

The UDHR and Confucian Community: A Case of Confucian Religious Education Erasure in Indonesia

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Abstract

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Confucianism have a complex relationship in Indonesia. Therefore, this article focuses on the relationship between human rights principles and religious traditions that consider the importance of the UDHR for Confucians. It is also related to the fulfilment of the rights to freedom of religion and education, and it focuses on the case of the elimination of Confucian religious education during the New Order in Indonesia. This article is compiled using historical methods. The primary sources used are Supreme Council of the Confucian Religion (MATAKIN) correspondence with the government officials. The study results show that the Confucian community uses the UDHR as a promotional medium for Confucian religious education in schools. In addition, they fight for Confucianism to gain legal recognition as a religion.

Keywords: UDHR; Confucian Community; Confucian Religious Education; New Order.

Introduction

Freedom of religion and the right to education are interrelated but often overlooked. Initially, religious education was not compulsory in schools (Kosim, 2021). However, the New Order government began to realize the importance of religious education in schools. At that time, religious teachings were adjusted to government policies. Religious policies issued by the government sparked debate about religion and politics, especially for people who adhere to Confucianism. With this policy, Confucian religious education was removed from the education curriculum in 1975. That then directly impacted the Tripusaka Foundation, which was managed by the Confucian Religious Council (Makin) in Solo as one of the Confucian-based schools. As a result, Confucian students could not receive Confucian religious education in schools. These students could only take religious education recognized by the government under the policy.

Since 1970, problems related to the recognition and education of Confucianism have occurred. Therefore, the Confucian community invited the UDHR to play a role as desired by the state. Religious education is important to be taught in schools. In addition, the public believes that the New Order government realized that religion is a complementary element to Pancasila.

At that time, there were various assumptions about the Chinese and Confucian religions. However, it was the Confucians who were harmed by the various policies on religion. That was because the group was seen by society as part of Chinese culture. Therefore, the New Order government made restrictions related to Chinese culture and religion so as not to disturb national stability and harmony as one of the fundamental aspects (Hansen, 1976; Hainsworth, 1983). In Suryadinata's research on the impact of New Order policies on the Chinese, it was revealed that there was political discrimination against certain ethnic groups. It is related to the political situation during the New Order (Heryanto, 2006). The situation can be said to be influenced by the Genocide of 1965, which led to discrimination against the Chinese. Although Communism is not necessarily associated with the Chinese, the group will be affected because they are considered to have a relationship with each other (Cribb & Coppel, 2009). Similarly, the relationship between Chinese and Confucianism is considered the same despite differences in some respects. When the recognition of Confucianism was revoked, Buddhism, one of the religions rooted in China, gained recognition and underwent changes (Suryadinata, 2005; Yulianti, 2022).

Based on that, there has been a discourse on the role of religion in the recognition of religions established by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The New Order government carried out the discourse to regulate religion in Indonesia. That is because recognizing religion in Indonesia impacts financial and bureaucratic benefits (Stephan, 2011). In Indonesia, Confucianism was recognized before the New Order period through Presidential Decree No. 1/ 1965. Meanwhile, its community has existed since the early 20th century. The Khung Chiao Hui Association of Indonesia (PKCHI) has even said that Confucius is a prophet. However, worship activities and religious practices are only actualized in religious circles due to Presidential Instruction No. 14/ 1967 issuance.

Along with various events, the recognition of the Confucian religion was discussed to be abolished in Indonesia since 1970. The discourse became a reality through the president's statement in the Cabinet Session on January 27, 1979 (Yang, 2005). It had a broad impact on the lives of the Confucian faithful. In addition, there were also theological changes related to negotiation strategies with the state to regain recognition (Sutrisno, 2018).

To gain recognition, the Confucian people made the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to demand their rights as Indonesian citizens. Although the idea of rights is not part of Confucian teachings emphasizing obligations, Confucian teachings still teach about the state's obligations to its citizens. The movement carried out by Confucians raises assumptions regarding the relationship between UDHR and Confucianism, although the relationship between the two is not unfamiliar. That is because the vice-chairman of the UDHR, P. C. Chang, had injected Confucian thought into the UDHR (Roth, 2018). The role of the UDHR as a medium of struggle was initiated by the Indonesian Confucian Religious Council (MATAKIN). MATAKIN is a Confucian community in Indonesia that was established in 1967. The organization acts as a representative of the Confucian community in negotiating with the state. One of

the things fought for is Confucian religious education. Therefore, this issue is the focus of this article. The problem is guided by two research questions: How do Confucians interpret the UDHR, and how do Confucians support the UDHR struggle? In my opinion, the UDHR plays an essential role in the Confucian struggle. Apart from being the basis for political arguments in negotiating with the government, the UDHR also preserves their existence.

Research on Confucianism has previously been conducted by Evi Sutrisno (2018). Her study discusses the negotiation strategy of recognizing the Confucian religion, especially in the colonial period until the Reformation. In his various writings, Suryadinata (Suryadinata, 1972, 1976, 1982, 1987, 1988, 2002; Siddique & Suryadinata, 1981; Suryadinata & Emerson, 1991) also studied Chinese Indonesians focusing on political aspects related to government policies from independence to reform. In addition, he studied Chinese education, although it was not associated with human rights. Meanwhile, a study of Chinese identity was conducted by Dawis (2010), which focused on the visual culture of Chinese people during the transition from the New Order to the Reformation. Lasiyo (1992), in his study, also discusses Confucianism in Indonesia, although it focuses on religiosity and theological aspects. These studies support this research, which examines the intersection of human rights principles and Confucianism during the New Order.

Method

This article employs historical method focuses on the relationship between Confucianism and the UDHR in fighting for the rights of its people as Indonesian citizens. Therefore, this article is organized using the historical method, which includes four stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2013, p. 69). The sources used to compile this article are archival documents of MATAKIN and government letters. In addition, there is *Gentrika* magazine, published by MATAKIN for the Confucian community. This paper also uses secondary sources such as books and articles from various journals to obtain a more completed and in-depth context.

Confucianism From Recognition to Derecognition

Recognition of Confucianism in Indonesia has come a long way, especially during the New Order. The New Order government has banned the spread of Chinese culture and public performances since 1967 through Presidential Instruction Number 14 of 1967. That was done as a form of government assimilation plan. The regulation caused many Chinese schools to be closed, Chinese names were replaced with names containing Indonesian elements, and even the *Barongsai* art was banned from being performed in public. In addition, major holidays related to Chinese culture were also forbidden from being celebrated. Of course, this would conflict with the religious activities of Confucianists, even though President Soekarno had recognized the existence of Confucianism in Indonesia in 1965 through Presidential Instruction Number 1 of 1965. Therefore, the dynamics of the Confucian community in fighting

for its rights were already apparent in the early days of the New Order.

The dynamics of the religious life of Confucians in Indonesia at the beginning of the New Order continued to experience turmoil, especially when recognition of the religion was abolished in 1973. Confucian religious representatives in various divisions of the Ministry of Religion began to be removed. President Suharto also emphasized that Confucianism was not a religion but part of Chinese culture and philosophy. That statement was stated in a joint decision by the Minister of Religion, Minister of Home Affairs, and Attorney General in 1980 to reaffirm the implementation of Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967. The decision also stated that Chinese-Indonesian culture is affiliated with mainland Chinese culture. Therefore, implementing Confucian religious activities needs to be considered in several ways, such as not being displayed in public and requiring permission from the local governor. There are several reasons underlying the rejection of the recognition of Confucianism as a religion, including because it is considered to have no prophets, does not teach the worship of gods or goddesses, does not have a holy book, is not recognized as a religion in China, only teaches ethics about how humans should act towards each other, does not have priests, is based on philosophy and Confucianism is a great figure, and there are no teachings about the existence of life after death (Kilapong, 1978). It resulted in Confucian religious education in schools being removed from the education curriculum in Indonesia, including at the Tripusaka Solo Foundation.

In addition, the government also pressured schools established by ethnic Chinese groups in Indonesia in the 1950s. That pressure was in the form of strict supervision of schools that used Chinese as the language of instruction and categorizing these schools as foreign schools (Suryadinata, 1972, p. 49). In its development, schools managed by ethnic Chinese groups became private schools. However, there were still schools that provided Confucian religious education until 1974, namely the Confucian school in Solo under the management of the Tripusaka Foundation. The elimination of the recognition of Confucianism was implemented gradually. Although Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 prohibited Chinese culture from being displayed publicly, Confucianism was still recognized as a religion. Then, in the 1970s, the Ministry of Religion did not provide seats for Confucian representatives, which caused other problems. Based on the MATAKIN letter, when the Ministry of Education and Culture held an assimilation program in education in Indonesia, schools based on Confucianism could not hold national exams. Hence, students had to join formal schools that the government permitted. Therefore, the 1975 Education Curriculum began to prohibit the teaching of Confucianism in schools, so students from Confucian-based schools had to move to other schools that followed other religious teachings.

In its development, Confucian-based schools transformed into multicultural schools (Chan, 2013). In fact, several Chinese foundation schools have turned into Islamic religious education-based schools (Raya, 2023). Even though the New Order era has ended, many Chinese foundation schools have chosen to maintain the assimilation program. An example is a new school founded by the Chinese ethnic

group in Purwokerto, choosing to become a multicultural school (Putro, 2021).

At that time, the Ministry of Religion had provided an understanding of religion. However, the knowledge that was made gave birth to assumptions about religion. The compiled understanding gave rise to a group that could not be included as a religion, namely belief. Based on the decision of the Ministry of Religion with the approval of the Attorney General, religion became part of the political group. Therefore, Confucianists tried to gain recognition and not be grouped as a heretical and mystical sect considered the birthplace of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). However, the New Order government had a relationship with Confucianists. That was related to President Suharto's victory in the 1971 Election. In addition, he recognized Confucianism in his speech, which emphasized the relationship between Pancasila and religion ("Soeharto", 1971, p. 7).

In addition, Abdul Haris Nasution, as the Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), also supported the congress organized by MATAKIN. That was in line with the government's development program, or Pelita, as President Soeharto mentioned, which states that religion also plays a role as a socio-economic-political means to realize the development program. Therefore, Confucians contributed to the development of the political movement while supporting Suharto in the 1971 General Election (Coppel, 1977).

Confucianism, Human Rights, and State

The loss of recognition of Confucianism in Indonesia gave birth to a relationship between Confucianism and human rights since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Peng Chun Chang (P. C. Chang), vice chairman of the UN Human Rights Commission, first carried out that relationship and instilled Confucian teachings in the UDHR. Therefore, the UDHR is present to protect humans from systematic threats based on the idea of human dignity. The instillation of Confucian values in the UDHR is based on its ambition that the UDHR must have moral and pedagogical attributes to improve humanity (Roth, 2018). As a result, the UDHR can be a basis for discussing the compatibility between human rights and Confucianism (Qu, 2022). However, using the UDHR as a political medium remains different from the relationship between Confucian teachings and the UDHR.

The implementation of human rights in 1970 was not a coincidence for Confucians. At the same time, the country was facing pressure from the world to implement and accommodate human rights in Indonesia. Although Indonesia initially resisted, in the end, Indonesia could implement human rights because it was close to the United States. This closeness caused Indonesia to receive financial assistance from multinational companies to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) so that the international community could pressure the Indonesian government (Simpson, 2014). The UDHR used articles related to freedom of religion and belief in 1978. Some of these articles were also included in the MATAKIN Special Report letter Number Mat/XII/78 addressed to the leadership of the DPR. The movement continued because from 1973 to 1978, discrimination against Confucians increased, so they increasingly felt that the

recognition of the Confucian religion was being revoked. At that time, Confucians thought that they did not get a place of protection. The representation of the Confucian religion was no longer under the auspices of the Directorate General of Hinduism and Buddhism, which caused even more unrest for its people.

The pressure from the international community then finally caused Indonesia to implement Human Rights (HAM). The primary considerations began by citing Article 18 of the UDHR and continued with Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution. In addition, Confucians also cited the Guidelines for the Implementation and Practice of Pancasila (P4) in MPR Decree Number II/MPR/1978, which regulates religious freedom as a human right. As one way for Indonesia to accommodate international pressure on various human rights issues, the government issued P4, which emphasizes religious freedom. On the other hand, Confucians continued to report the issue of eliminating Confucian religious education and the plan to revoke the recognition of the Confucian religion to the Indonesian House of Representatives. However, the issue arose due to the government's half-hearted recognition of the existence of the Confucian religion. However, this effort was unsuccessful because the revocation of recognition still occurred ("Masih jauh," January 7, 1978).

Although the international community has pressured Indonesia to pay attention to human rights, religious issues have not yet become a major issue. At that time, the main issue of international concern was the 1965-1967 Genocide, along with arbitrary arrests by state officials (Simpson, 2014). It can be said that the international perception later gave birth to the view that Confucianism is not a religion (Kilapong, 1978).

In deciding that Confucianism is not a religion but Chinese culture, the Ministry of Religion assisted the government in evaluating Confucianism. One of the highlighted things was the absence of teachings about the afterlife in Confucian teachings, so it was considered a belief. The evaluation was also related to the assimilation program, which the government considered unsuccessful. As a result, Confucian adherents could not obtain their civil rights as citizens through recognition, protection, and facilities. The politicization of religion carried out by the Ministry of Religion through the definition of "religion" during the New Order era had political implications. In addition, politicization resulted in grouping religious groups that were considered illegitimate. According to Hurd (2015), this is a logical consequence. The inclusion of Confucianism as a belief group is because the ideology offered is contrary to the Pancasila ideology as the only ideology that is permitted and determines which religions can be recognized (Fibiger, 2023; Zulian & Bachtiar, 2021). Confucianists were about to make a unilateral movement. However, President Suharto gave a warning so that Confucianists would maintain their stance as Indonesian citizens.

Confucians showed this attitude after President Suharto's victory in the 1978 General Election. The win also marked the return of military power in guaranteeing national life. On the other hand, the general election showed limitations to human rights practices in Indonesia. Although the UDHR has been claimed as a universal declaration, the practice and application of human rights are still limited to state

administration (Brown, 2016; Regus, 2021). Therefore, several steps were taken by Confucians to support the government. These include government regulations, integration and assimilation, P4, and tolerance. Confucians focus on tolerance, as seen from their response to government recommendations to maintain tolerance or follow-up on using the UDHR. However, human rights issues re-emerged clearly in 1993, as seen in Yosadi's (1993, p. 199) writing regarding Confucianism as a human rights issue in the *Tempo* column.

Ultimately, the Confucian community's practice of human rights was one way to interfere in religious and political affairs during the New Order era, which the Minister of Religion dominated at that time. By Confucians, human rights are not only understood as a medium for negotiating with the government. In choosing an attitude of tolerance, the community makes efforts to accommodate two views, namely the government's top-down view of stability/harmony (Bagir, 2017; Sila, 2017). In addition, Confucians also invite the government to have a view on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Although the government has received international pressure regarding human rights, Indonesia has its strategy to limit international interference in managing what it considers national stability, one of which is through P4 (Simpson, 2014). Mahmood (2015) emphasized that the view of stability allows the state to negotiate on human rights. It also shows the geopolitical strength of a country that is more protective of the majority (Mahmood, 2015).

The Erasure of Confucian Religious Education

Religion and development were interrelated during the New Order because both were considered to support each other. Based on the 1975 Curriculum, religious education became a compulsory subject in schools and was followed by implementing P4 in schools. That arose because of the assumption that the assimilation program was still not running well (Sidjaya, 2014). Therefore, education is one way to make it a success (Kosim, 2021). Development also increasingly pays attention to the development of each individual, as achieved by P4. That is one of the political strategies to prevent the emergence of ideologies that conflict with Pancasila.

In the late 1970s, MATAKIN attempted to restore Confucianism as religious education into the national curriculum after it had been abolished. That effort was made due to the urgency of the Final Course Evaluation (EBTA) in 1977. Through this evaluation, religion became one of the subjects tested. However, because Confucianism was not included in the curriculum, Confucianism exams were unavailable in the national exam. Therefore, Confucian-based schools could not hold their national exams.

Based on the MATAKIN Special Report Special Number/ Mat/ V/ 78 to Minister Daoed Yoesoef, the government's attitude confused Confucianists. Although the 1975 Curriculum did not prohibit Confucianism, the prohibition of Confucianism in the 1977 EBTA showed a rejection of the religion itself. Confucianists used Article 18 of the UDHR to support their request in the MATAKIN Special Report No. Mat/XII/78. From a human rights perspective, the absence of Confucian religious education in

Confucian schools violates the right to freedom of religion and education. It has implications for the recognition of religion by the state and also affects the implementation of education.

After the Confucian community's position as Indonesian citizens was established, there was a change in Confucian religious education to Hindu religious education. Therefore, several schools that still run Confucian religious education chose to organize Hindu religious subjects and adopt the identity of a Hindu school (Suryadinata, 2015). One of the schools that organizes this is Tripusaka School. That was done so that the school could still stand like other Confucian schools that chose to change to multiculturalism and Islam (Chan, 2013; Raya, 2023). In addition, this shows the contestation between Chinese culture itself, namely between Buddhism and Confucianism (Sumantri & Yulianti, 2018; Suryadinata, 2015). Discrimination also occurred in textbooks narrated by the New Order Government about the Chinese (Kurniawan, et al., 2023). As a result, an extensive narrative was created that was discriminatory against the Chinese community so that the wider community was not aware of the problems in the education system and human rights violations that occurred in Indonesia.

Conclusions

The issue of revoking the recognition of the Confucian religion is a challenge for the state to uphold the human rights of its citizens. The New Order government has faced challenges from various international and domestic parties. The revocation of the recognition of the Confucian religion is an implication of the government's discourse to regulate religious life in Indonesia and realize the ideals of development. The awareness of the human rights of Confucians is also related to guaranteeing the fulfilment of civil rights. Confucians have made various efforts to get government support to fulfil their rights. However, Confucian religious education is prohibited in schools. It shows the separation between the right to freedom of religion and the right to education. To overcome this problem, Confucian-based schools changed the school base and replaced Confucian religious subjects with other religious subjects so that education could continue. Therefore, the changes in Confucian-based schools are a negotiation strategy to fulfil the right to education as part of civil rights.

The study of the relationship between Confucians and the UDHR related to the state still needs to be perfect. Most of the research is still centred on the island of Java. This condition is different from that experienced by Confucians outside Java, so there is still an opportunity to study the strategies of Confucians during the New Order. The author would like to thank the Confucians in Lithang Gerbang Kebajikan Solo, who have been willing to share their archives with the author. The author would also like to thank the Modern Endangered Archives Program (MEAP), a collaboration between the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies UGM (CRCS) chaired by Evi Lina Sutrisno, who always opened up opportunities for the author to conduct this research.

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