
more than 30 years, Chinese culture has been banned from the public and assimilation policy being imposed on them. Capitalizing on their financial capacity, the Chinese continue to be the source of fund for a wide array of political purposes. The 1998 May Riot in Jakarta, has been the most notable example of the Chinese has been made target and caught in the complexity of political realm of the country in transition. It is however not the purpose for this paper to highlight or unravel the truth of political events. This paper focuses on the meanings or quality of the relationship of Chinese-non Chinese (pribumi), the political economy aspects of the contemporary Indonesia will only provide the context explanation of tensions or uneasiness that exist so far. The last and the most important reason to highlight Chinese and non-Chinese relationship is the fundamental need to ascertain the new perspective for Indonesian in general to provide bigger space and burgeoning roles to the Chinese in the current society of Indonesia (Meij,2009). Having the correct perspective about the Chinese is important for non-Chinese in Indonesia to understand the great potentials of the Chinese as a diaspora and whether new and positive angles of the relationship across cultures can be developed in future. In this context, the CSR’s of Chinese owned companies and its bridging roles for social integration becomes an important subject to discuss. Forms of philanthropy and activities of compassion initiated by Chinese community will need to be understood in a comprehensive manner by the Indonesian public, as the atmosphere of public openness has been introduced and greater acceptance for Chinese presence has unfolded.

The new chapter in inter-ethnic relationship is important especially for Indonesian living in Post-Suharto era and the Reformasi. In the past 10 years, the issue between Chinese and non-Chinese has fundamentally shifted. When Abdurrahman Wahid came into power as the President of Indonesia from November 1999 to August 2001, he spearheaded efforts to end discriminatory regulations against the Indonesian Chinese population. Dawis (2009) noted that the first step that Wahid took was to abolish the Presidential Instruction Number 14, signed in 1967 by Suharto, which restricted the practice of Chinese customs and religions to private domain. He formalized this act by signing the Presidential Instruction Number 6, stipulated in the year 2000, which allows the public celebration of the Chinese New Year. Wahid, as one of the most eminent Muslim leaders, even proclaimed that he was of Chinese Ancestry and went to China on his first official state visit. The President also appointed Kwik Kian Gie to his cabinet (Indonesian
Observer 1 December 1999) and noted to emphasize that ‘the Chinese act in tandem with the interests of the nation, not in their own interest (Chua 2009). The comment from the former President somehow dismiss the general opinion that unlike other ethnic group that is well represented in the national movement for independence, the Chinese are perceived as ambivalent, opportunistic and a-nationalist.

Under President Megawati, who headed Indonesia’s government from August 2001 to September 2004\(^1\), Chinese New Year has been made into a national holiday starting February 1, 2003\(^2\). The Indonesians population needs to understand the impact of the great changes and also possible latent threats coming ahead. Identity problem is a major topic for nation building. The outlook of the Chinese in particular is somewhat different from the other ethnic groups in the country. Looking from the eyes of an outsider, the Chinese are seen to be socially exclusive and tends to draw the line of an insider to an outsider. In the current situation, the tendency towards exclusiveness tends to increase due to stronger greater economic power and wider opportunities for Indonesian Chinese to increase their Chinese identity. Dawis (2009) noted the issue of Chineseness and noted that according to Siu (2005), diasporic communities often form transnational organizations to maintain ties with a distant ‘homeland’ and to create ‘safe spaces’ and a sense of community. By organizing many cultural events, these organizations such as the ones that were established in post-1998 Indonesia help maintain and perpetuate their cultural identity as Chinese individuals in Indonesia.

Identity formation for the Chinese and how Indonesian in general perceives the outcome will be an important subject and relevant factor to be accommodated into the framework of Indonesian nationhood. The challenge of the national credo *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) would simply boils down to the task of overcoming the issue of differences, building trust while providing the atmosphere for all social potentials to flourish. The capacity of the nation in this

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\(^1\) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono became the 6\(^{th}\) president of Indonesia following his success in a national election held in September 2004.

\(^2\) Megawati’s government declared Chinese New Year as an elective holiday (which means that the Chinese may take that day off to celebrate it) for the Chinese in 2002 but formally declared it as a national holiday in 2003.
case will depend on the success of every ethnic group to work on the common corridor of national interest. Facing an ever growing global challenge, Indonesian will somehow need to work on its nationhood, as people of a multi-cultural nation living in an archipelagic country. For the Chinese, the process of being Indonesian citizen is a mutual process of absorbing cultural traits among different ethnic groups which is bound within the corridor of citizenship responsibility. The Chinese will need to work out on the question of who they are and what they are becoming. The task of national integration will involve a wide spectrum of relevant work. The challenge of identity formation among other will involve on how the media supports the process. Dawis (2009) quoted on how China, to Ferry and Sunni, is a form of ‘imagined nostalgia’ that they have never directly experienced but one that they have a deep emotional connection with. The images of China transmitted by the Chinese media also bring them together as part of an “imagined community”.

Some basic question will arise out of current, swift and sweeping changes. Globalization, China on the rise and rapid democratization in Indonesia are among major challenging circumstances Indonesia is confronted. In terms of culture, China now increases to be a strong imagined reference for self identity among overseas Chinese. Where and how then, national identity of Indonesia be brought forward? Clearly the challenges national of integration forward is huge. It is the reason why CSR of Chinese owned business and corporations becomes an important subject to discuss. Having mentioned CSR, one enters another field or large area of discussion. Complexity immediately confronts as one enters on ways to define the background motive, forms, measures the success. Many questions come to surface. Does providing employment, community development programs, poverty alleviation initiatives meaningful and to whom? Do forms civic engagement carried out by Chinese community become instrumental to mend the ill feelings felt and heal sores endured by many native citizens? Can CSR activities improve people’s perception about the Chinese and subsequently able to improve inter-ethnic relations in Indonesia?
Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. There are several methods of data collection employed, such as observation, interviews, and media framing analysis. Field observation was also applied in an international school in West Jakarta. An observation into school atmosphere was important to gain an understanding of how Chinese kids are being brought up. Interviews were also needed to gather information from street vendors about how they reflect to the program “mudik bareng”, a form company initiative to organize mass transportation for urban vendors to return home the Eid festival. Then, the media framing analysis was employed to extract the main point of the news about the program “mudik bareng”. In the study, the search for media was done through internet, by examining the electronic version of newspapers and television newscasts. Meanwhile, the effort to gather a complete data was done through the triangulation of data resources. Subsequently, incidental sampling was applied by selecting the heterogenic street vendors of SidoMuncul. One informant was Javanese and quite familiar with the program, and another informant from Sawahlunto (West Sumatra). Both of them revealed different perspectives in perceiving the “mudik bareng” program. Nevertheless, their arguments describe the other vantage point, different from the news vantage point.

Critical Differences between Chinese and Indigenous Habits

Observation shows some critical differences between the typical of Indonesian Chinese and the indigenous people, known as “pribumi”. In an international school in West Jakarta, some children seem to get used to the harsh talk showered to them. The tae kwon do exercise reflects this kind of situation. It is an extra-curricular activity. In contrast to the daily treatment of the school teachers, the ‘senpai’ or ‘trainer’ used the harsh talks in giving order. Meanwhile, the other school teacher, especially the principal, often use soft intonation and words whenever they talk to the students. Sometimes the teachers even have to comply with the spoiled little children. But these things did not happen in the teaching method from the ‘senpai’. The intonation sounds like an anger, rather than a teaching activity. Amazingly, the students seemed to get used to it. Harsh talks are not perceived as a disrespect action in the children’s eyes. The situation seemed
to be the reflection of what the children experience in the family and the significant others around them. On the other words, it’s no longer a frightening situation for them, because they often experience it through their parents or even the extended surroundings. One of the students, for instance, even suffered from an abusive mother. Some teachers stated that the mother holds a mystical belief, that she will be fortunate if she treat her second daughter harshly.

The fact above shows that the use of harsh talk in daily life becomes a potential friction between Chinese culture and some major Indonesian culture, like Javanese. In one of the beliefs of Javanese people, proper manner is a must. The children must respect the elders, veiled with the must to apply selected tier of language. ‘Kromo Inggil’ language, for instance, represents the smooth attitude of Javanese people where people must respect others (especially the elders or the higher social status) by using highly selected words in their sentences. Meanwhile, the elders must be able to give “wejangan”, a form of suggestion and direction of the life codes of conduct for the younger generation.

Another fact from the observation shows the exclusiveness of the children from the Chinese family. One of the children only speaks Mandarin and English, and does not able to use Bahasa Indonesia. Meanwhile, the parents are Indonesian Chinese. In the school, this child does not have any trouble, since it uses English as the teaching language. However, it gives a barrier for her to be able to mingle with other people who use the bahasa.

Gudykunst, in relate to the facts above, revealed a schematic representation of Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory (Griffin, 2006: 428). In the scheme, it appears that effective communication becomes the outcome of the intercultural communication process. On the other words, it is the target when people communicate with others from the different cultures. In Gudykunst’s vantage point, anxiety (feels of unease) and uncertainty (lack of information of the strangers), have to be managed in order to reach the effective communication. Superficial causes, then, becomes an important aspect.
Figure 1: Gudykunst
Source: Griffin

In the context of Gudykunst, one of the superficial causes is ethical interactions. The maintenance of cultural dignity, however, must be combined with moral inclusiveness, in order to respect for strangers. Unfortunately, the fact from observation showed a contrast difference. Instead of being inclusive, a child was shaped to be exclusive because the parents only teach English and Mandarin languages to her. Meanwhile, they regard themselves as an Indonesian family. This, however, becomes an example of trigger for a bigger friction in the society. Language barriers, as well as exclusiveness, intrigue the situation where Indonesian Chinese are being perceived as strangers in the eyes of the indigenous, or “pribumi”.

Overlapping Intercultural Communication and Business Ethics (Review on Brinkmann)

The bridge between cultural study and business ethics that becomes the moral driver for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) appears in the extensive research of Johannes
Brinkmann, Samovar, Porter, and McDaniels (2006) printed the thoughts of Brinkmann, who conducted a significant research titled: “Business Ethics and Intercultural Communications: Exploring the Overlap Between Two Academic Fields”.

In his thoughts, Brinkmann argued that Business ethics is presented as a special case of ethics. And business ethics contains a similar ambiguity of everyday moral practice versus ethics – that is, theorizing, discussing, and agreement about such practice – and of ethics versus moralism. There are gray zones toward law and conscience, and there are different schools of approaches. Citing Enderle, Brinkmann addition to such rather general, perhaps too general, quotations with low awareness of intercultural connotation differences, one can distinguish between talking of business ethics, business ethical practice, and theorizing about business ethics.

In defining ethics and morality, Brinkmann cited Goodpaster who argued that “Ethics” most often refers to a domain of inquiry, a discipline, in which matters of right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice, are systematically examined. “Morality”, by contrast, is most often used to refer not to a discipline but to patterns of thought and action that are actually operative in everyday life. In this sense, morality is what the discipline of ethics is about. And, so business morality is what business ethics is about.

Thus, Brinkmann also studied the important thing about cross-cultural setting in business ethics. He argued that Cross-cultural business ethics addresses moral issues that emerge when companies operate in different countries, when stakeholders live in different societies, and when norms and values reflect and are affected by cultural differences. In the context of the research, cross-cultural business ethics is implemented by SidoMuncul, an Indonesian Chinese ownership company, to the indigenous people, or known as the pribumi.

Moreover, Brinkmann argued that culture is relative. Therefore, no cultures suppose to cooptate other cultures. Cultural relativism, then, being understood as a worldview and standpoint that no culture as such is superior to any other one, and that any culture deserves to be described, understood, and judged on its own premises. Indeed, it is the opposite of ethnocentrism, where one culture judges other cultures. On the other hand, Ethical relativism as a world-view and
standpoint claims that there is no culture-free, universal morality and therefore no way of ranking moral view and practices as more or less right, at least across cultures.

**The Tradition of “Mudik Bareng”**

“Mudik”, is an interesting social phenomenon. In this context, “mudik” refers to the ritual of going back home to the village by the urban people in Jakarta. It is a habit, especially around the holy day of Eid Al Fithr, when some people in big cities of Indonesia return to their home villages. “Pemudik”, then, refers to the people who travel home. Consistently, Jakarta and its suburbs hold the largest number of returnee or “pemudik” every year. As the metropolitan city and the capitol city of Indonesia, Jakarta becomes the country’s growth center and concentration of migrant workers. The robust economy of the metropolitan city, continues to be the pull-factor for migration.

Following a year of hard toiled work, the holly season becomes the culmination to return to home. The former Vice President of Republic Indonesia, Jusuf Kalla, said “*Percuma kita sudah bekerja punya uang tapi tidak ketemu dengan keluarga. Itu tidak bahagia.*” (detiknews.com). The statement revealed on the ceremony of SidoMuncul “Mudik Bareng” in 2008, implicitly expressed the importance of “mudik” among the workers. It is the channel for happiness, when they can meet the family back home.

Togetherness in family, however, is one of the basic values of Indonesian people. As the common Javanese proverb, “*mangan ora mangan asal kumpul,*” that reflects the importance to preserve family closeness, both in poverty or in wealth. Therefore, the celebration of the holiday becomes another consideration for Muslim workers to embrace “mudik” as a part of their life ritual. Subsequently, the situation creates “mudik” as necessary and inseperable part of community activity.
The SidoMuncul Company

The SidoMuncul company, which literally means “the dream comes true”, is active in the herbal industry. Based from its official website (www.sidomuncul.com), SidoMuncul began with a small size organization. It is a company which first established as a home industry managed by Mrs. Rakhmat Sulistio, in Yogyakarta, 1940. Limited by only having three employees, Mrs. Sulistio had to produce herb in a more practical form, powder. Then she moved to Semarang. In 1951, she established a small company with the name SidoMuncul. In 1997, the growing demands for its product further push the company to grow. The management became larger, and they built a new 29 ha factory in Klepu, Ungaran, Bergas. Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, the Governor and King of Yogyakarta, placed symbolically the first building stone.

The development continued when the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of Republic Indonesia, dr. Achmad Sujudi, legalized the factory on 11 November 2000. At the same time, SidoMuncul received two certificates, i.e. the “Way to Formulate a Good Traditional Medicine”, and the “Way to Formulate a Good Medicine”, which made them equal with medical pharmacy. The certificates catapulted SidoMuncul as the only herb factory which meets the standard of pharmacy. Hence, they produce some firm brands i.e. Kuku Bima Energi, Tolak Angin, Kopi Ginseng, Kopi Energi, etc. Mbah Maridjan, the important cultural gatekeeper for the erupted mount Merapi, was even one of the endorsed artists of the brand Kuku Bima Energi.

However, one will not find any primordial aspect in the company profile on SidoMuncul’s official website. It seems obvious practice to highlight the organizational aspects of the company, rather than depicting any primordial aspects. The Chinese ‘touch’ of this company was unveiled by Yos, a ‘kios’ (stall) owner of SidoMuncul. “SidoMuncul itu punya nya Cina..orang Cina Jawa,” he said. On the other words, the retailer mentioned that SidoMuncul is owned by the family of Indonesian Chinese who grew up in Java.
SidoMuncul program of Mudik Bareng

The consistent annual habit of “mudik” (annual or periodic visit to hometown) among urban dwellers at the end of the Eid Festivity inspires SidoMuncul to initiate a special program that tributes. They implement “Mudik Bareng”, a program to facilitate street vendors to return to their hometown to celebrate the Eid with their families. Irwan Hidayat, CEO and owner stated that this program is aimed to embrace the public, where SidoMuncul wishes to continue to be a part of public life. The company wishes to be close with the public (www.sidomuncul.com).

Through various media, Irwan stated that the program is intended to be the CSR of the company. They facilitate “mudik” for those who have contributed to the company, as a mean to share or return the profit. Alwalindonews.com, the electronic news portal, reported the 800 percent of profit incremental gained by SidoMuncul. In relate to this fact, the CEO acknowledged “…kami mengalokasikan dana tanggung jawab social lewat cara memudikkan orang-orang yang mempunyai andil memajukan perusahaan, ya seperti mereka itu, penjual jamu, pedagang asongan. Tanggung jawab social lain ada seperti memberikan penghargaan,” said Irwan. From the statement, it can be understood that the ‘jamu’ retail sellers, as well as the street vendors, are the ultimate contributors of SidoMuncul.

As reported by alwalindonews.com, in the early era, SidoMuncul used to rely on street vendors as the ultimate distributors. However, in the current era, they only contributed 15 percent of the entire production. For this, Irwan stated that SidoMuncul do not want to neglect their pioneers. Thus, it is their normative consideration in applying the program “Mudik Bareng” (arranged group transportation to hometown during Eid Festivity).

Reported by various newspapers and televisions, the program began 21 years ago in 1991. In the beginning, there were only 2500 people participated in the program. In 2004, there were a significant incremental that SidoMuncul gathered 14000 street vendors. In 2008, the participant reached 16000 street vendors. Most recently, in the last 5 September 2010 (a few months before this research is written), SidoMuncul facilitated 18000 street vendors. Using 280 buses, they left from Jakarta, Bandung, Bogor, Tangerang, Cikampek, Cibinong, and Cilegon, for seven cities.
destination: Cirebon, Kuningan, Tegal, Banjar Negara, Solo, Wonogiri, and Yogyakarta. In total, SidoMuncul have been facilitating 250000 street vendors for over 21 years.

Every year, the departure ceremony is always followed by the endorsed artists of SidoMuncul brands. In the year of 2010, one of the endorsed artists is Mbah Maridjan. He is the cultural symbol of the people in Yogyakarta, especially in the area of Mount Merapi. Despite his role as an endorsed artist, Mbah Maridjan is also the key gatekeeper for Mount Merapi, known as “kuncen / juru kunci”. He is the cultural symbol in bridging the kingdom of Yogyakarta and the Mount Merapi. Being a symbol of local wisdom, Mbah Maridjan is respected by the people. Most of the time, people in the area of Mount Merapi await his signal whether the mountain will be erupted or not. Moreover, people trust him more than the ‘rational’ perspectives from the volcanologists. The icon passed away in the eruption of Mount Merapi, 26 October 2010, standing as the last person in the area after commanded for evacuation.

The program seemed to be attractive, not only for the street vendors, but also for the politicians in the government. Various media reported that Ministers, Governors, as well as the Police Department top management, often attend the departure of ceremony. Some issues are even embedded, i.e. the socialization of biodiesel. In 2008, Kompas.com and detiknews.com reported that Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla attended the departure ceremony. It was only one year before the national election, where he ran for the Presidency chair.

The problem is: is it enough for SidoMuncul to be accepted by the pribumi? Yos, one of our informant stated that he does not have any problem with the Chinese ethnicity of the owner. “SidoMuncul yang punya Cina. Tapi gak ada masalah.. Mereka kan paling Cina keturunan yang udah ke berapa, gitu..,” he said with laugh. The statement reflected the willingness of Yos to accept the primordial originality of SidoMuncul. Yos seemed to have no burden, because the current owner is not the real Chinese, but they are only the descendant of Chinese. Therefore, Yos thought that the owner will still hold the value of Indonesian even though they – the decision makers of SidoMuncul – are not pribumi.
But on the other hand, the second informant (refused to be named) revealed an interesting statement. He firmly refused and will always refuse to participate in the program of “mudik bareng”, as he does not want to be captured and ordered. “Saya kemaren ‘gak ikut mudik bareng sido muncul. Saya pulang duluan. Saya ‘gak mau, ‘gak akan mau ikutan mudik. Saya orangnya gak mau diatur-atur;” he sighed. About the Chinese ownership, he agreed. Therefore, there is a bias in his perceptual mind. This informant does not want to be ordered cooptated by Chinese. Instead, he chose to go earlier, back to his village in Java.

Another problem came up during the interview. Yos revealed his other concern. Even though he was favorable with the Chinese ethnicity of the owner, he did not participate in the program “mudik bareng”. With the body language showing grievances, Yos revealed that it was because he is from Sawahlunto, West Sumatra, not a Javanese. The bus tickets were only distributed for the Javanese street vendors. “saya gak ikut mudik, karena gak dikasih tiket sama SidoMuncul..gak kebagian..karena saya orang Sumatra. Tiketnya cuma dikasih untuk orang Jawa aja,” he said. Furthermore, he also revealed that in average, the “kios” / stall vendors could not get the tickets, because they usually come for Sumatra. “Rata-rata pemilik kios gak ada yang ikut mudik, karena rata-rata mereka orang Sumatra. Kalo pedagang asongan di jalanan baru dapet, karena mereka orang Jawa,” he said.

The facts from interview above showed a latent conflict that lies in the perceptual minds of the public, even the targeted public of SidoMuncul. In general, through the news reports, media framed SidoMuncul in a positive image, that the company is willing to mingle with the public. The consistent presence of the CEO – Owner, Irwan Hidayat, shows the positive sign of the willingness to do good acts. Unfortunately, the positive image conveyed by the media could not reach the entire public. Some primordial aspects still firmly established in their minds. Therefore, SidoMuncul must improve their CSR program to strengthen their linkage with the street vendors, who are – indeed – the oldest stakeholder of their business sustainability.
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