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Islam wasathiyah value in photojournalism in *Guo Ji Ri Bao* newspaper

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Abstract

Photojournalism is one of the various channels to convey messages in visual form. It is a combination of images and texts that produces a single communication unit that reflects events and issues in a society. In the A8 section of Guo Ji Ri Bao, a Mandarin-language newspaper in Indonesia, dated September 25, 2020, seven photojournalism materials were discovered to contain signs and symbols related to Islam Wasathiyah value. This implied message indicated the media's "agenda" in presenting reality or social issues, where the agenda typically corresponds to the ideology of the media itself. The media construct the frame of mind for their readers even with symbols and this study originated with the formulation of the main problem: "How is the value of Islam *wasathiyah* reflected in photojournalism on the Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper viewed from the perspective of meanings and media?" An analysis of semiotics, structuralism, connotation and denotation based on Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's Meanings and Media perspective were utilized in this study. It was discovered that Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper played a significant role in conveying the value of Islam Wasathiyah. This value is important to convey to all levels of society even through photos because it will be one of the ways to preach (da'wah) that lead us to a happy, peaceful, and harmonious life.

Abstrak

Foto jurnalistik merupakan salah satu saluran penyampai pesan dalam bentuk visual. Foto jurnalistik terbentuk sebagai kombinasi dari gambar dan teks yang menghasilkan satu kesatuan komunikasi yang mencerminkan makna tersendiri dan permasalahan dalam masyarakat. Pada media *Guo Ji Ri Bao* surat kabar berbahasa Mandarin di Indonesia, pada rubrik A8 25 September 2020, ditemukan tujuh materi foto jurnalistik yang memuat tanda dan simbol terkait nilai Islam Wasathiyah. Pesan yang tersirat ini berkaitan dengan "agenda" media dalam menyajikan realitas atau isu-isu sosial yang terjadi. Agenda sebuah media erat kaitannya dengan ideologi media itu sendiri. Sehingga, media kerap mengkonstruksi bingkai pemikiran pembacanya bahkan dengan unsur simbol dan tanda sekalipun. Studi ini hadir dengan rumusan masalah utama: "Bagaimana nilai Islam *wasathiyah* dalam foto jurnalistik pada surat kabar *Guo Ji Ri Bao* dalam perspektif *meanings and media*? dan seperti apa semiotika, strukturalisme dan makna konotasi dan denotasi berdasarkan perspektif Makna dan Media karya Gill Branston dan Roy Stafford digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Kesimpulan pada penelitian menyatakan bahwa surat kabar *Guo Ji Ri Bao* memainkan peran penting dalam menyampaikan nilai-nilai Islam *wasathiyah.* Nilai ini penting untuk disampaikan kepada seluruh lapisan masyarakat bahkan melalui foto karena akan menjadi salah satu corong dakwah untuk mengantarkan kita pada tatanan kehidupan yang aman, damai, tenteram, dan bahagia.

Kata kunci

Islam wasathiyah, foto jurnalistik, Guo Ji Ri Bao, meanings and media

INTRODUCTION

Media plays a very important role in reporting events that occur all around the world for the consumption of the general public. With a very broad reach in disseminating information and news to the public, the mass media significantly shape public opinions based on reported events and issues. New complex discoveries by media have led to numerous insights regarding how humans communicate or express themselves to others. One of the means to communicate these messages is through photos or images. Photojournalism, one of important elements in modern journalistic activities, has grown rapidly of late, especially since the arrival of digital cameras which

offer considerable convenience. Journalistic photography is increasingly playing a critical role in disseminating information to the public rapidly and accurately.

Photojournalism appears in various forms of the mass media, namely print media and digital media. Photos have become important elements and successfully conveyed secondary messages to the public. The photos themselves are results of documentation activities and their presence in print media, such as newspaper, present a visual representation that may describe the numerous meanings and symbolisms within them. Photos have become reading materials and one important communication method, even though the meanings and values in photojournalism frequently are not easily described and comprehended in standardized interpretations.

Photojournalism is a communication unit consisting of photos and texts and has existed since newspapers began to use it as visual aids. It is often utilized to strengthen and visualize news content to involve the feelings and evoke the emotions of readers. In appearance, the photos do not feature alone but also include news content and captions.

A good photo is assumed to be able to explain the news elements which generally consist of what, who, where, when, why, and how (5W+1H). One of the advantages of an image or photo is that it is easy to understand and easy to remember. It also can convince readers and provide a real image of an event. Photos contain explanations or problems that are happening and developing in society, be it political, social, economic, cultural or other issues. Photos also contain symbolisms and meanings which can produce different interpretations. In addition to depicting the news literally, photos, especially in the mass media, also carry the implied symbolism in them. There is no standard interpretation in a photo because it requires an agreement that is built structurally in interpreting signs and meanings. These implied messages are often related to the "partisanship" or "agenda" of the media in presenting a reality or social issue that is happening (Sobur, 2006).

The involvement of photojournalism greatly influences readers' perception in shaping the interpretation of what are presented by the photos themselves (Gayle, 2020). Frequently, photojournalism also implies a crucial meaning contained in an event. This is also discovered in a Mandarin-language media in Indonesia, namely Guo Ji Ri Bao. By the review of the cross-functional aspect of the media, Guo Ji Ri Bao is unique. In addition to carrying out the function of the media as a business enterprise, it provides entertainment in a special entertainment column, serves as a medium of news/information spreader as well as serves as a tool to conduct da'wah *(da'i)* to its readers.

Guo Ji Ri Bao frequently presents materials that reflect and highly uphold the value of tolerance. In a previous study conducted by Guo Ji Ri Bao media regarding the

Uighur ethnicity in China (Xinjiang) (Rahmayuni & Hidayat, 2020), it chose to report that the massacre was not as stated by other well-known media and that the Chinese government did not take into account religious consideration in treating its people. Inviting state ambassadors, presenting mosque data, and observing the situation in Xinjiang first-hand are elegant ways to defuse the important issue of ethnic supremacy. The problems of Xinjiang and China are internal state issues on rebellion and nationalism, which have nothing to do with the oppression carried out by the Chinese government against its Muslim people in Xinjiang.

Interestingly, the presence of Guo Ji Ri Bao may offer a way of preaching to remove the negative stigma that has spread among the society regarding the presence of people of Chinese ancestry in Indonesia, as evidenced by numerous incidents related to oppressive behavior and racial discrimination that occurred in Indonesia (Tan, 2014; Suhandinata, 2009). In fact, from a historical perspective, Chinese Indonesians has played an important role in the progress and prosperity of the country (Dhani, 2016; Hasan, 2017; Zhou, 2019). Guo Ji Ri Bao also uniquely respects differences and takes a neutral stance over several problems and conflicts, such as the incident of Uyghur ethnic group in Xinjiang. It chose to report that the Chinese government did not take into account religious consideration in treating its people. Inviting state ambassadors, presenting mosque data, and observing the situation in Xinjiang first-hand are elegant ways to defuse the important issue of ethnic supremacy. The problems of Xinjiang and China are internal state issues on rebellion and nationalism, which have nothing to do with the oppression carried out by the Chinese government against its Muslim people in Xinjiang (Mou, 2011). The patterns and system carried out by Guo Ji Ri Bao are in line with the concept of Islamic teachings called Islam *wasathiyah.* What was published in the Guo Ji Ri Bao about the Uyghur incident was also supported by prominent news agencies such as the BBC and the CNN. They reported that the Chinese government denied all the accusations of genocide or ethnic reduction in Xinjiang. However, they do admit the existence of the re-education camp which is intended to eradicate terrorism and Islamic extremism that is rampant in China. Unfortunately, this is misused by the anti-communists who accuse China of violating the human rights to tarnish the Chinese government (Hasan, 2016).

A Guo Ji Ri Bao reporter with the initial of IM mentioned that although the company employees are predominantly non-Muslims, the process of producing news content has invariably adopted a 'middle way' stance to avoid conflicts, fights, defamation, and other negative aspects. This media is also consistent in reporting social activities of Chinese Indonesians in each edition which evidently invite more people to spread kindness.

This research focused on seven photographs that have been discovered to share the Islamic concept of *wasathiyah.* This research is crucial considering the powerful impact and influence of photojournalism on the formation of public understanding. In this case, the photos taken by Guo Ji Ri Bao are heavily embellished with elements that are related to the essence and meaning of tolerance and the Islamic teaching of *wasathiyah.* Encouraging the Islamic teaching of *wasathiyah* to the wider community is crucial to minimize turmoil as well as provide a neutral understanding that the human instinct is the most important element in building and fostering interreligious relations and living in harmony between one religion and another.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Meanings and Media

Meanings and media are two separate terms. However, in terms of terminology, they cannot be separated and are invariably relevant to be examined concurrently, as has been discussed in Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's The Media Student's Book (2010).

Misunderstandings and multiple interpretations often occur as far as 'meaning' and 'meant' are concerned, especially when utilizing the media as a channel. This is due to the complex and comprehensive nature of understanding the meaning of the message conveyed by the media. Gill Branston and Roy Stafford discussed meanings and media which are then narrowed down into three discussions, namely semiotics, structuralism as well as denotation and connotation (Farhan, 2017).

Semiotics

Semiotics is a theory that originated from the study of the media. Semiotics is also called "semiology" which can be defined as the study of signs or the production of social meaning by sign systems, that everything carries meaning (Utoyo, 2018). According to linguists such as Saussure, Pierce, and Barthes, in the study of semiotics verbal language is only one of several systems of meaning. There are two main models of understanding language or representation (image). *First,* language is a reflection of the world, where meaning itself is readily assigned (truth) and lies in events, people, waiting for language objects to try to "get" or express (in realistic photography or film styles for example). *Second,* language as the basis of the meaning of the "author/writer", i.e. most of the language is a way in which each of us expresses ideas and feelings unique to ourselves (this approach will appreciate/judge the styles of acting strange (eccentric) of writing or photography, as individuals.

The study of the media reached a serious development in the 1950s, and various methods from literature, social science, and critical arts schools were applied in research on the media. A value is positioned in good dialogues, convincing characters or beautiful compositions. However, discussing films or television shows with such an approach is not sufficient. Audiences should be more critical and enquire 'What are the criteria for measuring research?' or 'For whom?' The meaning that is built in the language and culture is then applied to the media, both audio, visual, audio-visual (sound and image), and so on (Branston & Stafford, 2003). Thus, this semiotic approach tries to understand the way meaning is constructed through stories or images (Benny, 2014).

Semiotics is also known as semiology. Semiology is the study of how humanity interprets (to signify) various objects. Existing objects do not only carry information but also the desire to communicate (deliver messages) and constitute a structured system of signs (Barthes, 2016). Hence, semiotics is understood as the science that deals with 'signs' and studies the nature of the sign system. The concept of signs in Islam is known as verse *(ayat)* which means that everything is a sign of God that needs to be interpreted (Shabti & Mas'udy, n.d; Ahmad, 1998). Understanding verbal language is one of the numerous sign systems that can be interpreted, such as attitudes, clothes, and other objects, which are studied as verbal language. Signs describe meanings that are constructed from social production.

Structuralism

Structuralists argue that all forms of human organization are determined by broad social or psychological structures following the logic of society or the wishes of society itself. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) in the 19th century began to attempt to interpret the social world in systematic steps (Branston & Stafford, 2003) Freud argued that human psychology is a stand-alone structure, causing people to act in ways that are not conscious but sometimes command fleetingly as dreams come true. Marx argues that economic life and especially one's relationships affect one's productivity, and this can also determine one's opinion in politics (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

The meaning of a sign in structuralism can be understood that every human being understands something based on the rules of the social system or psychological factors within themselves. Each individual certainly possesses a distinctive accent or style of language (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

A social system that is systematically mutually agreed upon can become its characteristic and/or cause natural differences and there are terms in certain languages that have become general agreement (the majority) and served as a guideline used in

communication. One of the famous figures in structuralism is Claude Levi-Strauss (1934-1937), an anthropologist from France. Since the 1950s he had been actively studying myths, totems, and kinship systems of tribal cultures in North and South America. He stressed the importance of opposing mythical signs and language. His opinions can be described as binary opposition because the qualities can be grouped into pairs of opposites (Iskandar & Widyastri, 2020). This resulted in key boundaries or differences in culture, usually with unequal weight or value attached to either side of the pair. Meanwhile, Ferdinand Saussure (1857-1913) considered language as a system of signs, which was formed from 'code' and 'structure'. A way to derive meaning from language was proposed by defining the opposite term of another term, such as black and white, hot and cold, 'femininity' as opposed to 'masculinity' and others (Branston & Stafford, 2003). To understand structuralism as part of the meaning, the following two arguments need to be considered. *First,* structuralism argues that all human organization is determined by the social or psychological structure within the individual. *Second,* structuralism argues that meaning cannot be understood except in a systematic structure, which has its characteristics or naturally born differences (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

Structuralists' emphasis on opposition helps explain semiotics in that 'signs are fully understood only by reference to their differences from other signs in a particular system or code' (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

Denotation and Connotation

Denotation (Branston & Stafford, 2003) carries an implied meaning while the meaning of connotation is explicit. The word 'red' indicates a different denotation as compared to other colors such as 'blue' or 'pink'. When red is associated with other colors it can have different meanings. In certain cultures, the color red has the connotation of something fierce, passionate, or dangerous. In the 1990 movie Pretty Woman, there was a scene in which Vivien, played by Julia Roberts, wore a red dress. The red dress instilled confidence and passion in Edward, played by Richard Gere. 'Red' denotes a code that means 'passionate' but maybe different in meaning in a red costume in another movie (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

Several arguments regarding signs raised different terms, namely icon, index, and symbol. An icon is understood when the relationship between the signifier and the signified has the same or similar characteristics, such as photos, films and television, which describe reality. An index is a sign that indicates a relationship which refers to reality. For example, smoke indicates fire, sweat indicates work, spots indicate smallpox, et cetera. Meanwhile, a symbol is understood as a natural relationship

between the signifier and the sign that is arbitrary or based on an agreement (convention) (Sa'idah, 2010).

Signs also contain a certain code that is understood differently from the 'natural' or merely a 'label' from the real world, which is formed based on social conventions, and never appears as 'natural'. For example, the green light of a traffic sign indicates that vehicles may continue on the road. It can be replaced with pink if the color is agreed upon (Sunardi, 2004). This is where the broad cultural or social agreement (or even style) is needed to articulate what is produced, and reproduced, comes into effect. As far as a broader system of meaning is concerned, the term 'code' may be redefined. Barthes discussed this as a part of myth and mythology. Similar to political terms 'ideology' and 'discourse', these signs are polysomic/not permanent (Kurniawan, 2006).

Islam *Wasathiyah*

The term *wasathiyah* derives from the word *wasath,* which, according to Ibn Faris in his book, *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah*, is interpreted as being in the middle, fair, good, and balanced. In everyday language, *wasathiyah* is often translated into the term moderate or neutral. Islam emphasizes the aspect of *washathiyah* (middle path) as the words of Ali bin Abi Talib, *"Khairul umuri awsatuha"* (the best affairs are those in the middle) (Nur, 2015). Geographically, from Morocco to Merauke, Islam occupies the majority of this region. In terms of teachings, Islam is not too *zuhud* (leaving the world altogether) and not too liberal and permissive. In the aspect of worship (respect), not only raising one hand like the military, not only bowing like the Japanese and Koreans, holding hands with one hand like the Turks, Sitting cross-legged like the Buddhists, but Islam embraces all when praying: raising both hands during *takbiratul ihram;* holding hands when standing; as well as bowing, sitting, kneeling, and prostrating at the time of prayer as much as 17 *raka'at* a day and night (Bakti, 2021).

The concept of *wasathiyah* in Islam is relatively central in shaping personalities and characters, both individually and in groups. It is related to the teachings of Islam as a whole, including aspects taught in Islam both in terms of *muamalah, tawhid,* and others. The concept of *wasathiyah* with Islamic teachings is crucial, inherent and cannot be separated. This is demonstrated by the many verses in the Qur'an and Hadith that mention *wasathiyah.* In Islamic studies, *wasathiyat Islam* is often translated as 'justly-balanced Islam', 'the middle path' or 'the middle way' of Islam and Islam as mediating and balancing role. These terms indicate the importance of justice, balance, a middle way in Islam and not involved in cases of extreme nature. The Prophet Muhammad once reminded as follows: *"O people, stay away from your excessive attitude (beyond the limit) in religion! Because verily (things) that destroyed the people before you were due to excessive attitude in religion (Narrated by Ibn Majah from Sayyidina Ibn Abbas)."*

In Indonesia, there are six recognized religions, namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. One of the pioneers of pluralism was Nurcholis Madjid (1939-2005) (Moko, 2017). Observing the high number of religions in Indonesia, Majid called for recognizing their existence and exercising tolerant attitude. He expressed three thoughts on religious pluralism. First, religious pluralism is an understanding that recognizes the existence of other religions, promotes a mature outlook in facing diversity, encourages tolerance and competition of kindness. Second, Madjid's idea of religious pluralism is a religious principle that recognizes the freedom of observing one's religion, with each believer assuming associated the risks. Third, Madjid's concept of thought is an open, dialogical, tolerant da'wah which upholds universal human values and also characterizes his perspective in realizing a *hanif* and Islam *rahmatan lil alamin*. In summary, this specific belief of Majid is commonly understood to promote inclusivism, integralism (open to dialogues), and respect of human rights (Bakti, 2005) as discussed in details below:

Inclusive Islam

Islam is an open religion. Muslims must appear confident and wise in the face of pluralism. An inclusive attitude is highly recommended in living a life in the midst of religious pluralism. This inclusive attitude certainly necessitates the existence of an understanding of pluralism and vice versa, pluralism demands an attitude of inclusivism. Because pluralism is a necessary reality, the attitude of inclusivism therefore becomes a necessity as well. This is a point from which the social interaction between beliefs and ideologies emerges in the form of dialogues.

Madjid expressively argued that religious pluralism is an inclusive concept where all the truths of other religious teachings are applicable in one's religion as well. Madjid pointed out that in religious pluralism, there is no absolute truth and there is an acknowledgment of the truths of other religions. Therefore, religious pluralism only exists if attitudes of openness, mutual respect, and tolerance are prevalent. This teaching emphasizes the basic understanding that all religions are given the freedom to exist (Ridwan, 2007).

In initiating and promoting religious pluralism, Madjid indicated that the goals of religious people are to be broad-minded and open. Madjid argued that the best religion before Allah is *al-hanifiyyah al-samhah*, namely seeking open truth that brings tolerance, encourages openness, discourages narrow and fanatical perspective, and does not shackle the soul. In the idea of religious pluralism, Madjid demonstrated that Islam is a teaching that seeks and adheres to the truth broadly and inclusively by giving the recognition to all religions, all holy books, and all prophets (A'la, Baso, & Azra, 2005). Madjid's idea was to merge religious differences into openness, mutual respect,

and tolerance and encourage believers of differing religions to collectively work hand in hand in fighting for justice and mutual respect for human dignity. In his thinking, Madjid put forward a high level of optimism towards the success of achieving the 'meeting point' of various religions.

Communicative Islam

Madjid also stated that the concept of communicative and humanistic da'wah is highly recommended considering the heterogeneous nature of society. In their community, Muslims are able to build understanding, *tepo seliro* (tolerance) and mutual respect. The presence of Islam does not negate the existence of other religions, because linguistically, Islam is generally concerned with peace and justice. Every Muslim can spread peace in a pluralistic society because problems are not are not borne personally but also collectively.

Religious dialogues are considered important to reveal the closeness that has been prevalent in inter-religious relations. Dialogue is a form of activity that promotes the idea of openness because it is not possible to happen without an open attitude between the parties involved. Interfaith dialogue is not only possible but also necessary to bring about a correct understanding of religious beliefs. Every religious adherent must be aware of the reality of pluralism for a communicative relationship to exist.

Madjid emphasized that the issues of pluralism are not unique and surprising, especially in modern times, because sociologically the reality of pluralism always exists. Basing his analysis on the Qur'an, Madjid attempted to examine deeper the issue of truth claim. Without intending to reduce the truth that is believed by each religion, Madjid observed elements that already exist in each religion, especially Islam, namely tolerance, freedom, openness, fairness, justice, and honesty. The idea of pluralism is a basic principle in Islam, where objective reality of human community is a kind of God's law and that only God understands and may explain during the last day why human beings were created differently (Naim, 2013).

Humanistic Islam

Islam is a religion of humanity. The relationship between Islam and pluralism is generally based on the spirit of humanity and the universality of Islam. The universality of Islam can be theologically interpreted that all true religions are Islamic (submission to God) because they teach submission to God and peace. In this perspective, according to Madjid, Muslims as the majority group must be a group that appears with high self-confidence, act as civil servants who can mentor other groups, and work together without discrimination. To quote Gus Dur's words, upholding one's own religion does not have to mean bringing down other religions. Therefore, inter-religious dialogues can be seen as the implementation of the most basic religious teachings, and

humanitarian cooperation that results based on faith in God Almighty and goodness is a commandment in the holy book.

The Qur'an, in Al-Baqarah: 148, recognizes that society consists of various kinds of communities that have their own life orientations. Humans must accept the reality of cultural and religious diversity and exercise tolerance towards each community members in carrying out their worship practices. In general, every human being has the freedom to believe in a religion of his choice and to worship according to that belief. In the Qur'an, there are many verses that speak of accepting Allah's guidance or religion.

Acceptance of a religious belief is an individual's free choice (Ka'bah, 2005). Normatively, in the Qur'an, there are several verses which lead to the values of pluralism. For example, verse 13 of the letter Al-Hujurat mentioned: *"O mankind, indeed we have created you all from male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other. Indeed, the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most pious among you, indeed Allah is Knowing, All-Knowing"* (Q.S Al-Hujarat: 13).

METHODS

Narrative analysis was utilized in the study of Meaning and Media from Branston and Stafford which was subsequently linked to a conceptual framework that refers to the Qur'an and Hadith. An examination of seven photos in the A8 edition of September 25, 2020, Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper as the object of research was subsequently carried out. This study aimed to explore the elements and values of *Islam wasathiyah* applied by the media in presenting news content.

Descriptive qualitative method was utilized by analyzing photojournalism materials which implicitly contain the elements of *Islam wasathiyah*. It is hoped that the study may enrich the literature which examines that numerous objects in the universe (in this particular study a product of journalism created, packaged, and pioneered by non-Muslims) is also indirectly part of the teachings of Islam. It is also an analysis which confirms that Islamic dogma is highly suitable to be applied in all activities of life, including photojournalism.

The subject in this study is the *Guo Ji Ri Bao,* a local Mandarin language media in Indonesia. With its high circulation and numerous regular columns, the newspaper still thrives despite the increasing domination of digital media in journalism. *Guo Ji Ri Bao* literally refers to 'International Daily News'. The newspaper was originally championed by Bambang Suryono (Lie Zuo Hui), a former journalist for the daily Warta Bakti (formerly known as *Harian Sin Po*), one of the largest newspaper for Chinese-Indonesian communities during the pre-independence era. Indonesia. *Guo Ji Ri Bao* was

first published in 2001 with 6,000 copies printed and distributed daily throughout Indonesia. In its development, *Guo Ji Ri Bao* joined the Jawa Pos Group and opened a representative office in the city of Bandung.

Figure 1. Guo Ji Ri Bao Photojournalism

Guo Ji Ri Bao was established out of a desire to offer new horizons for the people of Indonesia. The shackles of reading interest had motivated three media outlets from three countries, *Guo Ji Ri Bao* (LA-United States), *Wen Wei Po* (Hong Kong), and *Ren Min Ri Bao* (China) to create a Chinese-language newspaper in Indonesia. After joining the Jawa Pos Group, *Guo Ji Ri Bao* was able to fully benefit from using the network and remote printing technology from Jawa Pos, enabling it to produce a daily newspaper that is available in four major cities, namely Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Pontianak.

The object research in this study is the photojournalism that listed in the A8 section of Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper, dated September 25, 2020, as presented in figure 1 (http://epaper.guojiribao.com/ shtml/gjrb/20200925/ vA8.shtml).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semiotics

Semiotics is a study of communication process that contains meaning. For this reason, the study of mass media such as photojournalism includes the search for

messages and meanings in the study objects. In other words, studying media is a study of meaning, i.e. the origin, the form, the scale of purpose, the positioning, and the correlations to our thought process. Therefore, the use of the semiotic method in studying photojournalism in the Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper is expected to reveal the meaning contained in the communication materials. Photojournalism is highly relevant to be studied with semiotic analysis. Zoest stated in Sobur that images/films are built solely with marks. Indeed, the characteristics of images are an imitation of the reality they represent. A dynamic image is iconic for the reality it denotes. This study discovered that photojournalism in Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper on religious signs utilized a semiotic approach such as a cap *(Peci),* a short piece of cloth hanging on the neck *(Rida'),* as well as an orange cloth wrapped around the body.

Structuralism

The symbols displayed in photojournalism in section A8 of Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper dated September 25, 2020, are expressed in the form of clothing and religious attributes that distinguish one religion from another. The distinction also lies in the person wearing the costume with the mark that distinguishes profession. However, the most apparent sign is the symbol on the religious costume and this is the construction of the meaning of the religious attributes prevailing in society. The person indicated in the research object who wears a cap is a Muslim, and the person whose body was wrapped with a long orange cloth is a monk.

The structure of culture and belief in each of these religions has been established on the foundations and doctrinal arguments. Tufail argued that religion for an ethnic group is not always positioned as a guideline for their relationship with God and fellow human beings spatially and temporally but also positioned as an ethnic identity (Bakti, 2005).

Symbols are a characteristic of religions since they are established out of belief systems as well. The sign is interpreted in various forms according to the cultures and beliefs of each religion. This cult subsequently gave birth to a system and structure of symbols that shaped humans into homo symbolicum (symbolic creatures). The sign in a symbol carries a hidden meaning or can be interpreted from its literal meaning to a sacred and deeper meaning. Meanwhile, as a structured system, symbols have their coherent logic (interrelated) that can be interpreted universally. In journalistic photos in Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper, religions are represented in their respective characteristics and symbols. These religious symbols are represented in the form of costumes worn by the person in the picture. This is in accordance with Eliade who stated in Daniel L. Pals, that an object, cloth, an animal, a flame, a stone or a star, a cave, a river, a blooming

flower, or even a human can become a sacred symbol in religion. as long as people find it and subsequently believe it (Pals, 2011).

Denotation and Connotation

In the realm of denotation, meaning is implied and in accordance to the context mentioned in the Qur'an *(Al-'Alamah),* namely the sign, a meaning is created according to the frame of understanding that has been constructed or agreed upon by humans.

In the last two photos, two buildings with pyramid-like domes and red and green roofs respectively were interpreted as places of worship. This was inferred based on the title which means: Tzu Chi completed the construction of the Jingjing Institute and five religious sites with the help of the North Lombok Regency. Likewise, the last photo also featured a large building with a green roof.

The inauguration of five religious sites that were built side by side with the involvement of religious figures is an element of tolerance that may be deemed as a rare phenomenon in some countries. Moreover, it could also be a dream for certain groups of people in other parts of the world to be able to live in harmony with a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious environment; such as Israel, Myanmar, and several other countries for example. Religious conflicts can be lengthy and are detrimental to society as a whole, hence the existing tolerance in Indonesia deserves to be maintained and appreciated. The interesting feature of the photos is that the object (people) can comfortably wear the attributes of their respective religions; such as those used by the Regent of North Lombok Dr. H. Najmul Akhyar, SH, MH; i.e. rida' and peci (the black cap), and also orange robes worn by the monks. If all the people in the photo were not wearing any religious attributes, a more formal and different atmosphere would emerge. However, when the attributes of their respective religions were worn and people gathered in an environment that was safe, peaceful, and solemn, it reflected the high value of tolerance.

When the article title and content were studied further, it was discovered that five religious sites had been built at the same location managed by a single institute which was partially funded by the Lombok Regency. It indicated government involvement was present in an effort to unite the nation, by initiating and building places of worship which for adherents of various religions.

Based on Nurcholis Madjid's perspective on pluralism, the inauguration of a temple and a prayer room by the Regent of North Lombok, Dr. Hj. Najmul Akhyar, SH, MH, indicated the development of tolerance and mutual respect between religions. Even though it was merely an ordinary inauguration ceremony displayed in a print media, this must be fostered and encouraged to enable Indonesia to become a country that is able to implement Humanistic Islam. The humanistic version of Islam teaches that all

religions are true, advocates a surrender attitude to God and upholds peace. There should be no limitation in presenting self-identity that represents any religion, such as the cap, rida' and orange robes worn by monks as seen in the photos. The presence of Indonesian armed forces were also noted in the inauguration of the places of worship regardless of each soldier's religion. The picture of the Regent accompanied by Buddhist religious figures illustrates religious differences that do not cause the community to be more distant, but brings members of society of differing background even closer. This is in accordance with Humanistic Islam presented by Nurcholis Madjid, that is Islam must be open to pluralism.

The second photo until the seventh photo (along with the news texts) exemplify the tolerance between religions, where a Buddhist Religious Foundation (Tzu Chi) visited the site of the 2018 Lombok earthquake to provide help to residents of northern Lombok, build places of worship, including Islamic schools (MTsN Nurul Huda). When Muslims are building mosques and Buddhists are building temples, it is considered usual. However, when Buddhists demonstrated great contributions in building a place of worship for Muslim and Islamic schools, it deserves high appreciation. Through these photos, the unity between leaders and the people of North Lombok in the inauguration ceremony reflected that they were a unit under the auspices of the Indonesian foundational principles of Pancasila.

CONCLUSION

Photos presents events or issues happening and developing in a society. The variety of photos that were taken and published in Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper carried the essence and meaning of tolerance and the teaching of Islam *wasathiyah*. *Islam wasathiyah* is encouraged to communities in general to minimize inter-religion frictions and provide a neutral understanding that the human instinct is the most important element in building and fostering inter-religious relations and living in multi-religion place harmoniously.

Gill Branston and Roy Stafford discussed and narrowed down the meanings and media into three solid discussions, namely semiotics, structuralism as well as denotation and connotation. With this theory, seven photos of the A8 section of Guo Ji Ri Bao newspaper dated September 25, 2020 were analysed. Subsequently, at least three important points were discovered as follows:

First, Guo Ji Ri Bao had succeeded in constructing and building a positive paradigm towards religious diversity. This is in accordance with Nurcholis Majid's perspective in recognizing the presence of other religions and that every religion teaches goodness. In the photojournalism materials presented, each religious believer

was able to freely express their religion and religious attributes in an official environment. People were able to collectively build places for worship such as mosques and temples. This proved that the Islamic teaching of Islam *Wasathiyah* was well propagated by the newspaper even though theie readers are predominantly non-Muslims.

Second, according to semiotics, the photos displayed in section A8 of *Guo Ji Ri Bao* newspaper dated September 25, 2020, demonstrated religious symbols which would subsequently evoke the meaning of the symbol. Various examples of signs were discovered in the form of religious attributes, the colors of the clothes worn by the objects (humans) in the photos, the structure of the buildings such as schools and houses of worship.

Third, structurally, the seven photos presented in section A8 of *Guo Ji Ri Bao* newspaper dated September 25, 2020, were related and interconnected. First, the meaning was established in an extremely structured fashion starting with the main photo explaining the main activities, and subsequently supported by other photos that further explained the events and the shapes of the buildings. A neat structure is important in arranging the signs to avoid errors in interpreting the meanings implied in the photos. Second, the meaning established through the sign was the meaning that had been agreed upon by the community, especially in Indonesia. The attributes worn by the Muslims and the monks, as well as the temples and mosques/*mushalla* had been agreed a long time ago. Without a structural understanding in society, the meaning of the sign of the place of worship would not be understood.

Fourth, from the connotation analysis point of view, it was discovered that the journalistic photos in section A8 of *Guo Ji Ri Bao* newspaper dated September 25, 2020, reflected elements of tolerance and moderation in religion. The scenery contained in the main photo was a communication channel that conveyed how beautiful Indonesia was with its multiculturalism; with adherents of various religions who live side by side harmoniously. Likewise, the subsequent photos provided an explanation of the inauguration events of five religious sites; which concluded that both the media and the government were supportive of fostering tolerance among believers.

Religious conflict is an extremely detrimental conflict; therefore the existing tolerance in Indonesia must be appreciated and preserved. The implementation of this tolerance is the obligation of all elements of society and all institutions, including the media. They may utilize various delivery methods; namely hard news coverage, opinions, caricatures, poetry, photojournalism, and others to carry out this mission. The media plays an important role in shaping people's mindsets, and when the element of tolerance was displayed by the media, it must therefore be appreciated.

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