

CHRISTIAN VALUES IN EDUCATION AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO TOLERANCE WITHIN THE INDONESIAN CHINESE COMMUNITY

Evans Winata ^{1*}, Suranto ¹, David Samuel ¹, Damai Wijaya ¹

¹ Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Anugrah Indonesia

Email Correspondence: evnswnt@gmail.com

Abstract

This article observes the dynamics of coexistence within the Indonesian Chinese community, a community that is itself internally diverse in terms of religion. Within a single community, and even within a single family, one may find members who practice Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, and in smaller numbers, Islam. Despite this diversity, the community generally demonstrates a relatively high degree of tolerance in daily life, with friction that tends to be minor and limited to matters related to religious ritual. This article seeks to trace one of the factors that contributes to this pattern of tolerance, particularly from the perspective of Christian values in religious education. The argument proposed is that the biblical command to honor one's parents, as contained in the Fifth Commandment of the Ten Commandments, practically functions as a moral restraint for young Christians when facing religious differences with parents who still practice Buddhism. This tends to encourage a persuasive and patient approach rather than a confrontational one, and in turn helps preserve harmony within families and the broader community. The article also reflects on the pastoral implications of this pattern, including the fairly common phenomenon in which some parents come to express faith in Christ near the end of their lives.

Keywords : Indonesian Chinese community; tolerance; Christian education; Christian values; religious plurality; Fifth Commandment; witness of life

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian Chinese community is an interesting one to observe, not primarily because of its differences from Indonesian society at large, but because of the diversity that exists within the community itself. For an outside observer, what first appears may be a sense of sameness shared ethnic background, shared traditions, shared ways of celebrating the Lunar New Year. But looked at more closely, this community is far from homogeneous, particularly when it comes to religion.

Within a single clan gathering, a single extended family reunion, or even a single dinner table, one may find a grandmother who prays before the ancestral altar each morning, a daughter who serves actively in a Pentecostal church, an uncle who faithfully attends Catholic mass, and a nephew who married a Muslim partner and gradually adopted that faith. They differ in religion, yet in many cases they can still sit at the same table, eat together, and celebrate family occasions without significant conflict.

This phenomenon deserves attention in the context of Christian religious education. Not because religious plurality is itself the goal that Christian education aims to produce, but because within the dynamics of this community there is something worth learning: how the values taught by the Christian faith, when genuinely lived out, can become a factor that preserves harmony rather than disturbing it.

This article is written from the position of an outside observer attempting to understand patterns visible in this community. There is no claim here to a deep insider understanding of Chinese culture. What is offered is a reflection on what appears from the outside, connected to values taught in Christian religious education, in the hope that this reflection may be useful for developing Christian education that is more contextually grounded.

LITERATURE REVIEWE

Religious Diversity within the Indonesian Chinese Community

A Diversity That Lives Side by Side

One of the things immediately felt when spending time around the Indonesian Chinese community is that religious difference within the community is not something new or surprising to them. This is not a phenomenon produced by globalization or recent modernization. For a long time already, within a single extended Chinese Indonesian family, differences in religion have simply been part of life.

The most common pattern that can be observed is that the older generation, particularly those who grew up before the 1980s, tends to still practice Buddhist traditions or a syncretic belief that blends elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and ancestral veneration. Meanwhile, the younger generation, especially those who have received higher education or live in larger cities, has in considerable numbers moved toward Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic. A smaller number have married Muslim partners and gradually shifted their own religious affiliation as well.

What is striking is that this religious transition, which in other community contexts might become a serious source of conflict, within the Indonesian Chinese community often takes place without severing family ties altogether. There is friction, of course. There is tension, difficult conversations, moments when the difference feels sharp. But generally, families stay together. Family events are still attended by all. And the dinner table remains a place where everyone can sit.

The Most Common Sources of Friction

When observed more carefully, the friction that occurs within this community is usually not about abstract theological convictions. There are not many debates about which God is the true one or which doctrine is correct. The friction that most commonly arises is friction connected to concrete religious rituals and practices.

The moments that most often produce tension are family occasions involving ancestral veneration rituals. When a family member who has become Christian is asked to kneel before the ancestral altar, to burn incense together, or to participate in certain rituals during a funeral

procession, that is when the difference becomes most palpable. For the Christian family member, participation in such rituals conflicts with their convictions about proper worship. For the family member who still follows the older tradition, the refusal can feel like a rejection of the family itself, not merely a rejection of a ritual.

There is also friction that stems from the assumption held by some Christians that Buddhism is simply idol worship. This assumption, when expressed directly and without care, is naturally offensive. For those who practice Buddhism, the figures on their altars are not objects of worship in that simple sense; there is a deeper understanding of what they are doing. When young Christians, particularly those who are newly converted and full of zeal, express this assumption in a frontal and disrespectful way, that is what most often triggers more serious tension.

Nevertheless, these moments of friction tend to be minor and do not last long. The community has a kind of capacity to absorb tension and return to a relatively stable pattern of harmony. The question is: what makes that possible?

The Fifth Commandment as an Unwritten Moral Restraint

Honor Your Father and Your Mother

One of the factors that seems to play the most significant role in preserving this harmony, from the perspective of Christian values, is the Fifth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12, WEBUS). This command, repeated in the New Testament in Paul's letter to the Ephesians Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth (Ephesians 6:1-3, WEBUS) is a command that is fairly concrete and does not leave much room to be reinterpreted away.

For young Indonesian Chinese people who have become Christian, this command creates a productive tension. On one side, they carry a new conviction about the truth of the Christian faith and a genuine desire that their parents would come to experience what they have experienced. On the other side, that same faith teaches them to honor their parents. And honor, in this context, cannot mean only not being rude. To honor means to treat parents with dignity, to listen to them, and not to impose one's own will upon them.

In other words, the Christian value they hold is precisely what most effectively restrains them from taking a confrontational approach. A young Christian who is genuinely living out their faith cannot at the same time be disrespectful toward their parents in the name of that faith. There is a kind of internal mechanism within Christian faith itself that directs the believer toward a more patient and more loving approach when facing religious difference within the family.

The Approach That Remains: Persuasion and the Witness of Life

If frontal confrontation is blocked by the command to honor one's parents, then the approach that remains available to young Christians in this community is gentle persuasion and the witness of a life lived well. This is not a consciously planned strategy; it is more the natural consequence of the values they hold.

Gentle persuasion in this context means inviting, not forcing. It means sharing about faith in a way that respects the parents' freedom to receive or to decline. It means praying quietly for parents over many years, even when there are no signs that the prayer will be answered soon. It means attending family events that involve rituals they do not agree with, not to participate in the ritual itself, but because their very presence is already a form of honor.

The witness of life means that the way the young Christian lives from day to day, how they treat their parents, how they work, how they respond to hardship, how they treat others, becomes a testimony that speaks far more loudly than any theological argument. Wilkins (1992) affirms that biblical discipleship is expressed most fully not through argument but through a life patterned closely after Christ, lived out in relationship with others. In a community that values family harmony, a person whose life appears more peaceful, more joyful, and more full of genuine care is a person whose witness will be heard, even when their words are not always welcomed.

It is the combination of gentle persuasion and the witness of life that seems to be the most common approach among young Christians in the Indonesian Chinese community when facing religious difference within their families. And it is this combination that, indirectly, helps preserve harmony within a community that is genuinely diverse.

When Persuasion Does Not Succeed: Accepting Without Giving Up

Parents Who Remain in Their Own Faith

It must be honestly acknowledged that this patient and respectful approach does not always result in conversion. Many parents in the Indonesian Chinese community have passed away still holding to the faith of their earlier years. Years of prayer, years of living testimony, years of loving conversation, and in the end the parent passed on without ever explicitly declaring faith in Christ.

This is a painful reality for many Christian families in this community. And the way they face this reality is, again, significantly shaped by the values they hold. Christian faith lived with genuine seriousness does not make room for a posture of arrogance or judgment. Those who have truly received grace know that salvation is a matter between God and a person, not something that can be forced or guaranteed by human effort. The grief they feel is real, but it is not a grief that ends in bitterness or in judgment toward parents who were not successfully won over.

This acceptance of reality itself becomes a kind of keeper of harmony. Because a child who does not force their will, who does not require their parents to change religion in order to receive honor, is a child whose relationship with those parents remains intact until the end. And that intact relationship is the foundation of the broader harmony within the community.

Moments at the End of Life

But there are also different stories. A story that is heard fairly often within this community is of parents who, near the end of their lives, finally opened their hearts toward Christ. The ways this happens vary. Some asked to be baptized while already lying in a hospital bed. Some, in a final conversation with a Christian child or grandchild, spoke words that expressed their trust

in Christ, even without any formal rite. Some were simpler still: when a pastor or church leader came to pray at their bedside, they did not refuse, and even listened quietly and nodded. Moments like these, setting aside all theological differences about what is valid and what is not, are moments of profound meaning for families who have been praying for their parents over many years. And these moments become possible precisely because the relationship was carefully preserved across all those years. A parent who felt genuinely honored by their Christian child, who was never pressured or made to feel ashamed, who was always treated with love, is a parent whose heart remains open.

This is not a formula that can be guaranteed. Not every parent who is honored and loved with patience will ultimately declare faith near the end of their life. But the pattern that appears fairly often is that those who do finally open up are those who, across the years of their life, witnessed Christian faith not as something threatening or diminishing, but as something that made their child a better, more patient, and more genuinely loving person.

Implications for Christian Religious Education

Education That Forms, Not Merely Informs

From the observation of these dynamics within the Indonesian Chinese community, there are several things worth reflecting on in the context of Christian religious education. First, effective Christian religious education is education that forms character, not merely teaches doctrine. Knight (2006) argues that a genuinely Christian approach to education cannot simply add devotional elements onto an otherwise secular framework, but must be built from the ground up on a Christian worldview in which the formation of character is central. Young Christians who are able to preserve harmony within religiously diverse families do not manage it because they have memorized more Bible verses or mastered more theological arguments. They manage it because the values taught by Scripture have genuinely shaped the way they behave: the way they honor, the way they are patient, the way they love those who hold different beliefs.

Groome (1980) has long argued that Christian religious education must be understood as a process in which content, reflection, and real life are closely connected. What is visible in the Indonesian Chinese community is a lived confirmation of that argument: values that are only understood in the head will not produce lasting behavior under pressure. What is needed is values that have become part of how a person responds to the world spontaneously and naturally.

This means that in the context of Christian religious education in pluralistic settings, including within the Indonesian Chinese community, attention needs to be given not only to the content being taught but to the formation process that takes place. Are the children and young people educated in churches or Christian schools genuinely being formed to be humble, patient, and capable of honoring those who are different? Or are they only being taught to identify what is theologically right and wrong?

The Danger of Knowledge Without Humility

One of the most concrete sources of friction in the community observed is when young Christians, with sincere conviction, express the assumption that Buddhism is idol worship in a way that does not honor the person they are speaking to or about. This is an example of what

might be called knowledge without humility: someone who knows something they believe to be true, but who has not yet developed the wisdom to express it in a way that builds up rather than wounds.

Jesus himself, in his ministry, never diminished those who were different or who had not yet come to know the truth. He spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, not to shame her but to invite her (John 4:7-26, WEBUS). He ate with tax collectors and sinners, not because he approved of their way of life, but because his love extended beyond the boundaries set by the formal religion of his day. The way Jesus engaged with those who were different is the mirror that Christian religious education should always return to. Zuck (1995) observes that Jesus, as the Master Teacher, consistently drew people toward truth through relationship and invitation rather than confrontation, a pattern that remains the standard for Christian religious education today.

Pazmino (2008) reminds us that genuine Christian education must be rooted in the character of God as revealed in Christ, and that character is one of grace and truth together. Not truth without grace, which produces judgment. And not grace without truth, which produces relativism. Both must be present at once.

For Christian religious education in pluralistic communities like the Indonesian Chinese community, this means that teaching the truth of the Gospel must always be accompanied by the formation of attitudes that reflect grace. Young people who are taught that Christ is the only way of salvation, and who are at the same time formed to understand that this knowledge should produce humility and compassion rather than pride and judgment, are young people who will become effective witnesses and peacekeepers within their communities.

The Witness of Life as the Most Powerful Form of Education

The most striking feature of what can be observed in this community is that conversion, when it happens, almost never happens because of argument. Parents who finally open their hearts toward Christ near the end of their lives almost always do so not because they were convinced intellectually, but because they witnessed something in the life of their Christian child or grandchild that made them want to know the source of that life more closely.

This is a confirmation of what Scripture itself teaches. Peter, in his letter, writes about the approach of a wife whose husband has not yet believed: that even if some disobey the word, they may be won by the behavior of their wives without a word (1 Peter 3:1, WEBUS). The same principle applies more broadly: a life lived with genuine faith is the most powerful argument, and at the same time the least threatening one, for those who witness it.

The implication for Christian religious education is clear: the most successful education is education that produces people whose lives themselves become testimony. Not people who are skilled at debating religion, not people who have memorized many verses, but people whose daily way of life, how they treat their parents, how they carry themselves in difficulty, how they love those who are different from them, makes others wonder about the source of that kind of life.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative method with a library research approach, complemented by reflective non-participant observation of everyday interaction within the Indonesian Chinese Christian community. As a descriptive-qualitative study, the purpose is not to test a hypothesis through statistical measurement, but to explore, interpret, and construct a coherent understanding of how Christian values function as a factor of tolerance within a religiously plural family and social setting.

Primary data consist of relevant biblical texts, particularly Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-3, John 4:7-26, and 1 Peter 3:1 (WEBUS), which serve as the normative theological foundation for the argument developed in this article. Secondary data are drawn from literature in Christian religious education and practical theology, including the works of Groome (1980), Wilkins (1992), Zuck (1995), Knight (2006), and Pazmino (2008), selected for their relevance to the themes of character formation, discipleship, and the witness of life as instruments of Christian education.

Beyond these written sources, the discussion in this article is informed by the author's longterm reflective observation of interaction within the Indonesian Chinese Christian community, gathered informally through participation in family gatherings, church fellowship, and pastoral conversation over a period of years, rather than through structured interviews or a formal research instrument. This observational material is treated as illustrative rather than as data subjected to statistical generalization, consistent with the position stated at the outset of this article, namely that of an outside observer offering a reflection rather than a claim to exhaustive ethnographic authority.

Data analysis was carried out in three stages. First, identification, recognizing recurring patterns in the way religious difference is handled within families in this community. Second, classification, grouping these patterns according to the values from which they appear to originate, particularly the command to honor one's parents and the practice of persuasion through the witness of life. Third, interpretation, examining these patterns theologically in light of Scripture and existing literature on Christian religious education, in order to draw out their implications for the formation of Christian character in a pluralistic setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ritual, Not Doctrine, as the Primary Site of Friction

The pattern that emerges from observation, and that has been described in the preceding section, shows that tension within the Indonesian Chinese Christian community rarely originates from theological disagreement as such. Family members holding different beliefs generally do not argue about which teaching is correct. The friction that does occur is almost always tied to a concrete moment: a request to kneel before an ancestral altar, to burn incense, or to take part in a ritual whose meaning a Christian family member can no longer affirm. This result suggests that tolerance within this community is not the product of doctrinal indifference or a relativizing of belief. It is, rather, the result of a family structure that continues to hold together even while its members interpret the demands of that same ritual moment quite differently.

The Fifth Commandment as a Functioning, Not Merely Formal, Restraint

If the command to honor one's parents (Exodus 20:12, WEBUS; Ephesians 6:1-3, WEBUS) were held only as a doctrine memorized but not lived, it would not by itself be strong enough to prevent confrontation. What the observation indicates, however, is that this command operates at the level of everyday practice for many young Christians in this community. It shapes actual decisions taken in the moment of tension: whether to attend a ritual event, how to phrase a refusal, whether to press a theological point at a family gathering. In this sense the Fifth Commandment functions less as a rule imposed from outside and more as an internalized disposition, close to what Groome (1980) describes as faith that has become a lived story rather than transmitted information alone.

Witness of Life and the Timing of Conversion

A further pattern worth highlighting concerns the timing of conversion, when it happens at all. Almost without exception, the parents in this community who eventually opened their hearts to Christ did so late in life, often near its very end, and almost never as the result of a single persuasive conversation. This finding is consistent with the principle stated in 1 Peter 3:1 (WEBUS), that a family member may be won over without a word, by conduct observed patiently over time. It also mirrors the pattern Jesus himself demonstrated with the Samaritan woman in John 4:7-26 (WEBUS), where relationship and patient presence preceded any direct claim about the truth of what he taught. Read together, these results indicate that in this community, the most persuasive theological argument is not an argument at all, but a life sustained faithfully over years, the kind of discipleship that Wilkins (1992) and Zuck (1995) describe as the substance of following Christ.

Toward a Formation-Centered Model for Christian Religious Education

Taken together, these results point to a simple but consistent sequence: the command to honor parents restrains confrontation, persuasion and the witness of life become the remaining avenue open to the believer, the relationship is preserved even when conversion does not occur, and in some cases that preserved relationship becomes the very ground on which a parent later turns to Christ. This sequence carries a discussion point of some importance for Christian religious education. It suggests that curriculum and teaching focused primarily on doctrinal correctness, without corresponding attention to character formation, patience, and humility, would be unlikely to produce the pattern of sustained tolerance observed in this community. This supports Knight's (2006) argument that Christian education must be built on a worldview in which character formation is central, and Pazmino's (2008) insistence that Christian education must hold truth and grace together rather than allow one to eclipse the other. The result of this study, in other words, is not primarily a set of new facts, but a confirmation, drawn from lived experience within one particular community, that the values Christian religious education seeks to form are values that can be observed doing real work in the most difficult moments of family life.

It should be acknowledged that this discussion rests on reflective observation rather than a systematic empirical survey, and the results above should therefore be read as an interpretive account rather than as findings generalizable to the wider Chinese Indonesian population as a whole. Further research employing structured interviews or a broader comparative sample would help to test and refine the pattern proposed here.

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian Chinese community is a community that is diverse from within. Religious difference among its members is not a new phenomenon, and the relatively high level of tolerance visible in this community does not happen by itself. There are factors that shape it, and one of them, from the perspective observed in this article, is the values taught by the Christian faith.

The Fifth Commandment, which calls for the honoring of parents, functions in practice as an effective moral restraint for young Christians facing religious difference within their families. This command encourages a patient and loving approach rather than a confrontational one, and it is this approach that preserves harmony in the midst of genuine difference. Gentle persuasion and the witness of a life lived well become the primary means available, and the outcome is not always conversion, but it is always a relationship that remains intact.

The moments at the end of life, in which some parents finally open their hearts to Christ, are the fruit of seeds planted with patience across many years. Those seeds were not theological arguments, but a life lived with genuine faith, in love that honors, in patience that does not force.

For Christian religious education, the observation of this community offers a lesson that is simple but profound: the most effective education is education that produces people whose lives themselves speak. In a pluralistic community, in the midst of genuine difference, it is people like that who are most likely to become bridges rather than walls, and keepers of peace rather than sources of conflict.

REFERENCES

- Groome, T. H. (1980). *Christian religious education: Sharing our story and vision*. Harper & Row.
- Knight, G. R. (2006). *Philosophy and education: An introduction in Christian perspective* (4th ed.). Andrews University Press.
- Pazmino, R. W. (2008). *Foundational issues in Christian education: An introduction in evangelical perspective* (3rd ed.). Baker Academic.
- Wilkins, M. J. (1992). *Following the master: A biblical theology of discipleship*. Zondervan.
- Zuck, R. B. (1995). *Teaching as Jesus taught*. Baker Books.