Reframing *Maṣlaḥah* for Interfaith Family Conflict Resolution: The Case of Chinese-Muslim Households in Indonesia

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Abstract: This paper analyzes conflict resolution efforts undertaken by individuals who converted to Islam prior to marriage, specifically in relation to their non-Muslim parents. The study explores the strategies used to address familial conflict and rebuild relationships, with particular attention to how these efforts align with the *maṣlaḥah* approach. Employing a qualitative case study method, the research focuses on ethnic Chinese families in Kampung Pondok, Padang, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with families who experienced similar conflicts, as well as with community leaders. To ensure data validity, source triangulation techniques were applied. The findings reveal that actions such as maintaining communication, demonstrating respect, and participating in non-Muslim parents' religious celebrations represent conflict resolution strategies grounded in practical *maṣlaḥah* considerations. These results suggest that *maṣlaḥah* offers a relevant analytical framework for understanding interfaith conflict resolution within multicultural societies. This study contributes to contemporary discussions in Islamic law by illustrating that *maṣlaḥah* functions as a dynamic and adaptive principle for addressing the challenges of pluralistic contexts. Furthermore, it proposes a culturally rooted yet *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*-aligned model for managing interfaith family conflicts.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution; Interfaith Families; *Maṣlaḥah*; Chinese-Muslim Households.

Introduction

ℛeligious or belief differences are vulnerable issues with the potential to cause conflict (Fauzi & Faidi, 2021). An example of this type of conflict can be seen in the case of a Chinese-Muslim family in Padang. A child who was originally Christian decided to convert to Islam in order to marry a Muslim partner. This decision caused tension with his non-Muslim parents. To maintain family relationships, the child chose to keep in touch with his parents by attending and celebrating their religious holidays with them. The religious dilemma arises from the tension between maintaining good family relationships and committing to the beliefs embraced after converting.

Among contemporary Muslim scholars, the academic debate over the involvement of Muslims in the celebration of non-Muslim religious holidays is ongoing. Some argue that such involvement is prohibited because it resembles the worship practices of other religions *(tasyabbuh)*, while others view it as a display of social tolerance, particularly when interpreted as a gesture of respect rather than theological justification. However, this debate often overlooks the practical aspects within the context of family and close social relations. This study offers a *maṣlaḥah* perspective as an approach to understanding how to resolve this conflict.

The prevalence of interfaith marriages in society is partly due to the government's inconsistent implementation of the Marriage Law (Rajafi et al., 2024). Additionally, diverse legal interpretations of articles in the Compilation of Islamic Laws (abbreviated as KHI in Indonesian) and other laws have led to

legal instability and uncertainty regarding interfaith marriage provisions in Indonesia (Suhasti et al., 2019). Furthermore, interfaith marriages can be registered based on a court decision (Laksmi Dewi et al., 2022). However, interfaith marriages have the potential to give rise to conflict (Setiyanto, 2017). For the Acehnese, mixed marriages are problematic as well (Djawas & Nurzakia, 2019). Turkish citizens in London who entered into interfaith marriages also faced theological and social resistance (Jawad & Elmali-Karakaya, 2020). Harmonious interfaith couples' households can still have psychological impacts on each other (Hamdanah, 2018). Complex problems can arise from interfaith marriages (Glazer-Eytan & García-Arenal, 2020). In Padang City, interfaith marriages occur in Pondok area (so-called Kampung Pondok), where ethnic Chinese people, who are predominantly non-Muslim, are concentrated. Meanwhile, most of the people in Padang City are indigenous Minangkabau who strongly uphold their customary and religious norms (Azwar et al., 2023) as in Aceh area (Harahap et al., 2024).

Several researchers have conducted studies on interfaith marriage. The author categorizes those writings into the following five groups: First are the history and regulations, such as the research of Elmali-Karakaya (2022), Setiyanto (2017), Mutakin (2021), Maloko et al. (2024), Tobroni (2016), Arifin et al. (2024), Setiawan et al. (2024), Tilahun et al. (2025), Suhasti et al. (2019), Tahiri (2024), Hayat and Basharat (2021), Sanjaya (2023), Aditya et al. (2023), Farid et al. (2022), Farkhani et al. (2022), Glazer-Eytan and García-Arenal (2020), Nasir (2022), Rajafi et al. (2024); Setiawan et al. (2024); Tahiri (2024); and Zuhdi and Abdun Nasir (2024). Second are practices, patterns, and advocacy, as seen in the research of Giammetti (2024), Hamim et al. (2022), João & Bezerra (2023), Mansyur et al. (2020), Mashuri & Helmi (2019), Mehta (2020), Menachem Zoufalá et al. (2021), Muchimah et al. (2024), Nasir (2020), Sian (2021), and Takács (2020). Third are studies in the scope of perception, such as those by Asy'ari and Fisa (2022), Basid et al. (2024), Dikuraisyin et al. (2024), Edi Gunawan et al. (2024), Jawad and Elmali-Karakaya (2020), and Widyawati (2024). Fourth, regarding impact, see the research of Rifayanti et al. (2024), Laksmi Dewi et al. (2022), Rasidin et al. (2020), Aditya et al. (2023), Aris Setiyanto et al. (2024), Cheney and Priest (2025), Muqorobin (2021), Peshkova (2024), and Huda (2019). Fifth are efforts to prevent and overcome problems, as examined in the research of Rostovskaya et al. (2022), Asuna and Kusaka (2020), Ansori et al. (2022), Arisman et al. (2023), Aslati et al. (2024), Jamo et al. (2024), and Rosdiana et al. (n.d.).

Unlike the aforementioned studies, this article reveals and analyzes conflict resolution in interfaith families, particularly among people who converted to Islam and their non-Muslim parents within Chinese-Muslim families in Kampung Pondok, Padang City, Indonesia. This study focuses on the strategies they used to resolve conflicts and rebuild relationships with their parents and how the *maṣlaḥah* approach can be used to understand these steps. Additionally, this study attempts to explore the social and religious implications of children celebrating their parents' religious holidays, a topic that has sparked debates in contemporary Islamic law. This study contributes to filling the gap in literature on internal conflicts in interfaith families, which have not been widely studied from a *maṣlaḥah* perspective. This is especially true in cases that touch on relational, emotional, and cultural aspects, not only normative ones. This focus is important because it offers an alternative, inclusive, contextual, and humanistic approach to resolving conflicts based on Islamic values in response to the challenges of religious pluralism in Indonesia.

Literature Review

Maṣlaḥah Concept

Terminologically, *maṣlaḥah* refers to the benefits that Allah desires for His servants, including the maintenance of religion, soul, honor, descendants, common sense, and wealth. Imam Malik was among the early scholars who incorporated *maṣlaḥah mursalah* into legal determinations, particularly in the context of social life and public policy (A. bin I. Al-Qarafi, 1998). Al-Ghazali, however, did not accept *maṣlaḥah mursalah* that was not supported by *nash*, except under very limited conditions, which must be in accordance with *maqāṣid* (Al-Ghazali, 2020). Al-Shatibi emphasized that all Sharia laws aim to achieve *maṣlaḥah*; thus, *maṣlaḥah* is the soul of Islamic law itself (Al-Shatibi, 2020). At-Thufi even opined that, in *muamalah* matters, it occupies a higher position than *naṣ* (Al-Thufi, 1966), though this view is widely

opposed by other scholars. For example, Said Ramadan al-Buti stipulates three conditions for *maṣlaḥah*: it must not contradict *naṣ*; it must be general and real; and it must be in line with *maqāṣid* (Al-Buti, 2000).

According to Al-Qaradhawi, those who study Islamic law will be oriented toward obtaining benefits and avoiding harm caused by *mukallaf*. The goal of legal law is realizing the benefit of the *mukallaf* (Sunaryo & Fahmi, 2024). The purpose of Sharia *(maqāṣid)* is to provide a proper framework for analyzing contemporary issues (Asliati et al., 2024). The study of *maqāṣid* occupies an important position in Islamic law (Ichsan & Dewi, 2020). The core of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* is *maṣlaḥah*. According to Maula (2024), al-Ghazali, and asy-Syatibi, benefit is divided into three categories: *dharuriyat*, *hajiyat*, and *tahsiniyat* (Al-Qaradhawi, 1997). The purpose of *dharuriyat* is sharia, the pillar that upholds various benefits: preserving religion, soul, descendants, property, and common sense (Taufiqurohman & Fauziah, 2023). Scholars of *uṣul fiqh* recognize three types of *maṣlaḥah*: *mu'tabarah, mulghah,* and *mursalah* (Az-Zuhaili, 2011). *Maṣlaḥah mu'tabarah* is a *maṣlaḥah* explicitly recognized by sharia and supported by evidence. Scholars agree that *maṣlaḥah mu'tabarah* is a valid and authentic sharia argument. *Maṣlaḥah mulghah* is a *maṣlaḥah* that is not recognized by sharia and is even rejected and considered invalid by sharia. *Maṣlaḥah mursalah* is *maṣlaḥah* that is not explicitly recognized by sharia, nor rejected as false, but is substantively in line with universal legal rules (Al-Zuhaili, 1990). According to Maliki and Hanafi scholars, *maṣlaḥah mursalah* is a hujjah of syar'iyyah and a legal argument.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is a systematic approach to dealing with incompatibilities between individuals or groups with different goals, values, or needs. According to Thomas and Kilmann (1974), there are five models of conflict management: competing, avoiding, accommodating, collaborating, and compromising. If uncontrolled, conflict can develop into destructive conflict. There are eight conflict management strategies: (1) avoiding and actively fighting, (2) forcing and talking, (3) blaming and empathy, (4) silencing and facilitating open expression, (5) gunny sacking and focusing on the present, (6) manipulating and spontaneity, (7) personal acceptance, and (8) argumentativeness and verbal aggression. Factors influencing conflict management include: (1) assumptions about the conflict; (2) perceptions about the causes of the conflict; (3) expectations about the opposing party's reactions; (4) communication patterns during conflict interactions; (5) power held; (6) experience dealing with conflict situations; (7) resources held; (8) gender; (9) emotional intelligence; (10) personality; (11) social system and organizational culture; (12) procedures governing decision-making in the event of conflict; (13) conflict situations and positions in conflict; (14) experience using one of the conflict management styles; and (15) communication skills (Sudarmanto et al., 2021).

According to Ting-Toomey (1988), a person's approach to conflict is largely determined by the need to maintain self-respect and relationships. In Eastern and collectivist cultures, maintaining family honor is the main motivation for resolving conflicts. Abdullah and Amin argue that conflict management theory is too pragmatic, failing to consider normative values such as religious teachings. Therefore, they assert that it is crucial to incorporate religious values into conflict management approaches to generate more holistic and meaningful solutions (Ajuba, 2017).

Method

This study is field research based on qualitative data. The author attempts to explore the experiences of interfaith families in managing conflict. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with families whose parents or in-laws are of different religions. Validity of the data was tested using source triangulation techniques with relatives, community leaders, and religious leaders. Twenty-three informants were interviewed using the snowball method. This number of informants was considered sufficient because data saturation was reached. Data related to efforts to resolve conflict were analyzed using the *maṣlaḥah* theory. This qualitative method provides a deeper understanding of the various efforts to resolve conflicts and maintain harmony in interfaith families (Muhsin et al., 2021). The research was conducted in 2022 with ethnic Chinese families in Kampung Pondok, an area with a predominantly ethnic Chinese population in Padang City.

Results and Discussion

Equalization of Religious Status in Interfaith Family Marriages

A couple from different religious backgrounds in Padang got married following an agreement between the prospective bride and groom. Initially, they were two people of different religions, but before the wedding, one of them converted to the religion of their prospective partner.

Table 1. Data on Interfaith Households/Families in Padang City Society

No	Initial and Age	Year of Marriage	Occupation	Previous Religion
1.	DR-54	1996	Businessman	Christian
	YL-49		Housewife	Islam
2.	ID-48	1999	Businessman	Islam
	LD-44		Housewife	Christian
3.	ED-59	1989	private employees	Christian
	YT-56		Housewife	Islam
4.	YQ-52	1999	Laborer	Catholic
	RT-45		Housewife	Islam
5.	SN-41	2004	Businessman	Catholic
	RR-37		Housewife	Islam
6.	MN-68	1975	Army	Catholic
	KN-65		Housewife	Islam
7.	AG-51	1999	Businessman	Catholic
	WS-46		Businesswoman	Islam
8.	RG-37	2017	Army	Islam
	EL-33		Housewife	Katolik

Source: Primary Data, 2022

Based on the eight married couples from different religions mentioned above, all of them tried to convert to their partner's religion. One person, KN, a Muslim woman, became a Christian because she followed her husband's religion. The other seven people were Christians who converted to Islam. The group consisted of five men (DR, ED, YQ, SN, and AG) and two women (LD and EL). Apart from KN, these conversions were carried out without parental consent. If the parents had known about the conversions, they would not have approved (YT, Interview, May 3rd, 2022). Furthermore, YT stated, "Reaching an agreement between two families with different religious backgrounds is difficult. This results in both parties prioritizing their own wishes," (YT, interview, May 3rd, 2022).

The problem of different religions among the prospective spouses was resolved by converting one of the partners to the religion of the other, typically Islam. According to Defel, the people of Padang City—who are identical to the Minangkabau community—are very strong in upholding their customs. (Fakhyadi & Defel, 2024; Samsudin). Normatively, this marriage does not violate religious provisions. Likewise, it is not in violation of positive law in Indonesia or KHI. However, differences in beliefs between spouses and their parents are problems that arise from this marriage. Attempting to leave one's religion because of marriage causes disharmony with the family (Asman, interview, May 3rd, 2022).

Interfaith Family Conflict in Padang City

Conflicts between parents and children often arise when a child converts to a different religion prior to marriage, as was the case with LD and ID in 1999. LD, a Christian woman, ran away from home to marry ID, a Muslim man. She made this decision because her mother had disapproved of their relationship from the very beginning (LD, interview, May 5, 2022).

One of the recurring conflicts is the breakdown in communication between children and their parents. More severely, those who convert are often isolated from their families. LD experienced this firsthand. Her wedding with ID was conducted according to Islamic tradition, without the presence of her parents. For over two years, LD had been unable to communicate with them, despite repeated efforts by her and her husband to visit their home (LD, interview, May 5th, 2022). A similar case occurred with SN, a

Catholic man who converted to Islam in order to marry a Muslim woman named RR (SN, interview, May 12th, 2022).

In terms of conflict resolution, most couples took around two years to rebuild their relationships with their parents. However, the process took significantly longer for the DR-YL couple and the ED-YT couple. DR and YL needed approximately three and a half years, while ED and YT took even longer-about four years.

Table 2. Conflict Data and Reconciliation Time

No	Couple	Year of Marriage	Reconciliation	Type of conflict	Restoration Period
1.	DR & YL	1996	2000	Communication	± 3.5 Years
2.	ID & LD	1999	2002	Communication /Ostracized	± 2 Years
3.	ED & YT	1989	1993	Communication	± 3 Years
4.	YQ & RT	1999	2002	Communication	± 2.5 Years
5.	SN & RR	2004	2006	Communication	± 2 Years
6.	AG & WS	1999	2000	Communication	± 1 Years
7.	RG & EL	2017	2018	Communication	± 1 Years

Source: Primary Data, 2022

As shown in the table above, communication problems are a common form of conflict between children and parents of different religions. Children find it very difficult to communicate with their parents, especially their mothers. This is especially true for LD, who had been excluded from the family since the beginning of her marriage. It takes a long time to reestablish harmony between children and their parents. Initially, achieving harmony within families of different religions is very difficult. Some parents do not even want to greet their children, as YQ experienced (YQ, Interview, May 5th, 2022).

Resolving Interfaith Family Conflicts in Padang City

This study found that children of different religions than their parents develop unique and contextual approaches to resolving religious conflicts. These efforts are reconciliatory, empathetic, and rooted in family values, in the following ways:

1. Maintain family relationships actively

Maintaining close ties with parents is a step taken by children who convert to Islam. They try to visit, meet, and communicate with their parents. This is what YQ's family and RT did. YQ said: "Before our marriage, a conflict damaged our relationship with my mother. However, we still visit my mother's house at least once a week, and in the end, our conflict with her subsided. This was also thanks to my father, who tried to help my mother understand (YQ, interview, May 5th, 2022). In line with what YQ said, SN said, "To solve the problems we faced, we tried to be patient, not get carried away by emotions, and continued visiting and communicating with my mother-even though it didn't feel like a family atmosphere. Over time, the problem eventually subsided," (SN, interview, May 12, 2022).

2. Giving congratulations and attending parents' religious holiday celebrations

For the children, religious holidays serve as strategic moments to rebuild ties and persuade their previously disapproving parents to participate in shared celebrations. The child visits their parents and wishes them a Merry Christmas or Happy Chinese New Year. The child's arrival is also accompanied by food, such as sponge cake and jelly. The child does this to maintain harmony and relationships with their parents, especially their mother. SN said, "When there are religious holidays, we always come to our parents' house. We use religious activities as a means to gather and increase family harmony," (SN, interview, May 12th, 2022). In line with SN's statement, YL said, "The attitude of religious tolerance in my family has been quite good until now. This is evident during the celebration of religious holidays," (YL, interview, May 12th, 2022). TT added that although he and his extended family are Catholic, Muslim family members always greet them during Christmas celebrations, (TT, interview, March 6th, 2025).

3. Demonstrating an example and avoiding theological confrontation

Children try to set a good example and avoid discussing religious issues with their parents to prevent conflict. RT stated, "In communicating with parents, we try to always be patient, polite, and respectful. We try not to argue with parents and show them respect and affection. We also try not to discuss religious issues, especially those related to Islam, unless they asked," (RT, interview, May 5th, 2022).

Efforts to resolve family conflicts due to religious differences include maintaining relationships and open communication, as well as adopting increasingly respectful and polite attitudes toward parents. Another effort involves respecting one's parents' beliefs, which includes congratulating them on their religious holidays and attending the celebrations. The findings of this study suggest that religious reconciliation does not always have to be theological; it can also be achieved through social gestures full of appreciation and empathy.

Maṣlaḥah in Resolving Interfaith Family Conflicts

The actions of children who try to maintain good relations with parents of different religions fall under the category of *maṣlaḥah dharuriyyah* with regard to *hifzul irdh* (honor maintenance) and *birrul walidain* (parent devotion). Maintaining relations is an action with high *maṣlaḥah*. Being affectionate, respectful, and polite towards parents and being a good role model is a social and sharia *maṣlaḥah* because it demonstrates noble Islamic morals. Similarly, children who try to be patient and avoid theological confrontation are trying to prevent conflict from escalating.

Scholars have different opinions on whether it is permissible to offer congratulations in celebration of religious holidays. According to Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, as quoted by Ibn Qudamah, congratulating others on non-Muslim religious holidays is not permitted (Qudamah, 2011). Consistent with this view, Ibn Taimiyah believes that this is not permitted because it can lead to the acceptance of teachings that contradict Islam (Taimiyah, 2010). Ibn al-Qayyim expresses a similar opinion (Al-Jauziyah, 1968). Meanwhile, Al-Mawardi states that Muslims should not participate in other greetings and celebrations (Al-Mawardi, 2020). Similarly, Al-Qurthubi states that Muslims should avoid celebrating non-Muslim holidays (Al-Qurthubi, 2004).

Meanwhile, Yusuf al-Qaradawi does not prohibit Muslims from wishing non-Muslims a happy holiday that does not contain symbols of their religion contrary to Islamic teachings or elements recognizing their religion. Rather, it is just an ordinary congratulatory greeting. (Al-Qaradawi, 2017). The ability to congratulate non-Muslims on their religious holidays is based on Chapter Al-Mumlahanah, Verses 8–9. According to Imam Nawawi, congratulating parents of different beliefs on religious holidays with the aim of maintaining friendship is not an act of *shirk* because the intention is to maintain good relations with family (Nawawi, 2020). This aligns with the views of Ibn Taymiyyah and Imam Al-Ghazali, who emphasize that congratulations are permissible as long as they do not endorse their beliefs.

Congratulating someone as a way of maintaining family ties-without participating in non-Muslim religious rituals-is in line with a Hadith narrated by Asma bint Abu Bakr. She said, "O Messenger of Allah, my mother came to me, and she is still a non-Muslim, but she loves me, contacts me often, and gives me gifts. Should I maintain relations with her?" The Prophet replied, "Yes, maintain good relations with your mother," (Al-Bukhari, 2015).

Greetings to non-Muslim parents on religious holidays can be a strategic effort to reduce conflict, improve family relationships, and reduce tension. In this context, *maṣlaḥah* can be accepted to create social peace and maintain harmonious family relationships. Without making an effort to communicate with parents during religious holidays, it will be difficult to establish good relations with them. According to Al-Ghazali, any effort to maintain public and personal welfare that does not conflict with the basic principles of Sharia is acceptable (Al-Ghazali, 2020). Syathibi states that *maṣlaḥah* refers not only to individual goodness but also to harmony between members of society (Al-Syatibi, 2020). Giving congratulations to parents of different religions on religious holidays with the intention of maintaining good relations and respecting their feelings is considered an act that brings *maṣlaḥah*. This action can also prevent family divisions. Ibn Taimiyah states that Islam teaches tolerance when interacting with non-Muslims, as long as the basic principles of Islamic belief are not sacrificed (Taimiyah, 2010).

Efforts to reduce inter-religious conflict have great benefits because they reduce divisions. According to Abdullah Idi, Indonesia's pluralistic society has caused it to become a Southeast Asian country that often experiences ethnic and religious conflicts. Many conflicts in different countries are also linked to religious issues, though not all of them are directly related. Examples include the conflict between Rohingya Muslims and the Burmese ethnic group in Myanmar, the Moro Muslim conflict in the Philippines, and the Pattani Muslim conflict with the Thai government (Idi, 2018). According to Jamo et al. (2024), conflict is an opportunity, not a failure (Northern Nigeria). Ethiopian society celebrates religious holidays together to avoid inter-religious conflict (Tilahun et al., 2025).

Based on the three types of *maṣlaḥah* grouped by experts in *uṣul fiqh*, establishing a good relationship with and being kind to non-Muslim parents is included in the category of *maṣlaḥah mu'tabarah*. This aligns with God's command in Chapter Luqman, Verse 15: "And if they force you to associate Me with something of which you have no knowledge, then do not follow them. Associate with them in the world in a good way, and follow the path of those who turn to Me." Maintaining a good relationship with parents by being polite and respectful can help achieve the goal of sharia, which is to maintain religion *(hifzu ad-din)* by building harmony and tolerance with adherents of other religions. Yusuf al-Qaradawi emphasizes the importance of treating non-Muslims who do not commit injustice against Muslims with respect, especially towards parents. In the *maqāṣid* framework, balance is a very important principle. Even though children maintain a good relationship and shows empathy toward parents of different religions, they do not violate Islamic beliefs by participating in the rituals of other religions. Thus, these actions are social and ethical, not theological.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that interfaith family conflicts, such as a child converting from Christianity to Islam within a Chinese family in Padang, Indonesia, can be constructively approached and resolved through a values-based strategy. In this case, children who converted did not take a confrontational approach; instead, they prioritized good relations, respect, and interfaith tolerance as a means of family reconciliation. Through open communication, participation in non-Muslim parents' religious celebrations, and demonstrating respect and responsibility as children, the conflict gradually subsided without compromising the religious identities of those involved. From a *maṣlaḥah* perspective, the children' actions reflect *tahqiq al-masalih* (realization of benefit) and *dar' al-mafasid* (prevention of harm) by balancing religious obligations and social ethics within the family. This approach is relevant not only in Indonesia's pluralistic society but also contributes to developing an inclusive, humanist model of interfaith conflict resolution based on Islamic values. Therefore, the *maṣlaḥah* approach to conflict resolution can serve as an alternative model for maintaining family harmony amidst diverse beliefs.

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Conflict of Interest

This article has no conflicts of interest.

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