


Volume 16, No. 1  2019

JOURNAL OF

Islam in Asia

A Refereed International Biannual Arabic – English Journal

Special Issue: Islam in the China Seas

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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JOURNAL OF *Islam in Asia*

Volume 16, No. 1. 2019

ISSN: 1823-0970 E-ISSN: 2289-8077



Journal of Islam in Asia

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Wei Weng, Hew: *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia* (2018). NIAS Press. Copenhagen. xxvi + 305 pp. [NIAS Monographs 140]. ISBN 978-87-7694-211-3. Price £ 22.50 (Paperback).

Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia poses a welcoming contribution to the intersection of Chinese and Muslim identity in Indonesia. Both identity expressions were restricted during the New Order regime and have experienced a revival since its end in 1998. Much has been written on the re-discovery of Chineseness, even more so on the different forms of Islamic revival in Indonesia. However, as the author rightly identified, the (inter)- connection between the two has been neglected. Wei Weng shows in his book that Chinese and Muslim identity in Indonesia have more in common than it might appear at first sight. Both, Muslim and Chinese identities, had been suppressed. Expressions of Islam, as well as expressions of Chineseness, were restricted. In addition, both identities are multiple and fluid. There is no single Chinese or Islamic identity in Indonesia. The official national motto of Indonesia *Bhinneka Tunggal Eka* (Unity in Diversity) is present everywhere. Looking further into the similarities of Chinese and Muslim identities, Wei Weng finds that Chineseness and Islamicness are probably the two most commodified and visible identities in Indonesia's markets today. Here, Rudnytsky's Market Islam comes to mind, and how Muslim religious ethics are designed to merge with capitalism and consumer culture. Furthermore, both identities carry a transnational dimension, connected to the Chinese diaspora and the Muslim ummah. Wei Weng uses 'Islamic ummah', which I find problematic because the ummah is made up of Muslims, meaning people. However, 'Islamic' implies the notion of ideology, which is problematic when referring to a community as diverse as the Muslim ummah. To unite the two identities, the author argues that

"Chinese Muslims have a few unique qualities that make their identities deserve close examination (...) First, Chinese Muslims are not a locally bounded ethno-religious group (...). Second, they are mostly converts. Third, they are a religious minority among Chinese Indonesians. Last, but not least, Chinese Muslims are in some ways,

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constituting a ‘contact zone’ (...), where Chinese cultures, Indonesian local customs and Islamic practices interact and mix.” (p. 11)

What is most interesting to me from the author’s argument are two points: first, most of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are converts and therefore a religious minority in a minority and second, Chinese Muslims constitute what Wei Weng refers to as a ‘contact zone’. Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are therefore a double minority. They constitute a minority within Chinese Indonesians, as well as a minority within Muslim Indonesians. According to statistics, only an estimated 5.41 percent of all Chinese Indonesians adheres to the majority religion of Islam. However, the author sees this figure as over-estimated (p. 15). Putting numbers aside, the question arises why the author focused on such a tiny minority. As it is, not all Indonesians with Chinese descent reclaimed their their Chineseness after the fall of Suharto’s authoritarian regime. Some preferred to erase the marks of difference to the local non-Chinese majority Muslim (and non-Muslim) population. One answer Wei Weng gives is the issue about cultural consumption. And here it becomes clear that the author focused especially on Chinese Indonesian Muslims who reclaimed their Chineseness or who converted to Islam after the *Orde Baru*. Especially in Chapter 4, Wei Weng illustrates how Chinese Muslimness is performed, communicated and consumed. Here, the author focuses on several Chinese Indonesian Muslim preachers and how they express their Muslim as well as Chinese identity.

Chapter 3 is another essential contribution to the study that I would like to highlight further. In the light of discussions about Islam Nusantara and localized forms of Islam (not only in Indonesia but also in Europe), Wei Weng devoted a whole chapter to the discussion on Chinese-style mosques. As explained by the author, mosques, as it is, are expressions of collective identity and around ten Chinese-style mosques have been built across Indonesia after the collapse of Suharto’s authoritarian regime. Chinese style mosques, the author argues, show that there can be a Chinese way of being Muslim and that converting to Islam does not mean giving up Chinese cultural tradition (p. 77). However, local expressions of Islamic architecture are not new to the archipelago. Similar negotiations can be found in the history of Islam in Indonesia and especially in Java. Traditional Javanese style mosques can still be found across the island. The call for a unique architectural expression of mosques is also heavily debated in Europe. The question that arises is: What type of Chineseness do these Chinese style mosques present? Is there an Indonesian/ Nusantara or even Southeast Asian way of being

Chinese? The author explains that the architecture of these mosques follows those found in Mainland China, yet reconfigured to Indonesia's local context (p. 77). Therefore, he claims, it is not a form of long-distance nationalism (p. 96).

In chapter 3, Wei Weng puts a special focus on the Cheng Hoo mosques in Surabaya, East Java and Palembang, South Sumatra. Interestingly, the architecture and style of the Cheng Hoo mosque in Surabaya is replicated in other cities. The replication poses an interesting momentum because it serves to strengthen translocal imagination of Chinese Muslim cultural identity in Indonesia (p. 78). Furthermore, the Cheng Hoo mosques serve not only as sacred but also as social spaces. According to the author, the Cheng Hoo mosques are open to Muslims and non-Muslims, independently of their ethnic identity. Whether this is done for *dakwah* purposes (in the case of non-Muslim Chinese) is unclear. However, rather than becoming exclusive spaces, the Chinese style mosques in Indonesia form an expression of the claim to be connected to the 'diasporic Chinese', the Muslim *ummah* and Indonesian society (p. 80). Building Chinese style mosques is also a way to decrease negative perceptions or even hostility non-Chinese Indonesians have about Chinese Indonesians. It is hoped, so one of the author's informants, that "by maintaining our cultural identity along with Islamic piety" a better image of Chinese Indonesians is promoted (p. 85). Extremely interesting in this regard is that, according to the author, 70 percent of the total construction fee of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo mosque came from non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians, because they hope to be protected by the Chinese Muslim Organization from possible anti-Chinese riots (p. 97). In addition, Chinese style mosques also serve as a *dakwah* tool to attract non-Muslim Chinese to Islam.

In conclusion, the book is an important and refreshing contribution to research about Islam in Indonesia. It follows a multi-disciplinary approach, reflecting the training of the author. His MA was in history and sociology, while he did his PhD in political science and anthropology. A plus point to this study is the author's personal positioning to his field as a quasi insider because of his own Chineseness but as a quasi outsider because of being Malaysian and not being Muslim (p. 33). However, sometimes there seems to be a subtle tone of presumptuousness between the lines when for example, the author describes some of his Chinese Muslim informants as Muslims who reflect their Muslimness on the outside when they go to pray Friday prayer in the mosque. However, when at home, he claims, they eat pork

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and drink alcohol. The point of these statements in the book remains a bit unclear.

As the book draws on data collected in 2008/ 2009, it would have been interesting to include an update of current developments in the subject matter in the last decade. Reading this book in Malaysia, I will probably also refer to Wei Weng's first book about Chinese Muslims in Malaysia (*Identiti Cina Muslim di Malaysia: Persempdanan Perundingan & Kacukan Budaya*, 2014, UKM Press) to get an idea about the similarities or differences of identity negotiations of Chinese Muslims in the two neighboring countries.

The book is illustrated with full color pictures of Chinese Muslim's religious activities and pictures of Chinese mosques around Indonesia, which help the reader to obtain a better impression of what the author describes in the text. Those readers who are fond of the old fashioned fine hardcover books, NIAS Press also published a hardcover version of *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim*.

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