

# GUS DUR'S UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANITY AND PLURALISM IN DEFENDING THE INDONESIAN CHINESE COMMUNITY



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## Abstract

This paper examines the intricate dynamics of historical interactions between indigenous citizens and Chinese descendants in Indonesia, focusing on the economic and political dimensions of these relationships. It specifically investigates the significant contributions of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, known as Gus Dur, in advocating for the rights of Indonesian Chinese citizens through the lenses of humanity and pluralism. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, primarily based on library research, the study reveals that during the New Order, discriminatory policies—most notably Presidential Instruction Number 14 of 1967 issued by President Soeharto—imposed severe restrictions on the cultural and religious practices of Chinese Indonesians. In contrast, Gus Dur emerged as a key proponent of democracy, justice, and human rights, championing freedom of expression and the right to worship according to individual beliefs. His pluralistic and humanitarian perspective played a vital role in defending the rights of Chinese descendants in Indonesia. Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of Gus Dur's legacy in the ongoing struggle for equality and human rights within the context of Indonesia's diverse population.

## Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji dinamika rumit interaksi historis antara warga negara pribumi dan keturunan Tionghoa di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada dimensi ekonomi dan politik dari hubungan tersebut. Secara khusus, makalah ini menyelidiki kontribusi signifikan KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, yang dikenal sebagai Gus Dur, dalam memperjuangkan hak-hak warga negara Tionghoa Indonesia melalui sudut pandang kemanusiaan dan pluralisme. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, terutama berdasarkan penelitian pustaka, penelitian ini mengungkap bahwa selama Orde Baru, kebijakan diskriminatif—terutama Instruksi Presiden Nomor 14 Tahun 1967 yang dikeluarkan oleh Presiden Soeharto—memberlakukan pembatasan berat terhadap praktik budaya dan keagamaan warga negara Tionghoa Indonesia. Sebaliknya, Gus Dur muncul sebagai pendukung utama demokrasi, keadilan, dan hak asasi manusia, memperjuangkan kebebasan berekspresi dan hak untuk beribadah sesuai keyakinan masing-masing. Perspektif pluralistik dan kemanusiaannya memainkan peran penting dalam membela hak-hak warga negara Tionghoa di Indonesia. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya warisan Gus Dur dalam perjuangan berkelanjutan untuk kesetaraan dan hak asasi manusia dalam konteks populasi Indonesia yang beragam.

## INTRODUCTION

Abdurrahman Wahid, familiarly called Gus Dur, is a unique, eccentric, insightful, controversial, brave and humorous figure. His comical style can occasionally lighten the political tension or reduce emotional stress. Besides being a fighter in defending the truth, upholding justice, Gus Dur is known as the father of Indonesian Pluralism, because of his consistent struggle for Human Rights (HAM) and his defense of the



marginalized, oppressed, minorities and discriminatory treatment of certain groups not only groups of Chinese descendants, as well as the defense of Acehnese people over the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) case, also Papua which has long undermined their desire for independence because they demand social justice and economic equality and development. Also, Gus Dur defended people of the people of Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) descent by revoking the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) Decree Number 25 of 1966 and there are many more contributions to Gus Dur's struggle in Indonesia.

Gus Dur's struggle and defense against oppression, discrimination, and restrictions on certain groups that violate the law and the principles of humanity received a lot of sympathy and support. However, others opposed it. For instance, Gus Dur's policy of revoking MPR Decree Number 25 of 1966, this had caused a commotion among some of the public, particularly those who opposed it and were worried that it would open up opportunities for the revival of a new version of the PKI group; however, Gus Dur had solid reasons and foundations based on the constitution that law protects citizens. It is said in Article 28 of the 1945 Constitution that, "Freedom of association and assembly, expressing thoughts verbally and in writing and so on is determined by law." Furthermore, Article 28A states, "Everyone has the right to live and has the right to defend their life and livelihood." Then, Article 28B paragraph 2 indicates, "Every child has the right to survival, growth, and development and has the right to protection from violence and discrimination" (INDONESIA, n.d.). Because he defended humanity, Gus Dur also received many awards and honors from various figures, countries, humanitarian foundations/institutions, domestic and foreign campuses, and world figures, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, an award from Mebal Valor in Los Angeles and many others (Wikipedia).

Gus Dur is known as the "Father of Chinese Indonesia" for his contributions to fighting for the rights of the Chinese community in Indonesia. In the book "Tionghoa dan Budaya Nusantara," edited by Sumanto Al Qurtuby, it is stated that this title was given because Gus Dur was thought capable of creating a sense of security for the Chinese community, who had previously faced discrimination and violence, including major events such as the massacre in Batavia in 1740, the Kudus rebellion in 1918, and other discriminatory policies during the New Order. Gus Dur became a vital protector for those with a universal and cross-cultural vision, transcending ethnic boundaries (Al Qurtuby, 2021).

Although, Gus Dur had opened up enlightenment to the public regarding his perspective on Chinese descendants by revoking Presidential Instruction Number 14 of 1967, as well as Gus Dur's thoughts on discrimination, freedom of worship and expression for Chinese descendants and also the public response, religious and interfaith figures welcomed it, even after Gus Dur's death, many people missed him and respected him very much, but intrigues in society sometimes still occur regarding issues of racial discrimination sentiment against Chinese descendants, especially if there is chaos in the political and economic world, public criticism of government attitudes and policies spread to offend Chinese descendants who are often labeled "Chinese." For example, when there is a level of public criticism of the government that often cooperates with the PRC/China in terms of infrastructure development, even by bringing in workers from China, this issue often triggers jealousy with indigenous residents. Another example is economic and trade/business competition between indigenous people and Chinese descendants, which can occasionally become a societal issue. In this global digital era, where everything is accessible, and social media is

thriving, public criticism of this problem often appears on social media. The last two examples, if allowed to continue and not disseminated by providing education, understanding, and openness to the public, could become a time bomb that could one day explode into riots, as happened in 1998 with the issue of social jealousy and economic disparity "Indigenous vs Chinese," thus diluting what Gus Dur initiated as the Father of Chinese, his thoughts seem to have no influence.

In light of the preceding, it is essential to continue embodying or grounding Gus Dur's thoughts on equality, freedom and social justice without distinguishing between tribes, races, ethnicities, religions, indigenous and non-indigenous, particularly regarding what Chinese citizens face. Gus Dur's actions in defending citizens of Chinese descent are also part of the implementation of Islamic teachings found in QS. Al Hujurat verse 13, which explains that humans were created into tribes and nations to get to know each other. The verse's meaning and message revolve around 'equality,' which means that Islam does not differentiate humans based on social status class but rather based on their piety to Allah SWT. One of Gus Dur's other significant contributions in terms of participation and involvement in the state's administration was to establish a political party, the National Awakening Party (PKB). Gus Dur and his supporters, particularly the NU mass base, used PKB to realize ideals, visions and missions and integrated Islamic values into the Republic of Indonesia. Gus Dur once remarked to one of his friends, Kyai Husein Muhammad, that politics is about finding a way and working to an unbearable limit to satisfy as many people as possible (Aziz, 2021).

## THE CONCEPT OF HUMANITY AND PLURALISM

Gus Dur is a caliber figure with broad views and insight; even his thoughts are unconventional on some issues that other figures generally do not consider. Gus Dur has extensive experience in numerous areas, which influences his thoughts in many things that are sometimes uncommon for most people or even beyond the thoughts and estimates of others; this is what sometimes makes it controversial. Humanity and pluralism are interrelated ideas essential to understanding the relationship between humans and diverse societies.

Gus Dur stated "Humanity is universal and it must be placed above all interests. Human values are global and should not be sacrificed in the name of ideology or religion" (Wahid, 2011). From Gus Dur's opinion shows that humanity is above all, even above religion; in truth, religious people must be able to achieve universal human values. In Gus Dur's view, humanity must be seen as a primary principle transcending religious, political, or ideological boundaries. Regardless of their background, everyone has the same rights and dignity as human beings.

Although Gus Dur had an excellent religious educational background, even though his family and lineage were from ulama, and closely related to the world of Islamic boarding schools, he also had his own experiences, insights and views on Western thought. Gus Dur was familiar with religious/Islamic boarding school books and many reading books from his youth to adulthood, including Western books. Gus Dur enjoyed listening to Western music and films, so these conditions and experiences shaped Gus Dur's thoughts and character. Thus, Gus Dur's broad and open thoughts and views are not only about religious thoughts, but also his universal perspective, producing several thoughts on Pluralism, Tolerance, and Humanism.

The relationship between humanity and pluralism is a concept that supports each other. Humanity emphasizes respect for the dignity of each individual, while pluralism ensures that this dignity is maintained in the context of diversity. In a pluralistic society, humanitarian values will develop when there is an awareness of respect for the rights of every individual and group without discrimination.

### 1. Islam and Humanity (Humanism)

The word 'Islam' comes from the word *wazan aslama - yuslimu - islaman*, which literally means safe. In simple terms, Islam is defined as 'surrender'. Islam means entire surrender or submission to Allah SWT according to His will, yet this does not imply setting aside human endeavors with the potential of their minds and hearts. Muslims surrender and submit to the teachings of Islam. As Islam's meaning is safe, one hadith of the prophet explains "*al Muslim akhul Muslim*," which means that Muslim must be able to save each other and invite salvation according to the teachings of Islam. Islam also means peace; terminologically, it is interpreted as complete obedience or surrender to the will of God (Allah). Islam is a religion that teaches the teachings of monotheism (tawhid), the belief in one God, and life principles based on justice, balance, compassion, and peace.

In his book *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*, Quraish Shihab states "Islam is a religion that brings mercy to the entire universe. Every teaching is based on universal compassion, justice, and humanity" (Shihab, 2000). He emphasizes that Islam is a religion that brings mercy (goodness) to all creatures, not only to Muslims. Islamic teachings derived from the Qur'an and Hadith emphasize the importance of compassion and justice that transcend religious, ethnic, and national boundaries.

According to Harun Nasution in his book *Theology of Islam: Historical Streams, Analysis, Comparison*, "Islam is a religion based on the doctrine of monotheism, namely the belief in the oneness of Allah as the Almighty God, the creator of the universe. In Islam, the recognition of the oneness of God is the core of all teachings and practices of worship" (Nasution, 1986). He believes that monotheism is the core of Islamic teachings, namely the belief that Allah is the only God worthy of worship. This unification of God is the main foundation for all elements of Islamic worship and daily life.

In his book *ISLAM*, Fazlur Rahman explains, "Islam teaches that salvation can be achieved through complete surrender to God, following the instructions set out in the Al-Qur'an and Hadith, and carrying out good deeds in everyday life" (Rahman, 1984). In this case, Fazlur Rahman emphasizes that salvation in Islam is achieved through firm faith in Allah and the implementation of good deeds. Faith and charity are the two main pillars of attaining Allah's approval and salvation in this world and the hereafter.

Islam is the revelation of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was then spread and taught to mankind for guidance in life to achieve happiness and salvation in the world and the hereafter. A person who embraces Islam is referred to as a Muslim and Islamic teachings are known as the law of life or the path or way of living a good life that leads to salvation.

Islamic teachings are classified into three parts: aqidah, sharia and morals. Aqidah is the most fundamental teaching for Muslims. It teaches about faith, belief and Oneness in Allah SWT. Therefore, aqidah is highly significant and fundamental to Muslims.

The meaning of sharia, according to language, is the path, or the path taken by everyone. In a broad sense, sharia is the regulations set by Allah as a guide to human life. It is the way of life for every Muslim. Sharia refers to the regulations derived from

Allah's revelation in the form of Islamic teachings. For instance, a Muslim has life norms, such as muamalah, law, social interaction, responsibility towards Allah's creation, and others. In Islamic teachings, humans are referred to as *Khalifah fil ardh*, meaning that humans, as leaders on earth, have responsibility for the sustainability of nature and life through the guidance of Islamic teachings.

In accordance with the language, morality means actions, customs, temperament, behavior in general, both commendable and reprehensible. It is also called *akhlakul karimah* and *akhlakul mazmumah*. In general, morality is also known as morals and good character. In terms of understanding, *akhlakul karimah* is behavior, actions and commendable temperament based on Islamic teachings.

Gus Dur views Islam as a religion of compassion, tolerance, justice and honesty. It means that Islam is an egalitarian belief that fundamentally does not support unjust treatment (against justice), for reasons of religion, ethnicity, race, gender, social status, or other groups in society. Islam, according to Wahid, is a faith that acknowledges that in the eyes of God, all humans are equal, including Muslims and non-Muslims. Wahid's view of Islam is aligned with the basic principles of Christian and Jewish Europe in the Enlightenment era by Greg Barton (Abidin, 2012).

Gus Dur frequently explained in his presentations and writings that religion is an individual's awareness and a personal matter between a person and his God; the state does not need to interfere in regulating religion and its adherents; thus, Gus Dur often clarified that there is no need for religious formalism and it does not need to be institutionalized, particularly in terms of worship rituals. Therefore, there is no need to make regulations and policies based on religion; likewise, at the regional/local level, there is no need to issue regional regulations based on religious law prohibiting many things that will ultimately cause rigidity in social life. The existence of religious formalism can actually eliminate the spirit, soul, and authenticity of the teachings of the religion. Gus Dur's point of view may appear to be secular at first glance. However, it is preferable, especially in a country with a diverse population, tribes, races, ethnicities, religions, because one group cannot dominate another. Gus Dur remarked, "My religion teaches that humans live side by side in diversity. Islam teaches mercy for the universe, not just for specific groups." (Wahid, 2011). Gus Dur always held that Islam is a religion that is *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy to the world), which spreads love for all nature, so it must have a good impact on the universe, including what is meant is for all mankind. Instead of formalizing religion, one approach is to integrate the values of religious teachings into laws or regulations, and cultivate religious teachings in social community life.

In his book, *Pintu-pintu Menuju Tuhan: Renungan Tentang Kehidupan Beragama*, Cak Nur (Nurcholis Madjid) writes that religion is for humans, not humans for religion. Religion must be able to grow and enrich human qualities. In this section, Cak Nur emphasizes that religion is an instrument to complement human qualities. It is to maintain the balance between human reason and lust, namely through the instrument of religious teachings and values (N. Madjid, 2008).

Humanism or often known as humanity, is derived from the words human and ism. Both words come from Latin, namely *humanus* which refers to human, and *ismus* which means understanding or school of thought. In short, humanism is an understanding that upholds human values and qualities. The term *insaniyyah* or *insan* comes from Arabic which means human. The word *insan* means high humanity; moreover, if it reaches the level of perfect humanity, it can reach the level of becoming a caliph on earth. The

word *insan* is used in the Qur'an to refer to humans with all their capacities: physical, soul, mind and conscience.

Humanity is values that prioritize human dignity, rights, and responsibilities. This concept emphasizes the importance of maintaining, respecting, and protecting every individual regardless of differences in religion, race, ethnicity, culture, or social status. Humanity also involves empathy, a sense of social responsibility, and an awareness to treat others fairly and respectfully. There are essential aspects of humanity: 1) Human dignity: All humans have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, 2) Social justice: Humanity involves efforts to create a righteous society where every individual has equal opportunities, 3) Empathy and compassion: It is humanity's essence to care about others' suffering and to help those in need. In philosophy, the concept of humanity is often associated with humanism, a view that emphasizes humans as the center of all moral and ethical concerns.

Nurcholis Madjid, in his book *Islamic Doctrine and Civilization: A Critical Review of the Problems of Faith, Humanity, and Modernity*, said, "Islam is humanism in the most noble sense, namely the defense of human dignity based on the teaching that humans are the highest—ranking creatures of God (Madjid, 2019). Cak Nur's opinion confirms that Islam is not only a teaching but also a civilization that upholds and maintains the dignity and nobility of human beings. Islam responds to prior civilizations and beliefs that left humans in a poor or even uncivilized position, as in the era of ignorance or in other civilizations' beliefs that made humans a sacrifice to the Gods they worship.

Humanism, or humanity, is a school of thought that prioritizes human values and positions as the defining criteria for everything. In other words, humanism is a school of thought that views human behavior, life and living following the principles of humanity as the identity and nature of humans created by God. Humanism is a philosophical thought that highly values human capacity in measuring and determining the concepts of truth, goodness, and beauty in this life. If we look back, the origins of this thought have been pioneered since Socrates (399 BC).

The concept of Indonesian nationality upholds humanity, as stated in the second principle of Pancasila, "Just and Civilized Humanity." As a result, as Indonesian citizens, we must respect and maintain the degree, authority and dignity of humanity in the nation and state. Understanding and feeling humanity is one of the highest peaks of a person's religious knowledge and spirituality. If someone has reached a deep understanding of the concept of humanity, then he is done with the polemics and conflicts of differences in 'packaging' of tribes, races, ethnicities, religions, skin colors because that is the importance of deeply understanding the meaning of the concept of humanity.

## 2. The Concept of Islam and Humanity of Gus Dur

As the meaning of Islam is surrender, a Muslim must completely submit and obey Allah, which also entails surrendering to accept all Islamic teachings that Allah has revealed as a way of life without any protest or rejection with any reason from the human mind. There is no coercion, but when someone chooses Islam as a guide and way of life, then the consequence is to follow the teachings of Allah as revealed. Gus Dur defines embracing Islam as implementing the values of Islamic teachings according to one's beliefs and sincerity rather than claiming to be the most correct and dismissing other religious groups. It may be that adherents of other religions are not legally Muslim, but their behavior is Islamic.

According to Gus Dur, "Religion is here to protect humanity, not the other way around. Righteous and civilized humanity is the goal that we must realize together through tolerance and respect for differences" (Wahid, 2010). In this section, Gus Dur emphasizes the importance of tolerance in humanity. For him, humanity can only be realized if there is respect and acceptance of differences, whether in terms of belief, culture, or identity. This matter further shows Gus Dur's attitude towards equality in the context of humanity.

Islam, according to Gus Dur, is a religion *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, a religion that prioritizes compassion, a tolerant religion, a religion that places humans equal before Allah but only piety differentiates them, a religion that does not tolerate cruel treatment in any form or for reasons of different religions, ethnicities, races, genders, social statuses or other groups in society. For Gus Dur, Islam is a religion of salvation to realize peace in the world. He adds that Islam is a belief that spreads compassion, which is fundamentally tolerant and respects differences. Furthermore, Islam is a religion of compassion and tolerance as well as a religion of justice and honesty (Madjid, 2019), meaning that Islam is an egalitarian belief that fundamentally does not support unfair treatment for reasons of class, ethnicity, race, gender, or other groups in society. Islam is a faith that acknowledges that all humans are equal in God's eyes (Wahid, 1999).

Gus Dur also said that a person's faith is a process; even faith has its ups and downs, so being Muslim is also a process. In the process of searching, we are prohibiting from drawing unilateral conclusions by accusing others of being infidels just because there are differences in understanding religion, but allowing someone process in their faith and religion for the truth they are seeking. As Gus Dur explained, "religion always encourages to make process, in that process people will achieve the truth they are looking for, whether Islam or not. For me, Islam is still the best, but it does not prevent the idea that other religions are also good" (Abidin, 2012).

Islam and Gus Dur's Humanism have been closely associated with him. It can be seen from his actions in various matters, his political stance and his defense of the marginalized or oppressed as mentioned in the previous chapter, namely Gus Dur's defense of Chinese descendants, Acehese people related to the DOM (Military Operation Area), GAM (Free Aceh Movement) case, the Free Papua case by visiting it, even welcoming the New Year there on December 31, 1999, welcoming the arrival of the year 2000 so that he felt the warmth of the welcome and togetherness with the Papuan people. Then, Gus Dur defended the Kedung Ombo reservoir case in Central Java against the state's repressive actions toward local communities through intimidation, physical, coercion, oppression, shooting; even residents who refused were considered rebels. Furthermore, Gus Dur's policy of revoking the MPR Decree on the PKI ban was not merely defending the PKI but an attempt at reconciliation between the nation's children and stopping the endless conflict every time the PKI was discussed. One of Gus Dur's defenses for the PKI case was the treatment of the government at that time (military) toward innocent citizens who were punished, oppressed, even lost their lives, and forced to evacuate to Buru Island without a trial. What made it even sadder was the impact of the MPR Decree on the Prohibition of the PKI during the New Order government continued to spread to the children and grandchildren of PKI families who were innocent, did not know anything and were not involved at all, but were affected by the discriminatory treatment from the state, as if the PKI case was a 'hereditary sin'.

Gus Dur faced several examples of the cases mentioned above with a humanitarian approach and full of brotherhood; there was no other alternative, except in that way. A humanitarian approach creates a sense of mutual respect and appreciation between

individuals. It is proven that Gus Dur's struggle efforts succeeded after his death, even if some were not perfect. However, he was the one who opened the eyes of the horizon and motivated the spirit of brotherhood among the nation's children based on humanism.

### 3. The Theory of Pluralism

Pluralism is a concept that refers to diversity and recognition of the existence of various groups, views, or ideas in a society. In a social and political context, pluralism emphasizes the importance of tolerance, dialogue, and respect for differences, whether religious, cultural, ethnic, ideological, or otherwise.

Cak Nur said, "The attitude of pluralism, namely the recognition of diversity and differences as undeniable facts of humanity, is one concrete manifestation of Islamic humanism" (N. Madjid, 1997). In short, Cak Nur believes that pluralism, or diversity, is a reality that must be accepted rather than rejected. Therefore, the most important thing is to understand each other.

In the realm of religion, pluralism often means the recognition and acceptance of the existence of various religions and the belief that no one religion has a monopoly on truth. In politics, pluralism encourages a system in which various political parties and interest groups can participate freely and equally in the political process. In general, pluralism seeks to create an inclusive and righteous society, where all individuals and groups have equal rights and opportunities to contribute and develop.

Religious pluralism means establishing a religious life in the future by appreciating the entity of each religious teaching and the complexity of the potential possessed by each adherent while maintaining the identification of each religion (Moko, 2017). Pluralism, according to Nurcholis Majid, is a *sunnatullah* that cannot be changed; differences or diversity are the reality of life. QS. Al Hujurat verse 9 states, "If there are two groups of believers who are at odds, reconcile them. If one of them commits injustice against the other group, fight the group that committed the injustice, until the group returns to the command of Allah. If the group has returned (to the command of Allah), reconcile the two with justice. Be fair! Indeed, Allah loves those who are fair. "

"Nurcholis Madjid's idea of religious pluralism, which he said was a basic principle in Islam, was intended to provide understanding to religious people that this religious plurality affirms the basic understanding that all religions are given the freedom to live with the risks that will be borne by the adherents of each religion" (Moko, 2017). When the meaning of Islam is salvation and surrender which is full of good deeds, then other religions that teach doing good things are Islam in the general sense of "an attitude of surrender to God".

Nurcholis Madjid expressed "that religious pluralism is substantially an inclusive understanding which means that all the truths of the teachings of other religions are also in our religion. Nurcholis showed that there is no absolute truth and there is recognition of the truth of other religions. This recognition does not mean denying the truth of one's own understanding as a religion that is embraced. Therefore, religious pluralism only exists if there are attitudes of openness, mutual respect and tolerance. This teaching affirms the basic understanding that all religions are given the freedom to live" (Moko, 2017).

Pluralism comes from English pluralism consisting of two words, plural (diverse) and ism (understanding), which means understanding diversity. In other words, pluralism is an understanding that accepts, respects and appreciates differences or diversity of human groups, whether because of different tribes, races, ethnicities,



religions or skin colors. Therefore, Pluralism requires a person's attitude to be tolerant and acknowledge the existence of other different groups and have the same right to freedom in thinking, acting, and even having different opinions or views; then, achieving a perfect understanding of pluralism requires personality, maturity and adulthood.

Ahmad Syafii Maarif believes that Islam essentially views humans positively. All humans come from one ancestor in Islam, but then God created various tribes (shu'uban), nations (qaba'ila), and even religions. God created humans to get to know each other (li ta'arafu). Ta'aruf, according to Syafii Maarif, is interpreted as an effort to get to know each other while also functioning as a cultural and religious foundation to build universal human brotherhood and strengthen pluralism. Theologically, the Qur'an explains *la ikraha fi ddin'*, which means there is no compulsion in religion. This verse exemplifies the Qur'an's appreciation of religious pluralism." (Qorib 2012).

Pluralism is an absolute reality that cannot be rejected by figures such as Gus Dur, Cak Nur, and Buya Syafii Maarif, also known as the Three Musketeers, all holding Neo-Modernist thoughts. As a result, the different realities of life must be accepted with open arms and hearts, and this will naturally mature each person; as a result, there should be no need for racial and ethnic disputes, but rather, everyone can live together side by side in peace.

#### 4. Gus Dur's Pluralism Concept

According to Gus Dur, Pluralism is a view that recognizes and respects the diversity of identities, such as differences in ethnicity, religion, race, class, and others. Pluralism does not equate all religions, as many people have accused Gus Dur of because each religion has its differences and uniqueness. Furthermore, Gus Dur revealed that these differences should not be a source of conflict but rather a means for humans to understand God's grace in order to create tolerance and harmony amid life. Differences and diversity are the law of nature, reality and inevitability that cannot be rejected but must be accepted. Gus Dur said, "Our humanity is tested when we are faced with differences. This is where pluralism is important, that humanity cannot be limited by one religion, tribe, or nation" (A. Wahid, 2007). Gus Dur strongly emphasized that pluralism is part of humanity. Moreover, diversity is a reality that must be accepted, and humanity can only be realized if we respect and protect differences.

Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is widely considered to be the leading proponent of pluralism in Indonesia. His concept of pluralism is rooted in his understanding of "Depth Islam" (DI). This idea goes beyond literal interpretations of religious texts, focusing on the basic principles of humanity, diversity, and peace. Gus Dur believed Islam inherently embraces pluralism, although classical Islamic scholars did not explicitly discuss it in such terms.

For him, pluralism involves recognizing and respecting the diversity of religious and cultural expressions as part of the universalism of Islam. This universalism is manifested through the core teachings of Islam on equality, justice, and the protection of the rights of all people, regardless of their religion or background. He often defended marginalized groups, such as Chinese-Indonesians, Ahmadiyah, and Christians, not because of their particular identities but because of his commitment to human rights and justice. His thoughts on pluralism are discussed in the *Ulumuna Journal*, specifically the 2015 edition entitled "Depth of Islam and Religious Pluralism" for more details (Bahri, 2015). His views were developed over decades through religious studies

and personal encounters with various cultures, contributing to his unique understanding of Islam as a religion of peace and coexistence.

"Abdurrahman Wahid saw religious pluralism in the context of the teachings of universalism and cosmopolitanism in Islam. The teachings that perfectly display universalism are the five basic guarantees that Islam provides to citizens, both personally (individually) and as a group (impersonally). These consist of: 1) Physical safety of citizens from bodily acts outside the provisions of the law; 2) Safety of each person's religious beliefs without any coercion to change religion; 3) Safety of family and descendants; 4) Safety of property and personal belongings outside legal procedures; and 5) Safety of profession (Borton, 1997, p. 66)." (Moko, 2017)

The five aspects above, as stated by Gus Dur, are important for the realization of Pluralism because, in the midst of existing differences, it is important to have a guarantee of safety and freedom in adhering to and expressing their respective religions through their respective worship practices.

On several occasions, Gus Dur often likened Pluralism to a large house consisting of several rooms; each room occupant can organize, arrange their room and engage in any activity. However, maintaining the integrity, security and comfort of the large house is a shared responsibility, so if something happens or an attack from outside against the house, all room occupants have a shared responsibility in guarding and protecting the large house (YouTube: Ruly, n.d.).

The illustration of pluralism, like a large house in the paragraph above, is a simple example expected to be understood by everyone. The country of Indonesia – Nusantara is a large house whose diverse citizens have a shared responsibility in guarding, caring for and preserving the culture and civilization of living as a nation and state from generation to generation until eternity.

On various occasions, speeches, lectures, discussions, and also in his writings when discussing pluralism, he always quotes QS. Al Hujurat verse 13 about humans being created into tribes and nations to get to know each other, and the noblest person in the sight of Allah is the most pious person. In this verse, Gus Dur emphasizes the fragment of the word *lita'arofu* (getting to know each other); what Gus Dur meant in this section is not only getting to know each other's names, home addresses, telephone/cellphone numbers, but also getting to know each other and understanding each other's habits, traditions, culture, characteristics, thoughts and others (Muhammad, n.d.).

The concepts of Islamic pluralism, according to Gus Dur, cannot be separated from religiosity, tolerance, the basis of humanity, interfaith dialogue, unity and differences, rejection of Radicalism and religious freedom: 1) Diversity and Tolerance: Gus Dur strongly supported diversity and tolerance between religious communities. He said Islam teaches us to respect differences and live side by side in peace. Gus Dur believed that differences are inevitable and must be accepted as part of life. "Gus Dur frequently invited Muslims to be tolerant of other religions; according to him, we often expressed misunderstandings about the concept of divinity of other religions, even insulting that religion. Therefore, we must be aware of respecting the concept of other religions. Awareness to respect each other or tolerance of other religions is inevitability in the reality of diversity (pluralism)" (Maghfur, 2001). 2) Humanity as a Basis: For Gus Dur, humanitarian values are the basis of pluralism. He believed all humans have the same dignity and rights, regardless of religious, ethnic, or cultural background. In his view, Islam must be a religion that promotes humanity and justice for all people. 3) Interfaith Dialogue: Gus Dur strongly supported interfaith dialogue. He believed various religious

communities can understand and respect each other through dialogue. This dialogue is also essential to reduce tensions and conflicts caused by religious differences. 4) Unity in Diversity: Gus Dur often expressed that unity does not have to mean uniformity. On the contrary, he advocated the concept of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (different but still one) as a basic principle in building a harmonious society. 5) Rejection of Radicalism: Gus Dur firmly rejected all forms of radicalism and extremism. He considered that radicalism contradicts the basic values of Islam, which is *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for all nature). Islam must be a religion that brings peace and goodness to all creatures. 6) Freedom of Religion: Gus Dur highly respected freedom of religion and belief. He believed that every individual has the right to choose and practice their religion or belief without coercion or pressure, as explained in Islam (the Qur'an) *La ikraha fiddin* (there is no coercion in religion).

Gus Dur's view of Islamic pluralism emphasizes the importance of tolerance, dialogue, humanity and rejection of radicalism. He thought that Islam must be an inclusive religion that values diversity in order to contribute to world peace and harmony. His opinions have greatly influenced the way Indonesian society views pluralism and religiosity to this day.

### **GUS DUR'S DEFENSE OF THE INDONESIAN CHINESE COMMUNITY**

As explained in the previous paragraphs, Gus Dur upholds the Unity, NKRI, Bhineka Tunggal Ika and the Law, which makes Gus Dur consistent in defending the oppressed and discriminated people, including the Indonesian Chinese community.

From the Dutch colonial era until the New Order era, the Chinese community in Indonesia has frequently endured racial discrimination and unfair policies. The policy of assimilation and restrictions on Chinese culture, including the ban on the use of Mandarin and the celebration of Chinese traditions are some examples of policies implemented during the New Order era under the leadership of President Soeharto.

KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is one of the significant figures in Indonesia who consistently defends the rights of minorities, including citizens of Chinese descent. Gus Dur's defense of Indonesian Chinese descendants can be seen in various actions and policies he took, both when he served as the General Chairperson of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and President of the Republic of Indonesia.

Gus Dur was known as a defender of the rights of the Chinese community in Indonesia, especially during a time when discrimination against this group was extreme. One of Gus Dur's boldest actions was to revoke Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967, which restricted the expression of Chinese culture in public spaces, such as celebrating Chinese New Year and using Chinese characters. Gus Dur argued that the ban violated the principles of justice and humanity and did not follow the spirit of pluralism he fought for. For him, Indonesia was a home for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, race, or religion. Gus Dur saw that Chinese descendants were an integral part of the history and development of the nation, and therefore, they should have the same rights as citizens. Gus Dur emphasized that discrimination would only weaken national unity and damage the humanitarian values that should be maintained. Based on his thinking, he encouraged Chinese descendants to be able to celebrate their culture and traditions freely again as part of Indonesia's cultural diversity (A. Wahid, 1999).

Gus Dur was recognized as the Father of Chinese Indonesia because of his role in eliminating discrimination against ethnic Chinese. In the book "Father of Chinese Indonesia" by MN Ibad and Akhmad Fikri AF, it is explained that Gus Dur restored the cultural rights of the Chinese community, including the freedom to celebrate Chinese

New Year and the recognition of Confucianism. He saw the Chinese ethnic group as an integral part of the Indonesian nation and fought for them to gain equal rights as citizens (Fikri AF, 2012).

Gus Dur's defense of the Chinese community was based on his belief in pluralism and equality between citizens, regardless of ethnic or religious background. He often emphasized that all Indonesian citizens, including the Chinese, have the right to live free from discrimination and enjoy the same rights as other citizens. In a journal discussing Gus Dur's political policies towards the Chinese community, Gus Dur viewed diversity as a national strength, and his role was very influential in rebuilding harmonious relations between the majority and minority groups in Indonesia (Mustajab, 2015).

Another intriguing characteristic of Gus Dur is his diversified familial background. Gus Dur admitted that he has Chinese ancestry. It is common in Indonesia, given the long history of interaction between various ethnicities in the archipelago. Chinese descent in Gus Dur's family comes from his mother's line, Nyai Sholehah. Nyai Sholehah's mother, Gus Dur's grandmother, was of Chinese descent and married a Javanese cleric. This fact adds to the richness of Gus Dur's cultural and ethnic background, reflected in his views and actions throughout his life. Gus Dur's admission and openness about his background strengthens his image as an inclusive leader who accepts diversity. It also inspires many people to appreciate better and respect differences in society.

On Wednesday, March 10, 2004, many Chinese figures from Semarang ordained KH Abdurahman Wahid, also known as alias Gus Dur, as the "Father of Chinese" at the Tay Kak Sie Temple, Gang Lombok, Semarang, which has long been regarded as the "Chinatown" area (Suara Merdeka, March 11, 2024). In his speech—while wearing a *congshan* shirt, the ceremonial Chinese attire—Gus Dur said that the award was not a problem because he was a descendant of the Chinese nation from the Tan clan. Gus Dur had said several times that he was of Chinese descent. He even explicitly expressed that he was a descendant of Tan Kim Han, one of the warlords who overthrew the Majapahit Kingdom and helped establish the Maritime Islamic Kingdom of Demak. Tan Kim Han was a Chinese Muslim figure in the 15th/16th century who was sent by Jin Bun, known as Raden Patah, the first King of Demak, to carry out a political revolution in Majapahit, along with Maulana Ishak (some stories mention Sunan Giri's father) and Sunan Ngudung (supposedly Sunan Kudus' father) (Al Qurtuby, Gus Dur, *Tionghoa, Indonesia*, 2019). On the other hand, Gus Dur's defense of Indonesian Chinese descendants depends on the law, human rights, freedom of democracy and expression as Indonesian citizens and freedom of worship. However, Sumanto's article, explaining that Gus Dur conveyed his Chinese lineage several times, further clarifies and emphasizes the reasons Gus Dur put forward in his defense of Indonesian Chinese descendants.

It must be admitted that Gus Dur is one of the national figures who dares to "stand up" to the discriminatory actions of the Chinese carried out especially by the New Order regime. Gus Dur is indeed known to the public as a figure with a universal view. Therefore, when he became president, he immediately revoked Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967, which banned all Chinese religious activities, beliefs and customs carried out in Indonesia. Along with that, Gus Dur issued Presidential Decree No. 6/2000, which allowed the Chinese nation to express their culture, including freedom to practice religion in Indonesia. During Gus Dur's time, Confucianism, the ancestral religion of the Chinese nation, was given an equal place alongside other

religions. The Chinese community considered the revocation of the discriminatory Presidential Instruction while issuing a more "humane" Presidential Decree as a priceless "angpau". From this perspective, Gus Dur's award as "Father of the Chinese" is a natural thing (Al Qurtuby, Gus Dur, Tionghoa, Indonesia, 2019).

Gus Dur tried to overcome the injustice experienced by the Chinese community. He voiced pluralism, tolerance, and minority rights on various occasions so that Chinese descendants could freely express themselves through their traditions and culture and celebrate Chinese New Year after being banned for so long.

Some of Gus Dur's important steps in defending the rights of Chinese descendants are as follows:

1. Elimination of the Ban on Chinese New Year Celebrations: One of Gus Dur's most significant actions was revoking Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967, which prohibited Chinese New Year celebrations and Chinese cultural expressions in public spaces. With this revocation, Chinese descendants in Indonesia could again celebrate Chinese New Year openly.
2. Recognition of Confucianism: Gus Dur also recognized Confucianism as an official religion in Indonesia, which the government had previously not recognized. It allowed Confucian adherents the freedom to worship and practice their beliefs without discrimination.
3. Elimination of Racial Discrimination: During his leadership, Gus Dur pushed for the elimination of various forms of racial and ethnic discrimination experienced by Chinese descendants. He prioritized the principles of equality and human rights in every policy and action.
4. Role in Multicultural Education: Gus Dur promoted multicultural education, emphasizing tolerance and understanding between ethnicities. He believed education was the key to building an inclusive and harmonious society.
5. Support outside Government: After his presidency, Gus Dur continued actively in various activities that supported pluralism and fought against discrimination. He often attended Chinese cultural events and provided moral support to the community.

Gus Dur is a real example of a leader who upholds the values of humanity and justice and dares to take progressive steps to protect the rights of minorities. For his dedication to fighting for the rights of the Chinese community and his efforts in promoting inclusivity, Gus Dur was given the title "Father of Chinese Indonesia." This title was bestowed as a form of respect and recognition for his efforts in eliminating discrimination and promoting unity among the various ethnicities in Indonesia. This title also symbolizes the Chinese community's appreciation for Gus Dur's contribution to improving relations between ethnicities in Indonesia, and an award for his courage and sincerity in fighting for social justice for all groups. Gus Dur's legacy in fighting for pluralism and human rights continues today. Many of his policies still positively impact social and political life in Indonesia and inspire the younger generation to fight for tolerance and diversity. Gus Dur was a political leader and a symbol of the struggle for justice and humanity in Indonesia. His dedication and courage in defending the rights of marginalized communities, including the Chinese community, made him respected and remembered as one of the significant figures in Indonesian history.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the writing of this article, it can be concluded that KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is a significant figure with a broad, universal, global and insightful view; thus, a figure like Gus Dur is also known as a cosmopolitan Neo – Modernist Islamic figure. From his Islamic perspective and thoughts, we are reminded of religious awareness of substantial things that can cross the boundaries of religious differences themselves and understand the substance of diversity, namely about humanity. All adherents of religion are the same in their belief that God created humans with all their competencies and Gus Dur emphasizes and reminds us of behaviors that are contrary to the values of humanity itself through his concrete actions in defending injustice, discrimination, oppressed groups regardless of religion, ethnicity, and race. The understanding of humanity upholds humans' dignity, honor, glory and an attitude of mutual respect. Therefore, Gus Dur's pluralism ideology encourages all people to understand and accept diversity with an open heart, because it is a reality of life that cannot be denied, also known as *sunnatullah* in Islam.

Gus Dur's policy steps when he became President by revoking Presidential Instruction Number 14 of 1967, which prohibited the Chinese community from worshiping and carrying out their cultural traditions, were not only a defense of Indonesian Chinese citizens but also a defense of human rights for the freedom of every person and group, as stated in the UN Human Rights (HAM) consensus, and is also in line with the values of Islamic teachings on *al-insaniah* (humanity).

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