

Hew Wai Weng. *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia*. Copenhagen: NAIS (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies) Press, 2018. 305 pp.

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The title of Hew Wai Weng's ethnographic study, *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim*, captures immediately a crucial feature of the Indonesian Chinese Muslim experience. Dispersed throughout the archipelago, Chinese Muslims have responded to localized and historical trends in highly variable ways, so that ways of being Muslim are both diverse and individual. Clearly not a cohesive group, their treatment as an analytical category makes good sense for this study. Even so, who belongs in this category is still open to interpretation. Choosing to highlight diversity, Hew includes in his project not only individuals who self-identify as practicing Chinese Muslims, but also Chinese married to non-Chinese Muslims who no longer consider themselves Chinese, as well as Chinese converts who have become Muslim for practical reasons but are not religious in practice. Even within this wider framework, and despite the increased visibility and activism of Muslim Chinese, their numbers remain relatively small, estimated at only .5 to 1 percent of the Chinese Indonesian population (somewhere between thirty and fifty thousand individuals).

This volume explores the multiple sites where Chinese Muslim activities contest the long-standing belief that "Chineseness" and Islam are mutually incompatible—from historic legends to Chinese-style mosques to popular Chinese Muslim preachers to Islamic celebrations of Chinese New Year to Chinese participation in Islamic organizations. While Chinese conversion to Islam during the New Order period was conceived and encouraged as a move toward assimilation, the current approach incorporates Chinese symbols into Chinese Muslim practices that aim to bridge the Indonesian and Chinese Muslim communities. This has only become possible in the post-1998 political order, where expressions of cultural, religious, and political diversity have allowed new expressions of Chinese and Islamic identities that were previously curtailed or forbidden.

The primary ethnographic research for this project was conducted over thirteen months in 2008–09 that included seven months in Jakarta and five months in Surabaya. Close connections with three major Chinese Muslim organizations gave the author access to a wide range of Chinese Muslim events. Hew combines observations of these events with data from ninety-five recorded, semi-structured interviews of individuals from a range of age, gender, generational, and social-class backgrounds, as well as data from a variety of primary and secondary sources. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu, Stuart Hall, John Storey, Gayatri Spivak, and others, he portrays Chinese and Islamic identities as fluid, invented, multiple, flexible, and strategic, even as they are constrained by larger institutional forces. The contestations and negotiation of different types of identity takes place within a range of historical, social, and political settings detailed in the book's main chapters. Hew

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also deploys the concepts of hybridity (both intentional and organic) and vernacular cosmopolitanism as he describes Chinese Muslims' efforts to combine aspects of Chinese and Islamic culture in the ongoing production of both official discourse and daily activities.

Chinese Muslims are not new to Indonesia, even though most current Chinese Muslims are first-generation converts. Chapter two briefly summarizes the history of Muslim Chinese interactions in the Indonesian context, beginning with the celebrated visits to Java of the fifteenth-century Chinese Muslim Admiral Cheng Ho, along with references to the presence of other Chinese Muslims of this time. Hew is somewhat skeptical of the facticity of local texts that claim Chinese origins for some early Muslim saints in Java or assert that Chinese were instrumental in spreading Islam in Java, but he argues that what is more important is the historical memory-making that aims to establish a place for Chinese Muslims in Indonesian history. In his subsequent discussion of the construction of Chinese-style Cheng Ho mosques throughout Indonesia and the claims of Chinese contributions to Javanese Islam by some Chinese Muslim preachers, he argues that these represent strategic assertions that Chineseness and Islam are not incompatible.

During the New Order period, Chinese Muslim leaders and the Indonesian government encouraged Chinese conversion to Islam as a means of assimilating Chinese into Indonesian society. With the downfall of Suharto in 1998, a number of factors encouraged a change in this approach. The fact that anti-Chinese riots did not spare Chinese Muslims showed the emptiness of assimilation promises, while new openness to public expressions of Chinese culture and increasing cultural and business connections with China set the framework for a different style of Chinese Islam, capable of embracing Chinese identity while remaining true to religious principles. Construction of the Cheng Hoo mosque in Surabaya, with a temple-like design that echoes the Niu Jie mosque in Beijing, was supported for somewhat different reasons by Chinese businessmen and intellectuals, who viewed this as a kind of ethnic empowerment, and also by religious teachers, who embraced this as an effective means of religious outreach to local Chinese. Blending Chinese with Islamic and local motifs, the Cheng Hoo mosque has welcomed a broad cross section of Chinese and non-Chinese Muslim worshippers and preachers, while also making space for non-Muslim Chinese activities, creating what Hew describes as a cosmopolitan space capable of nurturing more inclusive forms of Chineseness and Islam.

Chapter four profiles five popular Chinese preachers who are part of a broader trend of Muslim celebrity preachers and whose audiences include both Chinese converts and non-Chinese Muslim Indonesians. Hew's in-depth investigation of the backgrounds and preaching styles of these five individuals reveals a wide diversity in their Islamic training, in their visual styles, and in their religious messages. Some of these preachers deliberately use their Chinese appearance as a marketing tool, even though they do not speak Chinese or appear to follow Chinese culture in their private lives. Highlighting their Chinese identity sets them apart from other local preachers, demonstrating to Chinese converts that becoming Muslim does not mean losing their Chinese identity, while also attracting the curiosity and admiration shown toward recent converts by Indonesian Muslims who were born into their faith. Yet even as

these Chinese preachers appear to represent a culturally diverse form of Islam, Hew worries that they reinforce ethnic stereotypes, and that by espousing generally socially and religiously conservative viewpoints, they are missing an opportunity to diversify and enrich religious discourse.

The last three chapters focus on the political and social activities of four major Chinese Muslim organizations; on the multiple Chinese Muslim approaches to celebrating Chinese New Year; and on variations in Chinese Muslim conversion narratives and experiences. The diverse Chinese ways of being Muslim resounds throughout these chapters: in the detailed accounts of different leaders and organizational membership; in views of whether Muslims can participate in Chinese New Year celebrations and the content of acceptable rituals; and in the reasons for conversion, which range from intermarriage (most typical) to business advantages to personal religious quests, as well as combinations of the above. One of the more interesting divides among Chinese Muslims noted by Hew appears to be generational. Older Chinese are more likely to express their ethnic identity through visible Chineseness in association membership and activities, while younger-generation Chinese Muslims, raised within assimilationist settings, lack the same nostalgia for Chinese identification and are more likely to involve themselves in nonethnic social advocacy that promotes human rights and interethnic solidarity.

This well-researched and -written study provides a wealth of informative detail on Chinese Muslim experiences in post-reform Indonesia. Hew skillfully draws on other scholarly research on Indonesia and Islam, as well as key critical theories, to interpret the significance of his findings. Although the complexities of different Islamic groups and factions could use better explanation in the early chapters, my questions jotted in the margins were eventually answered in later chapters. One of Hew's key points is that the visibility of Chinese symbols in the retellings of Indonesian history, the attendance of large numbers of non-Chinese Muslims in services at Chinese-style mosques, and the public commercial displays for Chinese New Year point to a new inclusive definition of "Chineseness" as a shared heritage of all Indonesians. I regretfully find this statement more aspirational than substantive. These new signs of Chinese visibility are based primarily on observation rather than investigation of how Chinese public symbols are actually received and understood by non-Chinese Indonesians. As Hew knows from personal experience, the high visibility of Chinese culture in Malaysia has not prevented the ongoing Malay-centric construction of Malaysian national culture and history. A comparative look at these two situations might provide a good beginning for Hew's next project.

