

BOOK REVIEW

Hew Wai Weng. *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia*. Copenhagen: Nias Press, 2018.

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The title of the book, *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia* itself self-explains its nature and contents. It is a continuity of the *Identiti Cina Muslim di Malaysia: Persempadanan Perundingan dan Kacukan Budaya* written by the same author, which focuses on the identity struggle and crisis of the Chinese Muslim community in Malaysia. Unlike the previous publication, this book has shifted from a mere focus on cultural and identity of Chinese Muslim community into a more comprehensive examination of all the social construction of Chinese Muslims from different sociological, economic, political and cultural dimensions, with a special focus on Chinese Muslim community(ies) in Indonesia.

As the author of the book, Hew Wai Weng from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia, asserts in its foreword that despite the existence of significant literatures dealing with the issue of Chinese Muslims' historical existence in Indonesia, especially in Java from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and their role in Islamic propagation, they however do not really address the issue of cultural and politics of identity as presented in his book. The author also acknowledges that there are also many studies on the topic focusing specifically on the cultural policy of the Suharto regime and the assimilation of Chinese Muslims. On the other hand, there have also been many studies conducted on the Chinese Muslim conversion experience and the difficulties they faced after embracing Islam. Without denying the existing studies, research works and discussions on the issue of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, the author nevertheless argues that most of the works were focusing on the elites of Chinese Muslims community(ies) in Indonesia, and neglecting the voices of ordinary Chinese Muslims. According to Wai Weng, the works

tend to see Chinese Muslims as a rather stable ethno-religious group, thus failing to explore the motivations, contestations and contradictions that lie behind the emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities. This is where the book fills the gap.

However, a question could be raised: how to explore those aspects in Indonesian Chinese Muslims' life? Hence, by looking into the chapters of this book, one could notice that the book has managed to answer such a question by capturing and explaining the distinction between public manifestation and private enactment, the disjuncture between the symbolic unity and the everyday diversity of Chinese Muslim identities unlike the previous existing works in the topic. Furthermore, the aspects of identity formation such as media representation, market consumption, cultural practices, religious rituals and everyday living strategies were treated extensively in this book with a more nuanced understanding and sophisticated analysis. In addition to all these distinctive features, the author has also managed to examine in his book, how and under what conditions various market forces, local politics, transnational flows, religious movements along with social experience and personal choice have shaped the negotiation of Chinese Muslims' identities. Hence, this book is one of the timely literature works which has successfully dealt with all those pertinent sociological issues about Indonesian Chinese Muslim community through empirical research in answering all important questions surrounding them from different spectrums.

The eight chapters that make up this book are divided into six major categories: (1) the historical traces of Chinese Muslim community in Indonesia from different narrations and perspective; (2) the inclusivity Chineseness embraced by Chinese Muslims in Indonesia by focusing on the Chinese-style mosques all over Indonesia; (3) the expression of Chineseness through marketing of Islam from author's observation on the hybrid performance of Chinese Muslim preachers in Indonesia; (4) the strategic solidarity of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia through the internal dynamics and diverse participation of Chinese Muslims in social and political domains; (5) the cultural contestations, and debates about the effect of culture to the life of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia through the debates on Chinese New Year Celebrations amongst the members of the community; and finally (6) the study on the issue of multiple identifications and flexible piety of Chinese Muslims with a special focus on the issue of conversion to Islam.

What makes the empirical studies in this book interesting is that its case studies are taken from the author's observation-participatory method throughout engagement with Chinese Muslims community members from

all levels and walks of life. This method has helped the book to achieve its objectives through the case studies presented in the chapters which directly deal with issues concerning the community. Nevertheless, this book, through its chapters, contains at least one hypothesis—which is the impact of culture and identity to the practice of Islam amongst the Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, and their responses to different political regimes policies, economic needs and socio-ethnic framework of Indonesia. What also makes this book interesting is the emphasis on certain chapters on the issue of identity and culture beyond the conventional way of looking into the issue of Chinese Muslim community living in a majority Muslims country, which mainly focuses on the issue of historical roots of Chinese Muslims or the issues of conversions.

The only obvious thing missing in this book is the absence of a special chapter to deal with the observation, evaluations and critiques on Chinese Muslims by the non-Muslim Chinese, and non-Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. The insights from their non-Muslim and also the non-Chinese compatriots would have open another way to help the author to build his own conclusions in understanding certain positions of the Chinese Muslim community, hence turning the book into a more rigorous critical and analytical—not to mention, a more nuanced and balanced—academic piece. Moreover, less discussion or analysis could be found in the chapters on the prediction and foresight on how the Chinese Muslim cosmopolitan and cultural identity in Indonesia might potentially progress or digress in the coming decade. This is important to shed a perspective to certain parties who are cynical, or curious about the future and prospects of the ability of such outlook to survive in Indonesia, especially in facing the Arabo-Islamic uprising, and the Nusantara-version of Islam as propagated by certain influential Muslim communities in Indonesia.

In spite of that, this series is an opportune literature of a well-researched issue which provides an introduction to beginners to understand the survival of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia amid the majority (non-Chinese) Muslim country. It also provides answers to some doubt in the mind of those who are not familiar with the Chinese Muslims' cosmopolitan and cultural identities, or those who are sceptical of them.

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