

China's Public Diplomacy to Build a Positive Image among The Muslim Community in Indonesia

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Abstract: *To carry out economic and political expansion in various countries, China has also exerted various public diplomacy efforts to maintain its image. Indonesia as one of the most important destinations is not an exception. This research aims to analyze various strategies adopted by China to sustain its positive image among Muslims in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative method using the conceptual framework of public diplomacy. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources on the Indonesian government, the Chinese government, as well as Muslim groups in Indonesia from 2000 to 2019. This research shows that China, during the Xi Jinping era, has actively been carrying out public diplomacy activities specifically directed toward Muslims in Indonesia through official representatives, educational and cultural institutions, and Confucius Institutes.*

Keywords: *Public Diplomacy, Muslims, China, Indonesia*

Abstrak: *Dalam upaya melakukan ekspansi ekonomi dan politik di berbagai negara Tiongkok juga menjadikan diplomasi publik sebagai bagian dari upaya untuk menciptakan citra positif terhadap publik di negara lain. Indonesia sebagai target investasi dan pasar Tiongkok yang besar tidak lepas dari upaya diplomasi publik Tiongkok. Fokus penelitian ini, berupa diplomasi publik Tiongkok dalam strategi untuk menciptakan citra positif di kalangan umat Islam di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan kerangka konsep diplomasi publik. Metode tersebut akan diperkuat dengan data sekunder yang berkaitan mengenai pemerintah Indonesia, pemerintah Tiongkok, dan kelompok Muslim di Indonesia dari rentang waktu 2000 - 2019. Penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa*

Tiongkok menggunakan strategi diplomasi lunak untuk membendung anti-sentimen Tiongkok melalui kedutaan besar, lembaga pendidikan, lembaga keagamaan, dan institut konfusius.

Kata Kunci: *Diplomasi Publik, Komunitas Muslim Indonesia, Tiongkok*

INTRODUCTION

China is one of the countries that can continue to increase the strength of its position in global politics today. With its economic power, the country can become the strongest in the world after the United States. This power was gained by China after economic reforms in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping's government. After 1978, the country's economic growth reached almost 10 percent annually and 850 people managed to get out of the poverty line. China's rapid economic growth is supported by manufacturing, exports, and cheap labor industries¹.

As one of China's strategic cooperation partners, Indonesia is part of the object of Chinese public diplomacy. In attracting public support in Indonesia, China held various programs such as the establishment of a center for the study of language and culture through Confucian institutions spread across various campuses in Indonesia². The institute also facilitates not only Language education but bridges student exchanges to China³.

As a majority Muslim country, China makes the Indonesian Muslim community part of its public diplomacy strategy priority through various cooperative efforts carried out both against large organizations such as Nahdlatul

¹ World Bank, "China Overview: Development News, Research, Data," 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview#1>.

² Maria Serena I. Diokno, Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao, and Alan H. Yang, *China's Footprints in Southeast Asia*. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2019).

³ Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat et al., *Ekonomi Politik Hubungan Indonesia-Tiongkok 2020* (Jakarta: INDEF, 2020).

Ulama and Muhammadiyah as well as Islamic educational institutions both public and private. Public diplomacy efforts against Muslims intensified in 2018 after the issue of violations of the religious freedom rights of the Uighur Muslim community in Xinjiang became a global issue and controversy that made China have to work hard to stem the issue through various statements and agendas to clarify and defend its policies in the Xinjiang region.

Looking at the historical side, Muslims as the majority community in Indonesia with 87 percent of Indonesia's 276 million people, have an important role in the course of political history in Indonesia. This makes countries that have strategic interests in Indonesia obliged to establish good relations with Muslim communities. Therefore, this study will focus on an in-depth and comprehensive study of China's diplomatic efforts in Indonesia, especially against the Muslim community in Indonesia through government agencies or non-governmental institutions⁴.

Studies related to Chinese public diplomacy in a global context have been written by researchers such as Yifan Yang (2020) who explained related to Chinese public diplomacy. Yang (2020) argues that China is using public diplomacy as a tool to spread its influence in the global order such as providing scholarship assistance; the role of Confucian Institutions in China's global cultural diplomacy⁵. Riski M. Baskoro, Amalia Agustina Theresia, and Anggara Raharyo (2019) also wrote similar things that China's strength in diplomacy is evidenced by the communication network carried out by China Using the film industry. The stance was taken by China to improve its bad image in western culture⁶.

In the Indonesian context, several authors raised the issue of how China's efforts through Confucian Institutions in supporting China's political economy

⁴ Thomas R. Leinbach, "Religions of Indonesia," Britannica, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Indonesia/Religions>.

⁵ Yifan Yang, "Looking Inward: How Does Chinese Public Diplomacy Work at Home?," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22, no. 3 (May 11, 2020): 369–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120917583>.

⁶ Riski M Baskoro, Amalia Agustina Theresia, and Anggara Raharyo, "China's Public Diplomacy Through the Utilization of Investment and Censorship in Hollywood (2012 – 2016)," *Sospol : Jurnal Sosial Politik* 5, no. 1 (August 5, 2019): 165–86, <https://doi.org/10.22219/SOSPOL.V5I1.7765>.

projects in Indonesia as carried out by Sitti Marwah and Ratna Ervina (2021)⁷. While Amorisa Wiratri (2017) focuses on the use of foods such as fried rice to vermicelli which is an instrument of Chinese public diplomacy in Indonesia.⁸

From several writings related to Chinese public diplomacy globally and in Indonesia, the involvement of Muslims as part of the object of Chinese diplomacy is still not seen in various existing studies. Therefore, the focus of the study in this article will discuss various Chinese efforts to approach the Muslim public in Indonesia to create a positive outlook, and the relationship between China and Indonesia continues to be better.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In carrying out foreign policy activities in the current era, a country no longer only targets certain state political actors to fight for its interests but also needs to consider the response and public attitude in the country. The more positive and open the public response of a country to a particular country, the easier it will be for the country to cooperate with that country and vice versa. This effort to create a positive image is referred to as *public diplomacy*. While the elements (ingredients) used to attract the public of other countries as *soft power* is the ability to influence other countries through attractiveness that is owned both in terms of culture, values, and other attractions⁹. According to Melissen (2005), As a method of diplomacy, public diplomacy is very diverse in its ways depending on

⁷ Sitti Marwah and Ratna Ervina, "The China Soft Power: Confucius Institute in Build Up One Belt One Road Initiative in Indonesia," *Wen Chuang: Journal of Foreign Language Studies, Linguistics, Education, Literatures, Cultures, and Sinology* 1, no. 1 (August 20, 2021): 22–38, <https://doi.org/10.26858/wenchuang.v1i1.23035>.

⁸ Amorisa Wiratri, "Cultural Negotiation through Food Case Study: Chinese Soft Diplomacy in Indonesia," *Kawalu: Journal of Local Culture* 4, no. 2 (December 31, 2017): 203–20, <https://doi.org/10.32678/kawalu.v4i2.1865>.

⁹ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014).

the actors who do it through activities carried out by the government or its representatives, the media, the internet, cooperation with celebrities, and various publications¹⁰.

Officially, Indonesia and China relations were established on April 13, 1950. The relationship between the two countries can be a symbol of strengthening political positions in the face of the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union in the cold war era. One of the focuses of the cooperation relationship between the two countries at that time was in the field of education and culture. Relations between Indonesia and China deteriorated during the events of the 30 September 1965 movement involving the issue of communism in Indonesia. Under President Suharto, Indonesia briefly cut diplomatic ties with China but improved again in the 1980s after a meeting of the two countries' top brass in Japan¹¹.

After the reform, relations between the two countries intensified starting from the era of President Abdurrahman Wahid and increased in the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, SBY, in 2004-2014 through two cooperation agreements, namely the Declaration of Strategic Partnership (strategic partnership) in 2005 and 2013 into a comprehensive strategic partnership covering various fields such as politics and security, economy and development, socio-culture, industry, infrastructure, transportation, energy, finance, tourism, education, creative industries, space, and natural disaster management¹².

In the era of President Jokowi, relations between the two countries have increased considerably judging from the amount of investment and trade relations between the two countries that have increased from year to year. In 2020, China ranked third largest in the number of investments in Indonesia. One of the causes of the improvement in relations between Indonesia and China in the direction of

¹⁰ Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan., 2005).

¹¹ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in The Republic of Indonesia, "Sekilas Hubungan Bilateral China and Indonesia," 2004, <http://id.china-embassy.org/indo/zgyyn/sbgxgk/>.

¹² Sandro Gatra, "Indonesia-China Jalin Kemitraan Strategis," Kompas, 2013, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2013/10/02/1946394/Indonesia-China.Jalin.Kemitraan.Strategis>.

China's foreign policy which is increasingly expansive after the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) project was introduced by Xi Jinping in 2013¹³.

In the aspect of public diplomacy, China in Indonesia, the two countries have been formally cooperating since 1992 after the signing of *the MOU on Information cooperation*. Cooperation is carried out through media work, student exchanges, and cultural cooperation such as Chinese language training. In 2018, the number of Indonesian students studying in China was 14,233 people. This data increased compared to 2007 which only amounted to 7000 people¹⁴.

Chinese Diplomacy at the Government Level

Public diplomacy efforts by the Chinese government towards Indonesians specifically related to Islamic issues have only increased in recent years, especially when human rights issues are on the issue of human rights Xinjiang was in the international spotlight in 2018. Various Chinese government statements conveyed to the Indonesian public related to the cooperation carried out by the two countries so far in various fields such as economy, education, technology, and culture.

As Uighur events heat up globally, the public response in Indonesia has also increased; Islamic organizations condemned china's attitude, including the Indonesian Ulema Council and Islamic figures. Responding to the public's insistence, the Indonesian government called Chinese representatives to clarify. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Chinese Ambassador to Indonesia on December 17, 2018, to convey the government's stance on the

¹³ Ade Miranti Karunia, "Indonesia-China Tandatangani Kerja Sama Soal Vaksin Hingga OBOR," Kompas.com, 2021.

¹⁴ Kedutaan Indonesia di Tiongkok, "Berapa Jumlah Pelajar Indonesia Di Tiongkok?," 2019, <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2019/11/21/berapa-jumlah-pelajar-indonesia-di-tiongkok>.

existence of detention camps against Uighur Muslims. At the Chinese embassy, the meeting gave a press statement on December 20, 2018, explaining that the Chinese government has granted the basic rights of the Uighur people in Xinjiang including religious rights in it; Facilitating the needs of Muslims such as mosques, Qurans, and hajj.

The Chinese government has made a policy of free vocational training and education programs for some Uighurs because of the emergence of radicalism and terrorism that result in the loss of people including Xinjiang's citizens. This happens due to a lack of skills and knowledge.¹⁵ The Chinese embassy also clarified allegations that the government destroyed many mosques in Xinjiang and built detention camps deemed part of western political propaganda. Xinjiang's Muslim rights including religious freedom have been guaranteed by Chinese laws. The government has built more than 24,000 mosques in Xinjiang¹⁶.

Diplomacy through the World of Education

Educational cooperation between China and Indonesia has been established for a long time, even since the Soekarno era until now such as China provides scholarships to continue studying in China, and builds cooperation with campuses in Indonesia in Chinese language training. Confucius Institute is one of the main institutions for spreading Chinese culture and language throughout the world and facilitating cultural exchange between China and other countries. The institute was first established in 2007 in collaboration with the Institute of Courses in Mandarin Bina Terampil Insan Persada with Hainan Normal University. Then this Institution spread to various campuses such as, at al-Azhar University Indonesia, 2010; Maranatha University, 2011; Hasanuddin University, 2011; University of Malang, 2011; Surabaya State University, 2011, Tanjungpura

¹⁵ AG. Sofyan, "Isu Muslim Uighur Disorot Indonesia, Pemerintah Tiongkok Berikan Jawaban Diplomatis," suarakarya.id, 2018, <https://m.suarakarya.id/detail/83895/Isu-Muslim-Uighur-Disorot-Indonesia-Pemerintah-%0D%0ATiongkok-Berikan-Jawaban-Diplomatis>.

¹⁶ Non Koresponden, "Kedutaan Cina Di Indonesia Sebut 24 Ribu Masjid Berdiri Di Xinjiang," dunia.tempo.co, 2020, <https://dunia.tempo.co/read/1390936/kedutaan-cina-di-indonesia-sebut-24-ribu-masjid-b%0D%0Aerdiri-di-xinjiang/full&view=ok>.

University, 2011 and Muhamadiyah University Malang¹⁷. Through this cooperation, various efforts can be made by China to carry out its public mission such as cultural performances, Chinese language courses and student exchanges, and lecturers in China¹⁸.

China also entered through Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia in collaboration with various Islamic universities such as UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in cooperation with Beijing Education Institute for International Exchange (IDXIE), a non-profit institution under the Beijing local government. The exploration of the cooperation involves 10 universities in China, such as Jiangsu Food and Pharmaceutical Science College, Wuhan Institute of Shipbuilding Technology, Hebei College of Industry and Technology, Jiangsu Vocational College of Medicine, Suzhou Art & Design Technology Institute, Jiangsu Agri-Animal Husbandry Vocational College, Nanjing Vocational Institute of Industry Technology, Nanjing Polytechnic Institute, Changzhou Vocational Institute of Mechatronic Technology and Jiangsu Vocational College of Agriculture and Forestry. Cooperation includes joint research between universities, sending lecturers for further study of doctoral programs, exchange of students and professors, and strengthening pressurization at State Islamic Religious Universities¹⁹.

UIN Walisongo Semarang also held educational cooperation with 23 Jiangsu Chinese universities in 2019²⁰. UIN Surabaya (UINSA) cooperation with

¹⁷ Feri Ansori, "Pusat Bahasa Mandarin Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia: Refleksi Dan Proyeksi Hubungan Sosial Budaya China-Indonesia," *Jurnal Al-Azhar Indonesia*, 4, no. 1 (2017): 11–16.

¹⁸ Humas, "UMM-Confucius Institute Cina Perkuat Kemitraan Strategis," UMM, 2015, <http://www.umm.ac.id/id/berita/umm-confucius-institute-cina-perkuat-kemitraan-strate%0D%0Agis.html>.

¹⁹ Khabib, "UIN Sunan Kalijaga Rintis Kerjasama Dengan 10 Perguruan Tinggi Di Cina," UIN SUKA, 2019, <https://uin-suka.ac.id/id/berita/detail/346/blog-post.html>.

²⁰ Public Relations Team, "UIN Walisongo Establishes Cooperation With 23 Jiangsu Chinese Colleges," Walisongo, 2019, <https://walisongo.ac.id/?p=1000000004191>.

the PRC consulate general, which produced a study center - Indonesia China Fisip, UINSA, 2018²¹. The exploration of cooperation has also been carried out by UIN Malang through the East Java provincial government, the year 2014²²; Cooperation by UIN Ar-Raniry Aceh with campus in Wuhan since 2014²³ and Cooperation of The Islamic University of Indonesia Yogyakarta with Nanjing Xiaozhuang University²⁴.

In addition to higher education, pesantren – pesantren is a target for China in spreading its identity to the public through the Chinese government directly. Like the program in November 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia initiated the "Santri for World Peace" program by sending 10 students to visit China as a form of cultural exchange to introduce Indonesian educational institutions that are tolerant, moderate and inclusive and learn from China's progress in various fields²⁵.

During the visit, the Chinese Government offered scholarships for outstanding students to continue their studies in China. In response to the Xinjiang Muslim issue, the Chinese government offered for students to visit the region and experience the lives of Uighur Muslims firsthand so that these students could convey objectives about Muslims in Xinjiang on a global level²⁶. China also facilitates the further study process of students who come from various boarding

²¹ Zaky Ismail, "Dosen UINSA Melakukan Muhibah Ke Tiongkok," UIN Surabaya, 2019, <https://w3.uinsby.ac.id/dosen-uinsa-melakukan-muhibah-ke-tiongkok/> .

²² Abadi Wijaya, "Pemprov Jatim Ajukan UIN Malang Ke IIA," UIN Malang, 2014, <https://uin-malang.ac.id/r/140901/pemprov-jatim-ajukan-uin-malang-ke-iaa.html>.

²³ Al-Zuhri, "UIN Ar-Raniry Perkuat Kerja Sama Dengan Kampus Di Cina," sumberpost.com, 2016, <https://sumberpost.com/2016/03/30/uin-ar-raniry-perkuat-kerja-sama-dengan-kampus-di-cina/> %0A.

²⁴ UII, "UII Dan Nanjing Xiaozhuang University Pererat Kerjasama," uii, 2018, <https://www.uui.ac.id/uii-dan-nanjing-xiaozhuang-university-pererat-kerjasama/> .

²⁵ Liputan6.com, "Kokohkan Islam Moderat, Indonesia Kirim Santri Ke Tiongkok," Liputan6.com, 2019, <https://www.liputan6.com/global/read/4119141/kokohkan-islam-moderat-indonesia-kirim-santri-ke-tiongkok>.

²⁶ Antara, "Sambangi Tiongkok, Rombongan Santri Indonesia Ditawari Beasiswa Kuliah," 2019, <https://www.jpnn.com/news/sambangi-tiongkok-rombongan-santri-indonesia-ditawari-beasiswa-kuliah>.

schools in Indonesia such as Nurul Jadid cottage, East Java which from 2010 - to 2017 has sent 111 students to study in China²⁷.

Chinese Diplomacy on Islamic Organizations

Approaching Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah is part of China's public diplomacy strategy. These two organizations are the largest group in Indonesia with millions of members and thousands of badah businesses, social institutions, education, and health institutions. Establishing a relationship between these two organizations will be an effective means for China to create a positive face toward the Muslim public in Indonesia.

China formally cooperated with PBNU, Nahdlatul Ulama's Executive Board, in 2017²⁸. Cooperation occurs in educational and social matters such as student exchange, NU students and Chinese students, scholarships for students, provision of clean water facilities (MCK) in pesantren - pesantren, and procurement of ambulance assistance from China²⁹. After the 2017 cooperation agreement, NU also established an international NU branch in China, PCINU (Nahdlatul Ulama Special Branch Board). In the era of the Covid 19 pandemic, China provides health assistance to PBNU such as PPE, rapid tests, masks, and foodstuffs³⁰.

²⁷ Agus Yulianto, "Santri Nurul Jadid Banyak Kuliah Ke Cina," *Republika.co.id*, 2017, <https://republika.co.id/berita/pendidikan/eduaction/17/09/03/ovoqm2-santri-nurul-jadid-banyak-kuliah-ke-cina>.

²⁸ NU Online, "PBNU Dan Tiongkok Sepakati Kerja Sama Di Bidang Pendidikan," *Nu Online*, 2017, <https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/78497/pbnu-dan-tiongkok-sepakati-kerja-sama-di-bidang-pendidikan>.

²⁹ *Indonesiainside.id*, "PBNU Dan Cina Rapat Online Bahas Beasiswa Santri Saat Pandemi," *Law Justice.co*, 2020, <https://www.law-justice.co/artikel/86013/pbnu-dan-cina-rapat-online-bahas-beasiswa-santri-saat-pandemi/>.

³⁰ Lutfi Dwi Puji Astuti Syaefullah, "PBNU Berharap, Indonesia Bisa Belajar Dari China Untuk Tangani Corona," *Viva*, 2020, https://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/1214524-pbnu-berharap-indonesia-bisa-belajar-dari-china-untuk-tangani-corona?page=all&utm_medium=all-page.

Ramadan in 2021, the Chinese Ambassador sent more assistance to pbnu through the Embassy of the People's Republic of Tiongkok (PRC) by providing food packages that will be distributed to boarding schools, students and dhuafa. In addition, China also provides scholarships to lecturers and students of Nahdlatul Ulama University, sanitation development assistance and MCK in Jombang, West Lombok, Bakauhehi, and Maros. The Chinese ambassador on that occasion conveyed nu's strategic value in Indonesia that:

NU is the largest Muslim organization that plays an important role in the field of religion, politics and social in Indonesia, the Chinese side is willing to continue to strengthen cooperation with NU in the fields of education, community welfare, social protection, in order to continue to maintain the friendship of China and Indonesia³¹.

China's approach through its ambassador has been increasingly intense even before 2017, several times the Chinese ambassador visited PBNU to explore cooperation and provide assistance to NU institutions such as pesantren and orphans in 2015³². In the period of Yahya Cholil Tsaqif who was elected chairman of PBNU at the end of 2021, in March 2022, the Chinese ambassador visited for the first time and discussed the good relations between the two sides in the future³³.

Muhammadiyah as the largest organization after Nahdlatul Ulama is also a target for China to establish cooperation. However, until now there has been no strategic cooperation between the two. But the contact between the two sides occurred to explore cooperation such as during the visit of Muhammadiyah central leadership to China in 2018, to study appeals to various universities and meet with

³¹ "Kedubes China Salurkan Bantuan Sembako Ramadan ke PBNU | Kabar24," *Bisnis.com*, April 20, 2021, <https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20210420/15/1383887/kedubes-china-salurkan-bantuan-sembako-ramadan-ke-pbnu>.

³² Danu Damarjati, "Dubes Tiongkok Serahkan Santunan Rp 100 Juta ke PBNU," *detiknews*, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-2961884/dubes-tiongkok-serahkan-santunan-rp-100-juta-ke-pbnu>.

³³ PT AKURAT SENTRA MEDIA, "Bertemu Dubes China, Gus Yahya Sepakat Lakukan Kerja Sama," March 22, 2022, <https://akurat.co/bertemu-dubes-china-gus-yahya-sepakat-lakukan-kerja-sama>.

Chinese officials³⁴. Work has also taken place at other levels of institutions, such as universities, schools, and regional administrators such as the cooperation of Muhammadiyah University of Palangkaraya, with 10 campuses in China³⁵; Cooperation of Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta (UMY) with Cheng Kung University³⁶; cooperation of Muhammadiyah University Prof. Dr. Hamka (UHAMKA) with 23 universities in Jiangsu China; Ahmad Dahlan University's cooperation with universities in China³⁷; Cooperation of Muhammadiyah University malang with Confucius Institute; cooperation SMK 1, Playen, Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta. Cooperation carried out by Muhammadiyah educational institutions is also based on the support of the Basic and Secondary Education Assembly of the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership³⁸.

During the Xinjiang issue in 2018, the Chinese ambassador visited Muhammadiyah headquarters 2018 and discussed and clarified the Uighur and Xinjiang issues³⁹. In February 2019, 15 representatives of Islamic organizations, MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah were invited by the Chinese government to visit

³⁴ Inung Kurnia, "China Tertarik Jalin Kerjasama Pendidikan Dan Keagamaan Dengan Muhammadiyah," *Menara62*, 2018, <https://menara62.com/china-tertarik-jalin-kerjasama-pendidikan-dan-keagamaan-dengan-muhammadiyah/>.

³⁵ *Betangvoice*, "UMP Jalin Kerjasama Dengan 10 Perguruan Tinggi Tiongkok," *Betangvoice*, 2020, <https://www.betangvoice.id/2020/01/18/ump-jalin-kerjasama-dengan-10-perguruan-tinggi-tiongkok/>.

³⁶ UMY, "Dorong Internasionalisasi, Fisipol UMY Jalin Kerjasama Dengan Cheng Kung University," UMY, 2017, <https://www.umat.ac.id/dorong-internasionalisasi-fisipol-umat-jalin-kerjasama-dengan-cheng-kung-university.html>.

³⁷ UAD, "UAD Kembali Jalin Kerjasama Bidang Pendidikan Dengan Negara Asing," UAD, 2011, <https://uad.ac.id/id/uad-kembali-jalin-kerjasama-bidang-pendidikan-dengan-negara-asing%0D%0Ag/>.

³⁸ Admin, "Siswa Lulusan SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Playen Bisa Melanjutkan Studi Di Jiangsu Vocational Institute of Architectural and Technology Tiongkok," *muspla.sch.id*, 2019, <https://muspla.sch.id/2019/06/20/siswa-lulusan-smk-muhammadiyah-1-playen-bisa-melanjutkan-studi-di-jiangsu-vocational-institute-of-architectural-and-technology-tiongkok/>.

³⁹ Yunita Amalia, "Bertemu Dubes China, Muhammadiyah Bahas Diskriminasi Muslim Uighur," *merdeka.com*, 2018, <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/bertemu-dubes-china-muhammadiyah-bahas-diskri%0D%0Aminasi-muslim-uighur.html>.

to observe the condition of the Uighur community and get an overview of Xinjiang by the Xinjiang government⁴⁰.

Muslim Attitude Towards China's Presence in Indonesia

Relations between China and Indonesia continue to improve, especially in the era of President Joko Widodo. This means that there has been a mutually needy relationship between the two countries seeing the potential that each other has. At the Indonesian public level, surveys that have been conducted show that the level of Indonesian people's perception of China tends to be positive as in research. the *Pew Research Institute* found that between 2005 - 2014 the positive outlook towards China averaged about 55 - 73 percent. Research conducted by the *Center for China Studies* in 2014 also showed the same with a positive perception of the public 71%⁴¹. However, public perception changed when President Joko Widodo became president in 2014, in a survey conducted by *the Indonesian National Survey Project*, shows that although public support for China is still high, with 76.7 percent admiring, and 77.3 percent who think that China is important to Indonesia but there are 62.4 percent who think Indonesia has only slightly benefited from relations with China.

The findings of the Indonesian Survey Institute released in January 2020 also showed that there was an increase in negative perceptions of Indonesian people towards China from 2011, 2016, and 2019. In 2011, 2016 and 2019, the perception that China benefits Indonesia decreased from 47% (2011), 36% (2016) and 34% (2019). While perceptions of harm increased, from 26% (2011), 19% (2016), and 34% (2019)⁴².

⁴⁰ Embassy of the People's Republic of China in The Republic of Indonesia, "Ambassador Xiao Qian Meets General Chairman of Muhammadiyah Dr. H. Haedar Nashir," 2018, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceindo//eng/gdxw/t1625763.htm>.

⁴¹ Johannes Herlijanto, "Public Perceptions of China in Indonesia: The Indonesia National Survey," *Perspective* (Singapore, December 2017), https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2017_89.pdf.

⁴² Lembaga Survei Indonesia, "Persepsi Publik Terhadap Negara-Negara Paling Berpengaruh Di Dunia" (Jakarta, 2019), https://www.lsi.or.id/file_download/176.

The cause of the increased public negative perception of China is allegedly due to several issues such as the controversy of the Jakarta - Bandung high-speed rail cooperation project in 2015; a flood of labor or manual labor from China; the issue of infiltration of communism ideology in Indonesia by China⁴³; the issue of reclamation of Jakarta Bay. Negative propaganda against China is running high ahead of Jakarta's 2017 gubernatorial election and 2018 presidential election⁴⁴.

The issue of human rights violations over Xinjiang's re-education camp is one of the causes of the change in Indonesian public perception of China that spread in 2018. This issue provoked various actions and demonstrations in various regions of Indonesia. Criticism came from various parties, including the Indonesian Ulema Council, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah demanding transparency from China⁴⁵.

Responding to the attitude of the Indonesian public, the Chinese government invited representatives of Islamic groups, especially from Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and The Indonesian Ulema Council as well as representatives of journalists to visit Xinjiang in February 2019. The visit was organized by China International Publishing Group (CIPG)⁴⁶. But this Chinese effort has not had a significant impact. After the Wall Street Journal published an article on December 11, 2019 "*How China Persuaded One Muslim National to*

⁴³ Musni Umar, "China Ancaman Nyata Indonesia," Arah Jaya, 2019, <https://arahjaya.com/2019/02/27/china-ancaman-nyata-indonesia/>.

⁴⁴ Dipna Videlia Putsanra, "Jokowi & Prabowo Diserang Isu Kafir, PKI, & Antek Asing Di Twitter," tirta.id, 2019, <https://tirta.id/jokowi-prabowo-diserang-isu-kafir-pki-antek-asing-di-twitter-dniH>.

⁴⁵ Antara, "Kata Mui Soal Dugaan Pelanggaran HAM Muslim Uighur," nasional.tempo.com, 2018, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1157698/kata-mui-soal-dugaan-pelanggaran-ham-muslim%0D%0A-uighur>.

⁴⁶ Rizki Akbar Hasan, "MUI, Muhammadiyah, Dan NU Akan Kunjungi Muslim Uighur Di Xinjiang," merdeka.com, 2019, <https://www.merdeka.com/dunia/mui-muhammadiyah-dan-nu-akan-kunjungi-muslim-uighur-di-xinjiang.html>.

Keep Silent on Xinjiang Camps"⁴⁷, Representatives of organizations that have been invited to Xinjiang have clarified.

Muhammadiyah said that, during the visit of Islamic organizations in early 2019, there were many irregularities indicating that there were efforts to engineer conditions in Xinjiang to look good, such irregularities included: requests for prayers in restricted mosques; qibla direction sign in the hotel that looks new; restricted when you want to go outside the hotel yourself; and religious conditions in the re-education camp that look as if they were made up⁴⁸.

Muhammadiyah Central Leadership (PP) even stated an official statement denying the allegations from the WSJ media and confirmed its political attitude towards the Xinjiang issue through a 7-point statement that the Wall Street Journal's reporting was very baseless and slanderous that damaged the good name of Muhammadiyah, NU, and MUI. Muhammadiyah Central Leadership urged the Wall Street Journal to correct the news and apologize to Muhammadiyah or Muhammadiyah residents will take legal steps as they should.

Muhammadiyah also urged the Chinese government to be more open in providing information and access to the international community regarding policies in Xinjiang and the Uighur Community. As well as stopping all forms of human rights violations, especially to the Uighur community under any pretext and resolving the Uighur issue peacefully through dialogue with Uighur figures and giving Freedom to Muslims to perform worship and maintain identity. Muhammadiyah also called on the United Nations to issue a resolution related to human rights violations against Uighurs, Rohingya, Palestinians, Syrians, Yemenis, Indians, and so on. This includes calling on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to hold a special session and take concrete steps to stop segala bentuk pelanggaran HAM yang dialami Muslims, especially in Xinjiang. The

⁴⁷ Jon Emont, "How China Persuaded One Muslim Nation to Keep Silent on Xinjiang Camps," The Wall Street Journal, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-china-persuaded-one-muslim-nation-to-keep-silent-on-xinjiang-camps-11576090976>.

⁴⁸ Lisye Sri Rahayu, "Muhammadiyah Ungkap Kejanggalan Saat Diajak Tur Ke Xinjiang China," detikNews, 2019, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4825065/muhammadiyah-ungkap-kejanggalan-saat-diajak-tur-ke-xinjiang-china/3>.

Indonesian government is also asked to more actively respond to the Xinjiang issue through bilateral and multilateral efforts through the OIC and the United Nations⁴⁹.

On the other hand, PBNU has conveyed its stance on December 20, 2018, on the Uighur issue through its official statement by affirming and appealing to the United Nations to immediately investigate the root causes and facts that occurred in Xinjiang to open up potential human rights violations and discrimination that occurred. PBNU also condemned all forms and acts of violence, including the behavior of attacking parties who are considered different, and encouraged the Indonesian government to immediately take diplomatic steps and take part in efforts to create peace in Xinjiang. PBNU also appealed to the world community to collect humanitarian assistance for Xinjiang residents.

PBNU's attitude softened four days after the statement after the Chinese ambassador visited and had a dialogue with the PBNU leadership. PBNU's attitude that looks more neutral and softened is seen in said Aqil Siradj's statement when he said that the problem in Xinjiang includes two aspects, namely religious issues where the Chinese government guarantees the freedom of its people in religion based on the freedom of each citizen to practice their respective religions. Said Aqil,

"I have also been there (China). Many have been there, kiai, religious figures witnessed how mosques were built, imams were paid fairly, and groups of Muslims were nurtured. Prayer, recitation may be as long as it is not outside the mosque,"

⁴⁹ Suara Muhammadiyah, "Pernyataan Resmi PP Muhammadiyah tentang Permasalahan HAM di Xinjiang - Suara Muhammadiyah," December 16, 2019, <https://suaramuhammadiyah.id/2019/12/16/pernyataan-resmi-pp-muhammadiyah-tentang-permasalahan-ham-di-xinjiang/>.

The second aspect according to Said Aqil is the political issue where Uighur Muslims have long rebelled against the Emperor of China and demanded secession from Beijing. In this aspect, Said Aqil said, it is China's domestic problem and should not interfere let alone denounce, except only provide input. Just like when there are domestic problems in Indonesia, such as in Papua and Aceh other countries do not need to interfere.

Said Aqil warned how the Chinese government should respond to Uighur Muslim issues such as having to be given freedom of work, economic development, and education. However, if the problem against Uighur Muslims is the question of religion then all Muslims should have Voices including NU. NU also said it was ready to be held as a mediator for the problems of the Chinese government and Uighur Muslims⁵⁰.

Nu's appreciative views on China's attitudes towards Muslims and Uighurs are widely demonstrated in various agendas. For example, in an event held by PCINU (Nu China Special Branch Board) in July 2019 Said Aqil Siradj, the Chairman of PBNU said that,

"I have been to Xinjiang. The mosque is fine. I also met my friend in Chengdu. There if praying in the mosque, the worshipers spread out to the outside of the courtyard" Then in answer to a reporter's question about the repression in Uighurs, Aqil Siradj said "The issue of torture is in the past. Xinjiang is great, really. The fact is that some Uighur combatants were arrested by our police for joining Indonesian terrorist groups."⁵¹

The appreciative attitude towards China's policies in Xinjiang was also conveyed by the chairman of PCINU China, Imron Rosyadi Hamid. Hamid (2018) explained that the problem in Xinjiang has nothing to do with anti-Islamic policies because it is part of efforts to prevent separatism. So even if there are allegations of human rights violations in the eyes of the issue of how to handle separatism is not related to China which is anti-Islam. Indonesia also, according to him, has a history in terms of errors in handling separatism movements such as in

⁵⁰ Muchlishon, "Kilas 2018: Geger Muslim Uighur," Nu Online, 2018, <https://nu.or.id/internasional/kilas-2018-geger-muslim-uighur-B4BTD>.

⁵¹ Novi Basuki, "Muslim Uighur Dalam Pandangan NU," Historia, 2019, <https://historia.id/agama/articles/muslim-uighur-dalam-pandangan-nu-Dwjgg/page/3>.

Aceh with the Military Operations Area (DOM) policy. But the world views the issue as a domestic problem in Indonesia. Imron also said that the Chinese Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and Muslim life in China, outside Xinjiang, goes well. The government even built facilities for Muslim interests such as Hui Culture Park worth 3.7 billion U.S. dollars (51 trillion rupiah)⁵².”

CONCLUSION

Public diplomacy is part of China's public diplomacy strategy in Indonesia to fight for its political and economic interests in Indonesia. China's public diplomacy efforts are carried out through government institutions, and educational and cultural institutions in the Muslim community in Indonesia. Public diplomacy is underway running until now is like Confucius establishment institute in several Islamic campuses in Indonesia; cooperation of public and private Islamic universities with campuses from China; cooperation of the Chinese government with the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board through the provision of santri scholarships, social and health assistance; and cooperation with Muhammadiyah through Muhammadiyah educational institutions. As the Uighur human rights issue in Xinjiang rolls around, China is actively stating its attitude through press conferences by denying accusations against Chinese policies in Xinjiang and inviting journalists, and religious figures to Xinjiang to see firsthand the lives of Uighurs.

Indonesia and China's cooperation efforts have been responded to positively by the People of Indonesia through surveys that have been conducted. However, the positive outlook of society changes from year to year, and the percentage of negative perceptions also increases. Some of the issues contributed including the Uighur issue in Xinjiang which caused a lot of

⁵² Muchlishon, “Kilas 2018: Geger Muslim Uighur.”

condemnation from the Muslim community in Indonesia as well as from major organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah including the Indonesian Ulema Council.

China has benefited from the long-established intensive cooperative relationship with the Muslim community in Indonesia. The issue of Xinjiang in Indonesia has not always been condemned, but also some from the Muslim community gave a more neutral and appreciative view as did Nahdlatul Ulama and the Head of nu's Special Branch in China. NU considers that the Uighur issue is a political issue, not a religion because Muslims in Uighurs have gained freedom and support in religion during this time. The Uighur issue is more about separatism, radicalism, and extremism. This narrative of support for China was conveyed by the administrators of NU and PCINU on various occasions.

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