

Toward a Holistic Development: The Effects of Tzu Chi Foundation's Charity Aid in a Relocation Project in Jakarta

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ABSTRACT: Much contemporary psychological anthropology is concerned with the ethnic stereotypes and interactions between the majority and minority groups. What relatively absent in the literature is how these ethnic phenomena could be affected by charity aids, in particular the relocation of illegal settlements. By adopting the anthropological methods of interviews and observation in the community, this paper highlights the effects of a river cleaning project activated in 2002 by Indonesia Tzu Chi Foundation with special efforts focusing on the significant change among the Indonesian economically disadvantaged residents relocated in a new community in ethnic attitudes toward and social distance with the Chinese in general and Tzu Chi volunteers in particular and demonstrates that the charity program has benefited to the residents and, in the meantime, helped to improve the once deteriorated interethnic relationship and religious attitudes between the Muslims and Chinese in Indonesian. It also testifies to Pierre Bourdieu's perspective of practice that the NGOs could become a sort of cultural capital to bridge a mutual understanding of dramatically different peoples who may otherwise violently confronted.

KEYWORDS: Tzu Chi Foundation, Charity Aid, Relocation, Indonesia

1. INTRODUCTION

With an ambition to become the new "pearl" of Southeast Asia, Jakarta witnessed dramatic economic changes in the last few years before the new century. Being the longest river floating across the Jakarta metropolitan area, Angke River has once been the mark of this great city. Yet, a big flood occurred in late January, 2002 shed clouds to this dream. In compliance with the encouragement of Master Cheng Yen,¹ the founder of Tzu Chi Compassion and Relief Foundation based in Taiwan, the Tzu Chi Indonesia Foundation (*Yayasan Tzu Chi* in Bahasa Indonesian) initiated a charity program to clean up the badly polluted river

and relocate the riverbank residents three months later. The program covered draining, cleaning, fogging (the river), and providing medical help and housing to the residents who had illegally dispersed along the riverbank of Angke River starting from the 1980's as Indonesia was trying to gear up its economy. Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia took about a year to build a totally new community, located a few miles away from the river with 1,100 apartment houses, a school, and a hospital.

The charity aid did not stopped here. Under the request of Jakarta Government, Tzu Chi volunteers remained and helped to run the new community until now. As this work has been extraordinarily costing, the goal set by the *Yayasan Tzu Chi* (thereafter the *Yayasan*) was to build a "model" community for the urban diasporas. This is by no means an easy job, particularly because

¹See Julia Huang (2009) for details concerning the leadership of Master Cheng Yen.

the Yayasan is a Buddhist foundation.

In order to evaluate the effects of this charity program, the author coordinated two independent research teams composed of interdisciplinary researchers in Taiwan and Indonesia and conducted field study from 2006 to 2009. This paper reports partial results of this project, with a special focus on how charity aid helped to improve the once deteriorated relationships between the Muslims and Chinese in Indonesian. The result testifies to the belief that compassion and love played a key role in mediating the mutual understanding of dramatically different peoples who may otherwise violently conflicted.

In exploring how family relations and other aspects among overseas Chinese were affected by the development of global capitalist economy, Aihwa Ong (2002:339) aptly suggested that their countercultural productions should be interpreted as “complex maneuvers that subvert reigning notions of national self and the Other in transnational relations.” The situation of Chinese in Indonesia is even steeper than anywhere else. Jemma Purdey, a political scientist from Australia, presented a close analysis of the main incidents of anti-Chinese violence occurred in the period between 1996 and 1999 while Indonesia was in the intersection of political transition. Purdey placed the most recent anti-Chinese violence outbreak in May, 1998 within the context of ethnicity, prejudice, politics, economics and religion. In conclusion, Purdey (2006:218) warned that “if interpretations of anti-Chinese violence as a normal and valid response to certain situations and emotions continue, Chinese Indonesians will not be its only victims.” In accordance with this observation, a newspaper in Bangkok reported in February, 2011 an upcoming court trial of a religious violence that has left three people dead and several churches badly damaged in central Java (The Nation, 2011.02.10). Given this situation, any action related to ethnic issues

may raise tensions among different ethnic groups. Tzu Chi’s charity aid in Angke River cleaning is exactly the case in point. The most difficult parts of this charity work involves the issues of long-term conflicts existed between diasporic Chinese and native Indonesians on the one hand, and Buddhism and Muslim belief on the other. It becomes an issue to observe the effects of the charity aid activated by Chinese volunteers who claimed work for a Buddhist charity foundation based in Taiwan.

Coincidentally, the UNESCO conducted a study in 1997-1999 on the environment and development in coastal regions and small islands in Indonesia and recommended that “improving the transfer of information to the public about new practices can only occur through interaction between the various groups involved, government agencies, NGOs and the media....Raising social awareness is necessary to maintain the continuity of community-based waste management initiatives” (UNESCO-CSI 2000:56). While this recommendation remains just a paper work, some of the suggestions had been carried out by the Yayasan. As the whole project widely covered the domains of sanitary, health, and education, this paper focuses on how this charity aid has helped to improve the interethnic stereotypes and ethnic interactions.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Some popular theories seem to provide adequate frameworks to understand how human behavior patterns are shaped. Vygotsky’s (1978) idea of zone of proximal development, Maslow’s basic needs (1999) and the concept of habitus by Bourdieu (1990) are among others the most well-known perspectives in this regard. These theories commonly pointed to the importance of learning environment in the process of enculturation and interpersonal interactions. According to

Bourdieu (1990), for example, the individual characters, attitudes, and values are shaped by interactions between internal and external environmental factors and the collective cultural symbol of the group takes its form as a result. From the ecosystem perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1979) considered that the family, school, community and wider social units each plays substantial role in this process.

Other theories dealt directly with the patterns of interethnic relations. In their pioneering monograph, Glazer and Moynihan (1963) found the ideal of melting pot is a myth and pluralism is *de facto* more telling of ethnic scenarios in contemporary United States. In comparing the development of ethnic stereotypes in Japan and Taiwan, De Vos and Hsu (1985) used the concept of selective permeability to portray the status differentiation of Korean Japanese and indigenous Taiwanese—a concept stressing the importance of ethnic stereotypes in role implement. Doing studies in the setting of schools, Boyer and Boyer (1974) reminded us of the impacts of school as one of the influential learning environment on ethnic identity and interaction. Similar results had been found in studies among aboriginal Taiwanese (Hsu, 1991).

As the importance of social environment had been commonly stressed, environmental anthropologist Veronica Strang (2009:28) proposed that “in areas concerned with food and water provision, or in the alleviation of poverty, there are frequent overlaps between the provision of aid and the encouragement of development.” At any rate, it seems very natural for the NGOs to go around a circle from helps to development so as to make a change to the targeted group. Putting aside the issues of power relations, it becomes legitimate and positive for the NGOs to empower the disadvantaged people and install the community with sustainable development. The goals the Yayasan set forth for Angke River cleaning are identical. Yet, the Indonesia situation caused incredible difficulties due to the factors of

history, religion and ethnicity. In exploring the relationship between aid and development, Strang (2009:36) suggested that “the resolution of conflicts around the world, and the alleviation of poverty and disease depend heavily on work that enables cross-cultural understanding. Those who undertake this kind of work can at least feel that what they do is worthwhile, and hope that it makes a difference.” The Angke River project is such a case in hand.

To understand the effects of this charity aid, we adopted quantitative method to collect materials on ethnic stereotypes and interethnic relations, and qualitative method to observe how cultural traditions and social organization are preserved in the new community.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Social Distance

To measure the social distance, the researcher used social scale measurement from Bogardus with Guttman Scale. The scale, ranging from the closest one to the farthest, measured the intention of the respondents to accept different kinds of relationship with the Chinese. The social distance toward the local Chinese was shown below:

Table 1 Social distance toward Chinese

| Relations accepted | Numbers | % |
|--------------------|---------|-------|
| all kinds | 28 | 14.4% |
| as family | 66 | 34.0% |
| as friends | 76 | 39.2% |
| as neighbors | 7 | 3.6% |
| as classmate | 9 | 4.6% |
| No relation | 8 | 4.1% |
| Total | 194 | 100.0 |

The above statistics illustrated that the relations between the respondents and local Chinese was quite good. The highest percentage is “willing to accept the local Chinese as friends” (39.2%). Most of the respondents (87.6%) showed positive responses and are willing to accept all

kinds of relations with local Chinese, willing to accept them as family and friends. Only 12.4% residents responded negatively: they are willing to accept Chinese only as part of their neighbors, classmate, even refused all kinds of relations.

The social distance score was significantly correlated with residents' religion ($r=0.352$). Through the crosstab ($\chi^2 =65.614$), we see that 100% of Buddhist respondents are willing to accept any kind of relation with Chinese as compared with 75% of Catholics in this regard. However, the rest 25% of Catholics expressed that they are willing to accept the local Chinese as friends. The Christians' answers relatively dispersed more as the Muslim respondents' answers spread in all kinds of responses.

3.2 Stereotypes toward the Chinese

The following table indicated the frequencies reported by Indonesian residents about their stereotypes toward the Chinese.

Table 2. Ethnic stereotypes on self and Chinese

| Rank | characters | Freq. |
|------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1 | Eagerness to progress | 28 |
| 2 | Hard working | 27 |
| 3 | Intelligent | 26 |
| 4 | Strong family bond | 24 |
| 5 | Honest | 22 |
| 6 | Polite | 19 |
| | Like to give | 19 |
| 7 | Suspicious | 18 |
| | Trustworthy | 18 |
| | Good hearted | 18 |
| 8 | In order | 17 |
| | Friendly | 17 |
| 9 | Exclusive | 13 |
| 10 | Open | 12 |
| 11 | Ambitious | 10 |
| | Like partying | 10 |
| | Love to have guest | 10 |
| 12 | Full of emotion | 9 |
| | Stingy | 9 |
| 13 | Believe in myths | 7 |
| | Frankly spoken | 7 |

(adopted from Hsu & Ho, 2012)

The following table presents the statistics the respondents perceived themselves as contrasted with Chinese.

Table 3. Ethnic stereotypes on self and Chinese

| Ethnic Stereotype | Mean | | P |
|-------------------|------|---------|-------|
| | Self | Chinese | |
| Positive Traits | | | |
| Efficient | 1.93 | 2.28 | 0.000 |
| Progressive | 1.49 | 1.83 | 0.001 |
| Ready | 1.89 | 2.38 | 0.000 |
| Intelligent | 1.91 | 2.11 | 0.035 |
| Polite | 1.35 | 2.00 | 0.000 |
| Helpful | 1.45 | 2.09 | 0.000 |
| Friendly | 1.42 | 2.26 | 0.000 |
| Neutral traits | | | |
| Luxurious | 3.51 | 2.65 | 0.000 |
| Ambitious | 2.57 | 2.31 | 0.010 |
| Negative traits | | | |
| Stingy | 4.40 | 3.50 | 0.000 |
| Suspicious | 3.84 | 3.22 | 0.000 |
| High tempered | 3.56 | 3.05 | 0.000 |

Note: P is probability that shows results of the t-test on the mean scores. The $P < 0.05$ means the differences of means are significant at 0.05 level. In this scale, 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=no idea, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree. (adopted from Hsu & Ho, 2012)

This result showed that most respondents attributed positive traits to themselves. Figures shown above indicate that they perceived themselves relatively more positive than they did toward the Chinese. Relatively speaking, the respondents tend to deny the neutral traits and stated that they simply did not know whether the local Chinese really had these traits. The negative traits toward the in-group were strongly denied by most of the respondents and they also claimed they did not sure whether the Chinese really own those negative traits. These responses exemplified the cognitive distance between the two ethnic groups.

The above statistics clearly implied that the respondents tend to value themselves better than the Chinese, demonstrating stronger self-identity among the Indonesian residents. Besides that, the high

number of “no idea” toward the Chinese shows the weak stereotype toward the Chinese: they were not sure whether their belief was right or not. The limited knowledge about the Chinese can be explained by the limited interaction between the respondents and the Chinese: only 30% of the respondents often interacted with the Chinese. The commercial and financial relationship was less than that. Yet, it is worth noting that a rather high percentage has been reported for the activities of friendship, leisure life, and sharing (something), a sign which was never likely to happen before moving into the new community.

Table 4 Relationship with the Chinese

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Commercial relation (%) | 104 (71.2) | 37 (25.3) | 5 (3.4) |
| Financial relation (%) | 118 (80.8) | 27 (18.5) | 1 (0.7) |
| Friendship (%) | 28 (19.2) | 88 (60.3) | 29 (26.9) |
| Leisure relationship (%) | 20 (13.7) | 77 (52.7) | 49 (33.5) |
| Sharing (%) | 31 (21.2) | 83 (56.8) | 42 (21.9) |
| Invite Chinese to ceremony (%) | 41 (28.1) | 61 (41.8) | 44 (30.1) |
| Invited by Chinese (%) | 77 (52.7) | 49 (33.6) | 20 (13.7) |
| Asked to visit Chinese (%) | 88 (60.3) | 49 (33.6) | 9 (6.2) |
| Discriminated (%) | 80 (54.8) | 46 (31.5) | 20 (13.7) |

Note: (1) Never; (2) Sometimes; (3) Often/Always.
(adopted from Hsu & Ho, 2012)

3.3 Effects of Interethnic Contact

The contact toward Tzu Chi began with the meeting during the resettlement and followed by various activities aiming at improving the living condition. Being moved by Tzu Chi volunteers, about twenty residents even devoted to Tzu Chi’s voluntary works.

A respondent admitted that in the beginning there was hatred toward Tzu Chi while another one frankly expressed that they were suspicious about the activities initiated by the Yayasan. These opinions evolved before the relocation, because they

thought it was Tzu Chi who forced the residents to leave Angke River and they were afraid if—behind the charity—Tzu Chi might request them to convert to Buddhist.

But three months after resettling in the new location, the perception toward Chinese, specifically Tzu Chi volunteers, dramatically changed in a more positive way. Most residents felt the Chinese “friendly”, “willing to mingle with our people”, “do not underestimate or discriminate other”, “helpful”, and “polite”. They also admitted that they were touched by the Tzu Chi people who are “willing to visit and talk to us”. These change equally applied even to non- volunteers.

Yet, there are still some felt that Chinese volunteers lack understanding the Islamic teaching, which reduced more interethnic interactions and mutual understanding. In addition, some respondents thought that Tzu Chi people’s positive characters could not transfer to the Chinese in general.

3.4 Crossing the Ethnic Boundary

Our interviews indicated that the villagers displayed rather positive stereotypes toward Chinese. The top ten highest frequencies given by the interviewees are (1) eager to progress, (2) hard working, (3) intelligent, (4) neat, (5) strong family bond, (6) honest, (7) polite, (8) compassion and love to give, (9) suspicious, (10) trustworthy, (11) good heart, (12) orderly, and (13) friendly. All traits but suspicious are positive terms attributing to Chinese. Comparisons of residents’ evaluation toward selves and Chinese indicated significant differences, with self-evaluation better than that of Chinese, illustrating strong self-identity. Yet, the stereotype scores toward the Chinese reported by the residents are quite positive in average, which shows their good impression of Chinese. Regarding the interethnic interactions, about 30% residents have interacted with Chinese quite often or always, even though relatively fewer interactions were given to commercial and financial relations. These results testified to the fact that the interethnic relations between the residents and Chinese are not as intense as the history may have suggested. To enhance better interethnic relationships, we recommend more interactions with the youngsters for they

demonstrated more distance with the Chinese as they have to work off the village such that have fewer chance to interact with the Chinese.

Although Tzu Chi volunteers brought changes to the residents' perception toward the Chinese, the comments “do not underestimate us”, “think that we were poor people”, “friendly and not arrogant” implied that a feeling of inferiority still persisted among the Indonesians.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The materials shown above led to the following two points: (a) Contact with Tzu Chi helps to improve inter-ethnic relations between the residents and Chinese; (b) Their perception of Tzu Chi, specifically Tzu Chi volunteers, becomes more positive. (“friendly”, “willing to mingle with our people”, “did not underestimate other/did not discriminate other”, and “polite”). Some were even touched by Tzu Chi people for they are “willing to visit and talk to us”.

After witnessing Tzu Chi volunteers' devotion in charity activities, some residents' perception of Chinese changed to some extent. It seems reasonable to conclude that charity work and ethnic interaction help to minimize the gap of negative stereotypes. This finding echoed what I have found among the aborigines in Taiwan: ethnic disparagement will result in social segregation and psychological alienation of the minorities (Hsu 1991:94).

The primary findings highlighted above have consistently illustrated the positive sides of the Angke River Project. The dramatic changes, especially the effects on education, religious understanding and ethnic relationships, have been so obvious as to be a good model for further projects. These progresses can be interpreted with some inspiring theories in social sciences. Among others are the theories advocated by Foster (1965), Vygotsky (1978), Bourdieu (1990), and Maslow (1999). As to interethnic relationships, the perspectives set forth by Glazer and Moynihan (1963), and De Vos and Hsu (1985) seemed to be appropriate. These perspectives perfectly echoed the idea that environmental anthropologist Veronica Strang (2010:36) has recommended: “the resolution of conflicts around the world, and the alleviation of

poverty and disease depend heavily on work that enables cross-cultural understanding.”

Interviews with people with high status in mass media indicated that “the Great Love Village and the compassion effort of Tzu Chi volunteers have changed the unspoken stereotyping that rooted in most Indonesian governmental officers who used to believe that Chinese people are selfish and isolated from Indonesian society” (Her, 2012).

What has been achieved so far? We now may see compassion and love as the bridge to mutual understanding, self-awareness and management as the key to community development, and systematic and continuing charity aids as the point of reference for the government and NGOs for the future.

This is by no means that the aiding program has been perfect. There are some complaints about strict regulations on residents' behaviors like gambling and alcohol drinking, and fewer chances to make a living as the new location is a little distant from the riverbank where they had lived for years. To make a compassion program successful, more factors need to be taken into consideration. Yet, the selfless charity aid is undoubtedly worthwhile and did make a difference in interethnic relations.

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