

# Islam and The Struggle for Multiculturalism in Singkawang, West Kalimantan: Local Ulama, Theological Economic Competition and Ethnoreligious Relations

*by Dwi Surya Atmaja*

---

**Submission date:** 15-Aug-2022 08:20PM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1882786484

**File name:** a-Islam\_and\_The\_Struggle\_for\_Multiculturalism\_in\_Singkawang.docx (50.27K)

**Word count:** 6152

**Character count:** 35016

## **Islam and The Struggle for Multiculturalism in Singkawang, West Kalimantan: Local Ulama, Theological Economic Competition and Ethnoreligious Relations**

**Abstract:** This article explores the dynamics of multiculturalism in Singkawang (San Khew Jong), West Kalimantan, which is the most harmonious Indonesian city. Social interactions and economic competition dynamics between people with different ethnoreligious identities, particularly Chinese and Malay, have become the locus of exploration of how a multicultural society is contested. The evolution of Singkawang as a multicultural city dated back to two centuries ago when the Dutch colonial government has permitted Chinese migrants from British-occupied Malaya to enter the West Borneo (Kalimantan) areas where gold and other mineral resources were newly found. The subsequent waves of Chinese migration were marked by the foundation of Chinese settlements at the end of the middle of the 18th century. After this period, Singkawang grew rapidly, attracting more overseas communities to settle in the city. Shaped by its strategic interest in supporting its economy, the Dutch colonial government assigned a policy to segregate cities for multi-ethnic and multi-religious harmony. It is this colonial legacy that has produced a pseudo-multiculturalism in which all ethnic and religious communities are tolerant of religious lives but tend to be exclusive to politics and economic competition. The role of local ulama in mitigating conflict potentials between ethnic groups is admired especially in promoting social acculturation through regulations of ethnic and religious proportions, whether in educational institutions, residential areas, and incentives for inter-cultural mixing in public spheres.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism; inter-ethnic relation; Singkawang; local ulama; social acculturation

### **Introduction**

As a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation, Indonesia named Nusantara during Majapahit times, comprises 633 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups interacting both in and across ethnic lines. These interaction networks obviously experience waxing and waning due to differences in interests between those groups, thus cooperation and conflict become the logical consequence. This sociological reality of conflict and cooperation shapes social behavior among ethnic, racial, and religious groups in Indonesia.

This article examines the sociological dynamics of ethnic-religious relations in the long-term struggle to build a multicultural society in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. It seeks to explain how local ulama and ethnic institutions has shaped the behavior among the different ethnic groups between Malay Muslims and local Chinese that interact within the framework of cultural commitment to establish “the most tolerant city” in Indonesia—a label that has been attributed by national government to Singkawang several years ago.

Understanding these dynamics, this article admits that while the reality of tolerance and multicultural society in Singkawang has been uniquely maintained by the spontaneous interactions between those different groups, the open-minded views of various types of *ulama* on Islamic teachings and multiculturalism has framed the wider Islamic community of Singkawang in mitigating conflict potentials—especially between the Malay Muslims and the Chinese—and continually maintaining its title as “Most Tolerant City in Indonesia”

The evolution of Singkawang as a multicultural city dated back to two centuries ago when the Dutch colonial government has allowed the Chinese migrants from British-occupied Malaya to enter the West Borneo areas where gold and other mineral resources were newly found. The subsequent waves of Chinese migration were marked by the foundation of the Chinese gold kongsis (companies controlled and owned by Chinese strongmen) at the end of the middle of the 18th century. This circulation of Chinese people, along with valuable goods, became very intensive, encouraging them to settle permanently in Singkawang rather than merely using it as a transit village. This is because Singkawang was a strategic location on the shores of the South China Sea connecting the gold mining centers of Monterado and Sambas Sultanate during that period.

Thus, by the early 19th century, Singkawang became a multi-ethnic city settled not only by the Chinese and the native Malays and Dayaks, but also by immigrants from Arab countries and India. The Dutch built a military base at the end of the 19th century and made Singkawang a colonial government district. The colonial government then assigned Southern and Western

Singkawang as Chinese neighborhoods, Eastern Singkawang as Chinese and Dayak neighborhood, Northern Singkawang as Malay neighborhood, and Central Singkawang as a mixed and segregated neighborhood of Malays, Chinese, Arabs, and Indians.

This article portrays the cultural, ethnic, and economic segregation practiced by various communities in Singkawang. By cultural segregation, this article means to explore the term “tolerance” attributed to them in which communalism is overwhelmed in their cultural lives. Each community lives in their own “boxes”, reluctant and even afraid to interact with “the others”, except for transactional purposes. Thus, the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of “the others” which should have been the principal foundation of true tolerance becomes questionable. It is the context historical origins of the multi-ethnic and religious city in West Kalimantan that gives rise to the “pseudo-multiculturalism” hypothesis.

“Pseudo-multiculturalism” in Singkawang is easily found in a satire familiar among the Malay communities to describe the city’s cultural segregation: “Dayaks are *tukang cangkul*, Malays *tukang pikul* and Chinese *tukang kumpul*.” At a glance, this satire expresses a funny joke, but when reflected upon, it is clearly revealed as a social irony: How is it possible to associate a functional-profession level/class with ethnic groups? In the context of Malay ethnic group, how is it possible that they willingly abandon their social identities both as people of the old Sambas Sultanate, and more importantly, as Muslims who have confidence in their cultural superiority as many religious preachers said that Muslims are acknowledged as “the greatest people on Earth” (“*kuntum kbayra ummatin*”).

### **Singkawang: One City, Many Ethnicities**

A famous label for Singkawang among Indonesian society has been a “City of Amoy (means ladies derived from Chinese)” and “City of Thousand Temples” echoing the city character as “the most tolerant city in Indonesia”. This declaration then disseminates the desire to prove a multicultural appeal on the site, particularly in the context of Singkawang Chinese and Malay interactions. It has been said that segregation of

residential areas is a colonial policy that continues to this day. Ironically, the economic growth of ethnic Chinese spurs the trend of Chinese acquisition of Malay residences. While Chinese and Malays live in the same town, they often do not know and do not want to know each other. They drink coffee and eat in the same place but still in separate groups, even when speaking their own languages. Furthermore, in the educational sector, there seems to be a virtual polarization of “Chinese Schools” and “Malay Schools”, especially performed by some culturally exclusive private schools in Singkawang.

In the above context, Singkawang’s pseudo-multiculturalism is supposed to mean the social harmony of various communities that are prone to social conflict. This trend is especially felt by endogenous communities, such as the Malays, as they have voiced their concerns over slowly declining existence. This problem has become the focus of this article on the role of ulama—in the variety of learning and ethnic background—in the context of “multiculturalism”. For comparison, the perceptions and imaginations of Chinese youth and the recent generation in fostering future harmony and multiculturalism in Singkawang are also interesting to study.

Around the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, under Sultan Umar Akamuddin II (1760-1793), Sambas Sultanate enacted a policy which invited Chinese miners in order to increase the Sultanate’s economy, following what had been made by the Panembahan of Mempawah. In relations to this arrival of Chinese immigrants, stated the year 1750 for Sambas Sultanate and 1740 for Mempawah Sultanate. These Chinese immigrants in the Monterado mines then created *kongsis*, and made Singkawang, located only around 80 km from the center of Sambas Sultanate, whose territory at the time reached as far as the northern reaches of the modern Mempawah Regency, specifically the Sungai Kunyit Subregency (144.2 km from Sambas). Thus, the interaction between the Chinese and Malays began in the 1700s, at the latest. Similar to other Malays in Sumatra, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and Southern Thailand, the Sambas Malay identity is intricately linked to Islam and its institution.

Thus, Islamic teachings and learning institutions had an important effect on the character of the Sambasi Muslims. On

the other hand, the Chinese immigrants mostly hailed from the Hakka people, as well as Teochews and a small number of Hokkiens and Cantonese, and almost all of the immigrant Chinese hailed from southern China. The Netherlands Indies colonial government referred to Hakkas as “Kheks” and Teochews as “Hok-Lo”. After managing to establish the *kongsis*, the Chinese miners of Monterado found their social status improving, using the Lithography method, mentioned 4 Chinese *kongsis*, which are: 1) Ta Kong / Tai Kong (Kongsi of Great River); 2) Lun Thien (Kongsi of the Raining Ricefield); 3) Shi Wu Kong Shi (Kongsi of the Fifteen); 4) Sam Tiao Kong Shi (Kongsi of the Three River Branches).

Based on this assertion Singkawang was originally a Chinese settlement. Miners, farmers, and fishers migrating from China received the “protection” of the Chinese *kongsis* (an exclusive neighborhood controlled by strongmen), who even protected other Chinese merchants, who opened stores selling rice, meat, and other foodstuffs. After the 1770s, the growing *kongsis* were often embroiled in wars with native populace, prompting the rulers of Sambas to send their armies to control them. However, even after defeating the *kongsis*, the Sultan never abolished the *kongsis* severely—not even dared to punish them letting the Chinese immigrants to continue working in the mines. Ultimately, the *kongsis* continued to grow and even became stronger with the arrival of Lo Fang Pak (1775), who created Hee Soon and united 14 Chinese *kongsis*, helped the Sultan of Pontianak (alongside VOC) to defeat Mempawah Sultanate, and finally leading to the declaration of Lanfang Republic. This development has given the opportunity for Lo Fang Pak to democratically elect as the first President of Lanfang. The Republic had significant autonomy in making and enforcing their own laws, although they were still obliged to pay tribute to Sambas Sultanate, Pontianak Sultanate, and the Qing Dynasty of China. The Lanfang Republic survived for 107 years (probably collapsed in 1880), when the 13th President was forced to acknowledge Dutch colonial authority in Batavia.

As immigrants, Singkawang Chinese become tougher because of the demands to survive in whatever condition they face. Adaptation, cooperation, competition, and even conflict

with local communities are the consequences they embrace. Their historical reality is filled with such conditions, before taking into account their bitter memories of the political transition between the Old Order and the New Order periods, particularly in the context of Indonesia – Malaysia *Konfrontasi*. One may argue that their political choice to support Sukarno's Old Order in opposing the formation of the (British) Commonwealth realms (Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore), which led them to join the Sarawak People's Guerrilla Army / People's Party of Northern Kalimantan, turned out to be a misfortune. When the Old Order collapsed in 1966 and the New Order started to persecute communist leaning leaders and members, their status instantly transformed – from heroes to “traitors”; from an army/force to “Communist Chinese Gangs (*Gerombolan Tjina Komunis / GTK*)”. The memories of both PGRS/Paraku incident and “Mangkok Merah” forced many Singkawang Chinese to flee en masse. At least 27.000 was slain, 101.700 fled to Pontianak and 43.425 among them relocated to Pontianak/Mempawah Regency.

Furthermore, they also had to put up with the New Order's political strategy, which in their eyes was discriminative (Demonization of ethnic Chinese, in the words of Michael J. Kristiono). It comes with surprise that, when the New Order was finally deposed, the Chinese once again become victims of riots, in the 1998 May Riots culminating the collapse of Suharto regime in 1998. All these political events has “forged” the Chinese, in contrast, strengthening their capabilities to thrive, particularly in the current Reformation Era, after finally convincing other that Indonesia is their true homeland, while *Chungkuo / Zhōngguó / 中国*, or China is merely their ancestral origin.

The existence of Chinese in Singkawang becomes more established in the subsequent political changes. Such a proposition is easily witnessed. Every year, particularly a few days after *Imlek* (Chinese New Years), Singkawang always conducted festive thanks to the Cap Go Meh Festival. *Tatung*, *Barongsai*, and *Naga* attractions which always draw attention from tourists and travelers worldwide to Singkawang. The Chinese also see these festivals as Singkawang's pride and “sense of

belonging”, as well as “symbolic” relational – dimensional articulation illustrating Chinese – Malay harmony. To what extent these annual festivals truly represent the Chinese character of Singkawang is still in question. The fact is that, viewed from within the traditional in which the resistance rituals towards the Dragon Statue monument, the meaning of harmony, tolerance, and multiculturalism in Singkawang ought to be puzzling, especially because in the face of inter-ethnic acculturation, Singkawang remains problematic. This superficial acculturation between the Chinese ethnic identity and the Malay Islamic identity become the corner stone of the persistence of ethnic stereotypes in Singkawang. All these factors have been worsened by the existing cultural segregation of residential areas and ethnic exclusivism in formal educational institutions, particularly the private schools and universities.

### **Competition, Harmony and the Threat to Multiculturalism**

Singkawang is mostly associated with various Chinese icons. Such an image is understandable, especially the Chinese population of this city are recognized easily due to their cultural performance. Besides being intrigued by and charmed by its cultural appeal, the Chinese community is well known as group of people with hard working habits both in terms of economic struggle and power contestation. This image of Singkawang that is “synonymous” with Chinese culture is because of several reasons. On the one hand, the industrious habits of Chinese, alongside their perseverance in the commercial sectors, is related to purposeful mentality, positioning social tolerance as an instrument to protect their business and capitals. On the other, the Malays are viewed to prioritize “sincerity” in their understanding of tolerance, or in other words, the Malays lean towards value-oriented rationality. As stated before, the Malays value the human behavior based on Islamic teachings, especially since Sambas Malays are familiar with the perspective of *Khatibi* religious order, which tend to be apathetic towards worldly concerns.

The Chinese strong drive for succes facilitates to build strong character to calculate every thing rationally, no matter how bitter it is. Singkawang Chinese has managed to transform a



small transit village into a metropolis intricately tied with their ethnic identity. Their efficient working system and way of life, particularly in their interactions with other ethnic groups, helped elevate them to the elite position in Singkawang. Harnessing the platform of social tolerance, the Chinese—who are relatively richer and more powerful than the others—is used to avoid participating in social works (*kerja bakti*) and communal gatherings (*gotong-royong*), in a village, for instance, but preferred to pay donation and money for these cultural practices. Meanwhile, the Malays and other ethnic groups serve as worker and laborers, even though such togetherness in social activities being the acceptable for Malays.

This identity stereotypes are embedded within the Singkawang society to differentiate between the Chinese and the Malays. The common Malay expression that “Chinese will be Chinese”, for example, is an illustration that the Malays actually realize, the Chinese always based their every interactions with in their neighborhood on goals or profits. It is illustrated in their social history, such as their initial arrival in Sambas Sultanate and their choice to take side with the Dutch colonial government back during the colonial era. This goal-oriented mentality is the main factor that has shaped ethnic Chinese to dominate the city economic and political lives.

Meanwhile, the Malays pejoratively see such Chinese’s goal-oriented mentality character as a hypocrite tolerance, because it is a mere instrument to secure their businesses and capitals (fully economic-oriented). In this sense the Chinese ignored the Malays’ social-oriented goals turns out to still not be enough to foster Malay consciousness to “surpass”, let alone compete the economic and political dominance of the Chinese over the Malays. One of the factors that creates this situation is that real and evaluated Chinese resilience grows well due to being fostered over the “fields” of Malays value-oriented rationality.

These various descriptions of social reality between Chinese and Malays further strengthens the view that the “multiculturalism” in Singkawang is still a *pseudo-multiculturalism*. Social and religious interactions between Chinese and Malays in Singkawang is steeped in economic and political ulterior motives, as the “tolerance” and

“multiculturalism” turns out to be not a natural one born between fellow humans as social creatures.

This form of interaction between Chinese and Malays clearly shaped a potential conflict to emerge at certain points. It goes without saying that the value-oriented Malays prefer to act tolerant, as well as maintaining Singkawang’s “multiculturalism”. Even though they realize Chinese economic and political domination, most Malays keep tolerating and appreciating the Chinese, even when the Chinese has no interest in knowing the Malays further, and unaffected by the small but growing movement of “shopping *only* in Muslim stores”.

In various public spaces, from markets to cafes, Chinese and Malays are frequently engaged in the same room, place, and public facilities. They sit and converse in cafes or restaurants, enjoying their ordered meals and beverages. However, they tend to not recognize each other; even if they do know each other, they would still segregate their social interactions. This situation illustrates that the intermixing between Chinese and Malays is still limited, illusory, and fake. When investigated further, it turns out that mutual understanding between ethnic groups (Malays and Chinese) is very pitiful.

Understanding others, people, or groups with different cultural identities—as this described above—is a prerequisite for hindering social prejudice. As this behavior is usually a biased assessment based on a certain group’s perception of another social group, this might be related to the relative power of that other group, which triggers a sense of being threatened. Then, this condition creates a situation in which one’s group may confront other groups, including key values in opposition to other group’s key values. These values then produce a sense of differentiating and conflicting identities between them.

This framework of identity conflict is illustrated in multicultural lives of Singkawang. It can be said that social prejudice among the Chinese community is related to their lack of knowledge and understanding of Muslims (read: Malays). The most extreme example of this lack of knowledge can be seen in the various Chinese culinary enterprises in Singkawang. Many Chinese culinary businessmen write the label “Halal” in their products without actually understanding the concept of halal

itself. In their eyes, as long as the product contains no pork, it is “halal”. According a local ulama under interviewed, despite the verses of the Quran and the hadiths, foods considered “not halal” includes carcasses, blood, pork, and animals slaughtered not in Allah’s name. In short, the Chinese culinary businessmen ignorantly put “halal” labels willy-nilly, ignorant of the existence of MUI’s Halal Certificate. Such ignorance of Chinese businesspeople that allowed them to freely write and attach “halal” labels. For the Chinese, this might not be such a problematic, due to their limited understanding. However, this ignorance might very well threaten the harmony between Chinese and Malays.

Further, Singkawang Muslim-Malays witness the phenomenal success of the 8-story PT. CV Arli’s “Sharia Mall”. This Sharia Mall, with its queue of buses carrying consumers from out of town, has become a point of pride for Singkawang Malays expressed in such a cultural confidence: “*jalan-jalannya di Grand Mall Singkawang, belanjanya di CV. Arli*” meaning that “we hang out in Grand Mall Singkawang, we shop in CV. Arli”. Among PT. CV. Arli’s uniqueness is the presence of staff who’s prepared to lend “*Awrah Covering*” for visitors who happened to wear just shorts, for example. Noerlizha Dzulhijjah Tarani’s description manages to capture the essence of PT. CV Arli: “...*Karena pemiliknya Islam, pegawainya berpakaian syar'i bahkan banyak akhwat memakai cadar maupun niqab. Ikhwan (laki-laki) cingkrang, dan in syaa Allah nyunnah*” which means “... because the owner is a Muslim, the workers dress up according to Sharia, many sisters wear *hijab* and *niqab*, many brothers use Islamic pants... *insya Allah*, all of this is practicing sunnah”

In the above context, there is a strengthening trend of the value-oriented identity of Malays in Singkawang, an identity that is translated simply as an openly performed action with the shopping “in accordance with sharia manner”. When this phenomenon is connected with the issues of “product from Muslims” and the performed through PT. CV Arli’s pictures (illustrated in one’s bearded face and wearing pants that do not cover the ankles), the Salafi message of the enterprise produce a strong sense of Malay-Islamic cultural identity. Thus, the worries concerning threats to tolerance and multiculturalism in

Singkawang share basically with the same experiences taking place in Malaysia, which means that economic competition can ultimately breed conflict of identity which erodes in the long terms social tolerance and harmony between the existing ethnic-religious groups.

However, some Muslim Malays develop their business strategy with more nuanced and opened minded fashion. Such different appeal of strategy performed by the Hotel and Resto Dangau Group, owned by Muslim Malay families. For example, the Dangau restaurants prefer to show the quality of foods and services in their restaurants, instead of performing their Islamic identity. As these restaurants do not exploit such identity, consumers who visit these restaurants have come across religious and ethnic boundaries. It is exactly this business strategy that moves beyond identity issues that people with different ethnic and religious background coming to these restaurants become the corner stone of multicultural marketing point for Dangau Group, and therefore take role in promoting multicultural lives in Singkawang.

In short, the arguments discussed above concerns two opposing trends: the ignorance of Chinese culinary businessmen concerning the true meaning of “halal” for Malays on one hand, and the rise of Muslim Malay identity symbols like PT. CV Arli’s Sharia Mall. The clash between these two opposite risks worsening the problems of pseudo-multiculturalism in Singkawang. As some commercial strategies undergo with cultural identity exploitation, some others keep them with preserving multicultural identity in which a more objective and product-quality oriented marketing. This manner, as performed by Dangau Group restaurants and hotels, has shaped the economic competition between Malay-Muslims and Chinese businesspeople goes in more multicultural manner. It can be said that differing strategies developed by PT. CV Arli and Dangau Group creates a balance of power between the different identities of the Malay business, thus the problem Chinese culinary business’s overly lax attitude towards “halal” labels has not present a threat to city tolerance and harmony.

### **Ulama Responses to the Chinese Cultural Dominance**

In religious context, small settlement of Chinese population that would have become Singkawang originated from a settlement of Sambas Malays (Muslims) and Dayaks (Kaharingan) communities. Singkawang's economy becomes grew rapidly not long after the Chinese arrived and settled, but also it attracted other overseas community to come to the city, especially from Indoa. The Chinese migrant in Singkawang built *Twa Pek Kong* or known as *Kelenteng* (Vihara Tri Dharma Bumi) serving as the "center of worship" for them. This has been followed by the Indian and Arab Muslims who built the Masjid Raya Singkawang in 1885. These two relatively nearby places of worship (only around 200 meters from one another) became symbols of religious and cultural harmony in Singkawang.

The present-day Malays in Singkawang work overwhelmingly as farmers and fishers settled mostly in the city fringes, although newly recent generations of their families have begun to shift into civil servants or become employees in Chinese-owned stores and companies. It can be argued that most of Malays' economic orientation is typically to fulfill their daily needs framed with traditional Islamic teachings, "where the main obligation of human beings is to help their pursuit of salvation in life and afterlife."

Economic domination of the Chinese in Singkawang is not only felt by the Malay ethnic community, but also by the Arabs and the Indians who mostly also work as merchants. It reveals that the various ethnic communities also witnessed pessimistic and expressed hopeless behavior concerning the prospect of economic and political competitions against the Chinese. Furthermore, many Malays today are preoccupied with the benefit-oriented Chinese style of life, uprooting themselves from their cultural outlook in the face of Chinese hegemony. However, such cultural changes have helped the Chinese businesses to grow even further by supplying their agricultural products to Chinese traders and spending their money in Chinese stores.

In the early 2000s, not long after the Indonesian monetary crisis and the collapse of New Order government, new network of companies was established by Malay trader in Singkawang: PT. CV Arli. This emerging company is seen as the most

important stepping-stone in the Malay effort to challenge the formidable Chinese economic domination. However, the Malays' efforts to appear as economic power in Singkawang have not been organized collectively as many successful economic networks operate, but their emergence has exhibited the strong role of family in the business creating family-oriented culture in the Malays' economy. One of the reasons for this failure is that, in general Malays still live by an agrarian culture and consumptive lifestyle habits, making it extremely hard to develop a business enterprise that may challenge the Chinese control. As a result, Malay economic opportunities are extremely hard to grow, let alone produce more entrepreneurs following the path of PT. CV Arli's owner, Ir. H. Edy Erliansyah.

Singkawang is unique, compared to other cities in West Kalimantan, or even Indonesia. As one enters the city, signs of "Chinese control" is strongly visible. Houses, stores, shrines, and lanterns can be seen everywhere with Chinese cultural styles, while people can be heard conversing in the Chinese language. Furthermore, sense of the Chinese cultural dominance can be felt by Malays who discussed about the Chinese "strong movement" to buy lands around 5 km and closer from the city center. This trend has caused massive increase in real estate prices. It is unfortunate that such economic changes strengthen the Chinese cultural position in Singkawang, driving the Malays even further to the outskirts, leaving them even further behind of the formidable Chinese superiority. Based on this economic and social changes between Chinese and Malays that this article investigated the potentials of social conflict through the lens of local ulama who experience this trend of pseudo-multiculturalism.

There are three diverse types of ulama that can be found within Singkawang Muslim community: First is the mainstream ulama. This group of ulama tends to have double standard in looking at the rationality side, trying to objectively compare the power dynamics between "values" (of Malays) and "material-benefit" (of Chinese). These ulama is usually affiliated with the Pesantren Ushuluddin of Singkawang, whether working as staff or alumni of this pesantren. This group is admired as the

defenders of multiculturalism and inter-ethnic harmony in Singkawang.

The prominent role of this mainstream ulama can be seen through their moderate and nuanced interpretations of Islam especially related to social interaction. The Pesantren Ushuluddin is respected as traditional Islamic school that produced many religious scholars. Their active engagement in working for government and society allowed them to socially and politically safeguard religious tolerance and harmony in Singkawang. Their religious stance and its implementation in cultural programs initiated by the government that tend to support national policies can categorize them as “State-aligned Ulama”. They articulate the Government’s visions of tolerance and multiculturalism that include promoting visions of religious and ethnic relations through both inter-religion associations as well as Islamic-based civil society organization such as Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). They champion educational and tutorial programs to train Chinese culinary businessmen about the importance of proper *halal* certification by MUI for their various culinary products.

Second, the group of ulama and religious leaders associated with mystical orders, known *jamaat tarekat*. Two important *tarekat* organizations established in Singkawang: the Naqshabandi order, which is based in *Makarimu al-Akblaq* religious school and the Khatibi Order (named after Syaikh Akhmad Khatib al-Sambasi), based in Sambas Regency. The influence of this second group of ulama is relatively weak, because of their disengagement with societal affairs let alone with the problem of cultural tensions between the Chinese and the Malays. It seems that in their religious activism they have not much interest in “worldly concerns” in city complicated problems. This group tends to focus on pursuit of afterlife salvation (called with intensifying rituals such as *dzikir*, *shalawat*, etc.). However, one should note the characteristic relations between a follower and their ulama, or master (*mursyid*), cannot be neglected since total loyalty of the disciples towards their masters could trigger dramatic conflicts and actions. Fortunately, as long as the issues of multicultural society are concerned, these tarekat orders’ main concern is spirituality and philanthropy.

However, these general concerns might morph alongside socio-political changes, as history recorded in the case of religious orders' followers in Priangan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Banten 1888, and the most extreme, the Sanusi Order, categorized by Nicola Ziade as a revivalist group.

The third group is Salafi Ulama. Associated with puritan outlook in their religious teachings, this recently recognized group is based in Pesantren Ibnu Taimiyyah. However, more prominent and visible influences of this group is spread among the employees of PT. CV Arli, with their characteristic salafi appearance, with beards, non-ankle-covering pants, whole-face veils (*niqab*) and the rule to “cover *awrah*” for all customers. Even though there are only limited *Salafi* followers in Singkawang, economically speaking the presence of PT. CV Arli Mall in the city has presented a symbolic cultural pride for the Malays. In other words, the *Salafi* PT. CV Arli has presented and restored a certain degree of social and economic confidence of Malays in Singkawang imbuing their ethnic and religious superiority *vis-a-vis* the Chinese.

In the context of West Kalimantan, the emergence of *Salafi* networks began with the presence of *asatidz-asatidzah* study groups which flourished in the early 2000s. These study groups show the presence of inter-connection between one *Salafi* cell with another, not only locally/regionally, but also nationally and even internationally. For Pontianak and its surroundings, these *asa>tidz* and *asa>tidzah* each have their own study groups and institutions, each with their own names.

The spread of this *Salafi* group in Singkawang cannot be separated from discourse of Salafis in Indonesia. As many studies on Salafism has found, the spread of salafi networks can be broadly divided into three: 1) *Salafi* who promote “*sunnah*” or the model of the Prophet's life as their main theme. This group promotes *afdaliyat sunnah* the Prophet Muhammad as the way to contain the modern life of Muslim society. Such an attitude of religious practices is promoted by Jama'ah Tabligh; 2) the *Salafi* who involve themselves in political affairs as part of the networks' response to democratic politics in Indonesia after 1998, as represented by Prosperous Justice Party (PKS); and 3) *Salafi* who make the matter of *khilafah* meaning to establish



global Islamic umma as their main themes, such as the emergence of *Hizbut Tabrir Indonesia*.

The group of *Salafi* that spread in Singkawang are mostly of the first type, prioritizing adherence to *sunnah* and largely ignoring political contestation. This might be due to the owner of PT. CV Arli being among those who had undergone the aforementioned “*hijrah*”. However, the minimal role of *asatidz* and *asatidzah* in pushing an exclusivist attitude toward religious diversity might facilitate the segregation of social interaction, harmony, and multiculturalism in Singkawang.

One aspect of social life that became arena of contestation by the ulama is educational institutions. Considering schools are the most ideal institutions to support inter-ethnic intermixing and tolerance, the most of ulama affiliated with the Pesantren Ushuluddin in Singkawang urged the Municipal Government needs to make an intermixing program for students in high schools. Private schools need to prioritize intermixing, such as regulating a minimum of 30% of students from “other” ethnic groups. Efforts to implement such regulations clearly need back-ups, such as: cross-subsidies and governmental support.

An interesting is shown by several student of SMK Syafiuddin Singkawang, particularly Susan and friends who openly express their hopes for Singkawang’s future. Even though their school only has two Malay students, they fully realize that the future Singkawang must be a truly multicultural one. The future Singkawang they imagined is one that considers the presence of Malays in the city, alongside them the Chinese. One of the potent multicultural instruments that they think can aid in warming relations and encouraging intermixing between Chinese and Malays is culinary businesses.

So far, Susan and friends are quite distressed by Muslim Malays’ reluctance to consume the various Chinese culinary products that according to them is counted “*halal*”. According to them, this Malay (Muslim) reluctance might be because the Chinese entrepreneurs are still not fully committed to promoting Chinese unique cuisines. Thus, one of them expressed their future plan to manage a Chinese culinary business that can also be enjoyed by Malays. They mentioned several Chinese cuisines

that should have fit Muslim (Malay) “taste”, such as: *Bak Pau, Chew Kwe, Jin Phia, Tau Sa Phia, Jiu Tui Tau Sa dan Go Jin*.

Interestingly, besides all of them collectively already knowing and understanding that those cuisines should not contain pork, they even made an effort to avoid mentioning the term, probably a sign of respect/appreciation towards the religious values of Malays.

Dismantling the communal differences to overcome segregation and reject ethnic exclusivity has been their desire since long, according to Susan and friends. It is time for Chinese and Malays, especially Muslims, to know and enjoy together each other’s unique cuisines as belonging to all. Their dream, on a certain level is in line with Sally Shortall’s research results, which state:

“the importance of economic interest vis-à-vis social and civic goals. It is further argued that the social capital debate gives renewed impetus to a romantic naïve view of rural communities, where civic harmony and inclusion triumphs and there is little room for power struggles, exclusionary tactics by privileged groups, or ideological conflicts”.

The manifestation of cuisine as a unifier of Singkawang is also demonstrated by Dangau Group, frequented not only by Muslims but also by Chinese. The sincerity of both the Chinese and Malays must be manifested in each cuisine sold, thus helping to build the foundation for true multiculturalism to emerge in Singkawang.

Susan and friends, as well as Dangau Group are also justified in their beliefs, as they correctly identify economic welfare as a prerequisite for multiculturalism, as discovered by Roy Cerqueti, et. al., which can be summarized as 1) Tolerance is only possible in societies with high prosperity; 2) Intolerance is much more resilient than tolerance; 3) Cultural integration must proceed economic integration.

## **Conclusions**

Social tolerance and multiculturalism in Singkawang are at some level “artificial”—a term referring to a low degree of social genuineness. Ethnic or religious conflict is hardly taking place thanks to the role of rational-moderate groups, led by local ulama affiliated with Pesantren Ushuluddin. Meanwhile, social

tension between these ethnic groups as well as between the economic classes in Singkawang has been made possible due to the rational-objective business strategy led by Dangau Group; a Muslim-owned company established in 2004. It is for this reason that, the term “artificial multiculturalism” attached to this form of tolerance, and multiculturalism means it is fragile, prone to collapse, and breaking apart.

As this article has addressed, the future of multiculturalism depends largely on views and roles articulated by the younger generations of Singkawang population, especially the millenials who are in formative period of their ages and still studying in high schools. Their expectations, dreams, paradigms and perspectives would determine the shape of Singkawang’s future for multiculturalism. Ironically, the state of pseudo-multiculturalism in Singkawang’s educational institutions is alarming. The majority of these private schools are occupied only by the children of Chinese elites, while the lower-class Chinese seems to only enroll their children in public schools, “intermixing” with Malay children since the latter only have limited options.

Even more ironically, this inter-ethnic mixing is mainly seen in elementary schools, while the subsequent educational levels show much less intermixing. An extreme example of this pitiful state of intermixing trend in educational institutions is obtained from several millenial Chinese informants who studied in Vocational High School (SMK) Syafiuddin, who stated that in their school there are only two Malay students. One of the 8 people interviewed simultaneously can only remember the name of one of their fellow Malay students back in elementary school, while the others found it too difficult.

Based on this contra productive trend of segregation that threatens the multicultural character of the city, various research concerning “social engineering” are needed, particularly research concerning government policies about intermixing programs, harmony, and multiculturalism in educational institutions. Intermixing behavior and inter-ethnic interactions only happen in public schools. Private schools, even those with Islamic label, which is intended to help the government provide education to

people, ended up becoming counter-productive to the goal of fostering multiculturalism and intermixing trend instead.

# Islam and The Struggle for Multiculturalism in Singkawang, West Kalimantan: Local Ulama, Theological Economic Competition and Ethnoreligious Relations

## ORIGINALITY REPORT

1 %

SIMILARITY INDEX

1 %

INTERNET SOURCES

1 %

PUBLICATIONS

0 %

STUDENT PAPERS

## PRIMARY SOURCES

1

[onlinelibrary.wiley.com](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)

Internet Source

1 %

2

[www.halalmui.org](http://www.halalmui.org)

Internet Source

<1 %

Exclude quotes Off

Exclude matches Off

Exclude bibliography Off