Unique insights into the cultural politics of Muslim and Chinese identity in Southeast Asia today.

Many recent works on Muslim societies have pointed to a growing ‘de-culturalization’ and ‘purification’ of Islamic practices. Instead, by exploring themes such as architectural designs, preaching activities, political engagement and cultural celebrations, this book describes and analyses the formation and negotiation of Chinese Muslim cultural identities in Indonesia today – a rapidly evolving environment where there are multiple ways of being or not being Chinese and Muslim.

By engaging with the notions of ‘inclusive Chineseness’ and ‘cosmopolitan Islam’, this book gives insights not only into the cultural politics of Muslim and Chinese identities in Indonesia today but also into the possibilities and limitations of ethnic and religious cosmopolitanism in many other contemporary societies.

For much of modern Indonesian history, the social categories of Muslim and Chinese were seen as incompatible; to convert to Islam was to lose one’s Chineseness. This engagingly written book provides a powerful ethnographic account of just why this is changing, and of what it means to be both Chinese and Muslim in Indonesia. This fascinating study also offers insight into processes even more general in our world: how we moderns balance multiple self-identities in an age of plurality and unprecedented mobility. – Robert W. Hefner, Boston University

Hew’s *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim* blows apart the usual identifications between ethnicity and religion in Indonesia. This pathbreaking book paints an intriguing portrait of how Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are charting a form of Islamic piety that is both assertive and inclusive. A first. – Engseng Ho, Duke University

In this adroit analysis of Chinese ways of being Muslim in Indonesia – from celebrity preachers and hybrid mosques to Chinese holidays and conversion controversies – Hew Wai Weng sheds important light on the religious and political entanglements between Islam, ethnicity, and nation. In doing so, this book admirably fills a lamentable lacuna of scholarship on Chinese Muslims in post-authoritarian Indonesia. – James B. Hoesterey, Emory University

*About the author:* Hew Wai Weng is a Fellow at the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (IKMAS, UKM), working on Chinese Muslim identities, Hui migration patterns, and urban middle-class Muslim aspirations in Malaysia and Indonesia.
Chinese Ways of Being Muslim
NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

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Chinese Ways of Being Muslim

Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia

Hew Wai Weng
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During a Ramadan night in 2008, while both Chinese and non-Chinese Muslims were performing their evening prayers at the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, across the mosque compound in a corridor at the office of the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association, a group of mostly Chinese non-Muslims were practising qigong, a Chinese breathing exercise. Bambang Sujanto, a key person behind the establishment of the mosque explained that the Chinese-style mosque is necessary to declare that ‘there can be a Chinese way of being Muslim’. Yet, at the same mosque, I also encountered a Chinese Muslim who insisted that the Chinese New Year celebration is haram (prohibited according to Islamic principles). Thus, how do we make sense of these diverse understandings and practices of being Muslim and being Chinese in Indonesia today?

Based on extensive fieldwork during 2008–2009 and several subsequent visits, this book describes and analyses the emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities in post-New Order Indonesia. It has three key features, being: 1. interdisciplinary – it engages with debates on ethnicity and religiosity in various academic disciplines, especially political science and anthropology; 2. intersectional – it brings together studies on Muslim and Chinese identities exploring the intersection between these; and 3. interconnected – it considers both transnational flows and local dynamics in the formation of Chinese Muslim cultural identities.

This book investigates how and under what conditions Chinese Muslims construct and negotiate their ethnicity and religiosity, both individually and collectively, in their public and everyday lives. Since the year 2000, Chinese Muslim cultures in Indonesia have been objectified in symbols such as Chinese-style mosques, embodied in organisations like the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (PITI), represented in popular media through Chinese

Preface
preachers and performed in rituals like the celebration of Chinese New Year. Chinese Muslim leaders also promote their unique identities through the rearticulation of their histories and the cultivation of ties to Muslims in China.

There is a large body of literature on both Islam and Chineseness in contemporary Indonesia. Yet, there has only been scattered research in exploring the intersections between these two sets of identities. By examining Chinese Muslim identities, this book helps us to better understand the cultural politics of Islamic religiosity and Chineseness in Indonesia today, as well as giving us insights into the possibilities and limitations of ethnic and religious cosmopolitanism in contemporary societies. The rise of Chinese Muslim cultures reflects an overall acceptance of Chinese culture in Indonesian society, and the tolerance of Islam towards diverse cultural expressions. Although encompassed by certain ethnic stereotypes and religious conservatism, Chinese Muslim cultures embrace a limited kind of inclusive Chineseness and cosmopolitan Islam, in which the assertion of Chinese identity and Islamic religiosity does not necessarily imply racial segregation and religious exclusion, but can act against them. The Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque is a prime example of religious inclusivity – it is a socio-religious place where both Chinese and non-Chinese, Muslims and non-Muslims can mix and interact with each other. Moreover, Chinese Muslim cultures are able to reconcile the prevailing stereotype of an alleged incompatibility between Islam and Chineseness.

However, the amalgamation of Islam and Chinese culture does not necessarily pluralise Islamic discourses. For instance, many Chinese Muslim preachers creatively mix Islamic teachings and Chinese cultural symbols to promote the universality of Islam, yet they do not contribute to a more critical understanding of Islam. Instead of challenging some widely held conservative viewpoints, many preachers choose to conform to them to avoid controversy. Last but not least, the public manifestation of Chinese Muslim cultural identities does not reflect all aspects of the multi-layered and multifaceted characteristics of ordinary Chinese Muslims.
Therefore, I use the notion of flexible piety to examine fluid Islamic religiosity, and the concept of multiple identifications to reveal the shifting ethnicity among Chinese Muslim converts according to their living contexts. In short, there is not ‘a Chinese way of being Muslim’ but multiple ways of being or not being Chinese and Muslim in Indonesia.

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Many people have assisted me in various ways in the completion of this book, and I would like to express my gratitude here. First and foremost, my deepest thanks are to my academic mentors, Greg Fealy and Sumit Mandal, for their time, invaluable advice and generous engagement. Sumit Mandal guided my previous research on Chinese Muslims in Malaysia and encouraged me to continue this research in Indonesia. Greg Fealy read the entire manuscript and shared with me his deep knowledge and incisive critiques. I am also grateful to Amrih Widodo, Anthony Reid, Edward Aspinall, Robert Hefner and anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions, which have helped to improve this book. I thank Gerald Jackson and Rezza Maulana for their help in editing this manuscript and the team at NIAS Press for seeing it through to this finished book.

This book would not have been possible without the kind help of my informants, who gave generously of their time, shared their experiences, explained their views and challenged my perceptions. There are too many people to name here, but I particularly want to thank Bambang Sujanto, Budi Setyagraha, Edwin Suryalaksana, Hadi Bun, Syarif Tanudjaja and Willy Pangestu. They have been very helpful, not only cordially connecting me to many other Chinese Muslims, but also warmly welcoming me to participate in various activities of the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (PITI, Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia), the Karim Oei Foundation (Yayasan Karim Oei) and the Chinese Muslim and Families (MUSTIKA, Muslim Tionghoa dan Keluarga). Moreover, I am grateful to the staff in PITI Jakarta and Surabaya, including Hidayah, Riri, Ayu and Alip for their
assistance. Special thanks are also extended to the leaders of various Chinese and Muslim organisations who have shared with me their insights and opinions.

Without intellectual, technical and financial support from several academic institutions, I would not have been able to conduct my research fieldwork and to finish this book. I am indebted to the Australian National University for awarding me the Tuition Fee and Graduate School Scholarships, and to the Australian Government for granting me the Australian DEST Endeavour Malaysia Awards, both covering my tuition fee and stipends for my PhD studies. Many academics, administrators and students in the Department of Political and Social Change and other parts of the university have been helpful during my four-year studies in the Australian National University.

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book are slightly more extensive ones and some information has been updated.

Last but not least, it would have been difficult for me to survive the whole process of writing this book without the support and encouragement of my friends and family members back home in Malaysia. I give my deepest thanks to my parents and brothers for their understanding and support. To all my good friends in Australia, Germany, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Netherlands: your kindness and support has given me strength to finish this book.
Glossary and Abbreviations

*abangan*  nominal or less observant Muslims
*adat*  customary practice or laws
*agama*  religion
*aqidah*  articles of faith, religious belief, theology
Ahmadiyah  controversial minority Muslim sect, deemed ‘deviant’ by some Muslims and partially banned in Indonesia since 2008
AKKBB  Aliansi Kebangsaan untuk Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan (National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Faith), a coalition that promotes religious freedom and sympathises with Ahmadiyah
Al-Arqam  a Islamic religious movement, originating in Malaysia
*angpao*  red envelope with money, a present during Chinese New Year
*asimilasi*  assimilation
*aurat*  the parts of the body that should be covered in public according to Islamic principles
*azan*  call to prayer
*bahasa*  language
*bahasa gaul*  social talk, slang used by Indonesian youth
*bedug*  a drum for calling to prayer
Bhinneka  Unity in Diversity, the official national motto of Indonesia
*barongsai*  Chinese lion dance
*bid’ah*  ‘improper’ innovations
CHINESE WAYS OF BEING MUSLIM

*bupati*  
district head

*budaya*  
culture

*caleg*  
calon legislatif (legislative candidates)

Ceng Beng  
Grave-sweeping day, a festival for ethnic Chinese paying respect to their ancestors by visiting the cemetery

*Cina*  
official term for ethnic Chinese in New Order Indonesia, considered insulting by many Chinese Indonesians

*dai*  
preacher, agent of the call to faith

*dakwah*  
invitation to faith, religious preaching, Islamic outreach

*doa*  
recital of prayers

DPD  
Dewan Perwakilan Daerah (Council of Regional Representatives)

DPR  
Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (People’s Representative Council, the national parliament)

DPRD  
Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (Regional People’s Representative Council)

*Dulur Tuwa*  
elder sibling; also title of a song

ESQ  
Emotional-Spiritual Quotient

*fatwa*  
religious opinion given by Islamic scholar or authority

*fengshui*  
Chinese geomantic omen

*fiqh*  
Islamic jurisprudence

FKUB  
Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (Inter-religious Harmony Forum)

FPI  
Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders’ Front)

FORGAPP  
Forum Gerakan Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi (Forum for the Anti Pornography and Porno-action Movement)
## Glossary and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gamelan</td>
<td>Javanese musical ensemble employing mainly gong-chimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GANDI</td>
<td>Gerakan Perjuagan Anti Diskriminasi Indonesia (Indonesian Anti-Discrimination Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gereja</td>
<td>church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerinda</td>
<td>Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Great Indonesia Movement Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOLKAR</td>
<td>Golongan Karya, the state political party during the New Order and one of the major post-New Order parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadith</td>
<td>account of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad transmitted through a chain of narrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haji</td>
<td>Muslim title for somebody who has completed the hajj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hajj</td>
<td>annual pilgrimage to Mecca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hokkien</td>
<td>Chinese dialect originating in the Fujian province in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>halal</td>
<td>lawful or ‘permitted’ according to Islamic principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>halal-bihalal</td>
<td>gathering for mutual forgiveness to celebrate Idul Fitri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haram</td>
<td>unlawful or ‘prohibited’ according to Islamic principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hidayah</td>
<td>God’s guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMI</td>
<td>Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (Islamic Tertiary Student Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTI</td>
<td>Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (Indonesian Liberation Party), the Indonesian branch of the transnational Islamist group, Hizbut Tahrir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAIN</td>
<td>Institut Agama Islam Negeri (State Islamic Institute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ibadah</td>
<td>religious observance, religious duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICBC</td>
<td>Indonesia China Business Council</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ICMI  Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals)

Idul Adha  religious festival celebrated during the hajj to commemorate Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son to God

Idul Fitri  religious festival marking the end of the fasting month

ijtihad  independent judgement on a legal or theological question based on recognised sources of Islam

ikhwan  brother, comrade

imam  ‘model’; the religious leader of a Muslim community, often the leader of prayers in a mosque

Islamism  Islamic movements that view Islam as a political ideology

Imlek  Hokkien term for Chinese New Year

INTI  Perhimpunan Tionghoa Indonesia (Chinese Indonesian Association)

JAIS  Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (Islamic Department of Selangor)

jemaah  community of followers, congregation

JI  Jemaah Islamiyah, a militant group in Southeast Asia

JT  Jemaah Tabligh (Tablighi Jamaat)

JTM  Jaringan Tionghoa Muda (Chinese Youth Network)

jihad  ‘to strive’, ‘to fight’; meaning can range from the struggle to create a just society to the participation in holy war

JIL  Jaringan Islam Liberal (Liberal Islamic Network)
# Glossary and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JIMM</td>
<td>Jaringan Intelektual Muhammadiyah Muda (Muhammadiyah Young Intellectual Network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juz</td>
<td>section of the Qur'an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>juz amma</td>
<td>most commonly referred to or memorised sections of the Qur'an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IKDI</td>
<td>Ikatan Keluarga Dayak Islam (The Union of Dayak Muslim Families)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jilbab</td>
<td>head cover, headscarf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jubah</td>
<td>long and loose dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kabah</td>
<td>cubicle shrine in the Great Mosque of Mecca, representing the direction to which Muslims turn in praying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kabupaten</td>
<td>district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kafir</td>
<td>‘non-believer’ (in Islam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kantor</td>
<td>sub-district office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kecamatan</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kantor kelurahan</td>
<td>village office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kapitan</td>
<td>the leader of Chinese, Arabs and other ethnic groups under Dutch colonial rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kejawen</td>
<td>mystical beliefs emphasising Javanese ethical and spiritual values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kerudung</td>
<td>loose headscarf, which loosely covers the hair and neck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KH</td>
<td>Kiai Haji (see kiai, Haji)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khitanan</td>
<td>circumcision for Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ki</td>
<td>Javanese title of respect for a learned person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kiai</td>
<td>‘noble’, title for a religious scholar or leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>klementeng</td>
<td>Chinese temple</td>
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<tr>
<td>koko</td>
<td>Hokkien term for older brother</td>
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<tr>
<td>koko shirt</td>
<td>a collarless shirt, commonly worn by male Indonesian Muslims</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CHINESE WAYS OF BEING MUSLIM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Komnas</td>
<td>Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (National Commission on Violence against Women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komnas HAM</td>
<td>Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia (National Commission on Human Rights)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOMTAK</td>
<td>Komunitas Tionghoa Anti Korupsi (Chinese Community for Anti Corruption)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komunitas</td>
<td>Community; name for a magazine published by East Java PITI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kota</td>
<td>municipality, city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTP</td>
<td>kartu tanda penduduk (identity card)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KUA</td>
<td>Kantor Urusan Agama (Religious Affairs Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lampion</td>
<td>Chinese lantern; name for a Chinese nasyid group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laskar Jihad</td>
<td>Holy War Fighters, a paramilitary force in Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LBH</td>
<td>Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (Legal Aid Institute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lebaran</td>
<td>Indonesian term for Idul Fitri, the celebration of the end of the fasting month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIPIA</td>
<td>Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam and Arab (Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LKiS</td>
<td>Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial (The Institute for Islamic and Social Studies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>majelis taklim</td>
<td>Islamic study forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maksiat</td>
<td>immoral act, vice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masalah Cina</td>
<td>‘The Chinese Problem’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masjid</td>
<td>mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATAKIN</td>
<td>Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu Indonesia (The Supreme Council for Confucian Religion in Indonesia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maulid</td>
<td>Celebration of the Birthday of Prophet Muhammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mbah</td>
<td>Javanese title for respected person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xx
Glossary and Abbreviations

*mimbar* | pulpit used by a Muslim preacher to deliver a sermon
---|---
*MONAS* | Monumen Nasional (National Monument)
*mualaf* | one who is interested in learning about Islam; recent Muslim convert
*mubaligh* | preacher
*Muhammadiyah* | modernist Muslim organisation
*MUI* | Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesia Council of Ulama)
*MUSTIKA* | Muslim Tionghoa dan Keluarga (Chinese Muslim and Families)
*MSQ* | Management-Spiritual Quotient
*nasyid* | Islamic music
*NGO* | non-government organisation
*non-pribumi* | non-indigenous, commonly understood as ethnic Chinese
*NU* | Nahdlatul Ulama, a traditionalist Muslim organisation
*nyai* | respectful term of address to older or learned women; also wife or daughter of a *kiai*
*PAN* | Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandate Party)
*PAS* | Partai Islam Se-Malaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
*Pancasila* | the five guiding principles of the Indonesian state (belief in God, humanitarianism, nationalism, democracy and social justice)
*patkwa* | Chinese eight-sided diagram, symbolising luck and prosperity
*PBB* | Partai Bulan Bintang (Crescent and Star Party)
*PD* | Partai Demokrat (Democratic Party)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDI-P</td>
<td>Partai Demokrasi Indonesia- Perjuangan (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIB</td>
<td>Partai Perjuangan Indonesia Baru (Party of Struggle for New Indonesia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peci</td>
<td>rimless cap, commonly worn by male Indonesian Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pembauran</td>
<td>intermingling, blending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pengajian</td>
<td>Islamic study session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pendopo</td>
<td>Javanese-style hall or veranda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peranakan</td>
<td>locally born or mixed blood; acculturated Chinese Indonesians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persis</td>
<td>Persatuan Islam (Islamic Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pesantren</td>
<td>Islamic boarding school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PINTI</td>
<td>Perempuan PINTI (Women’s Division of INTI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PITI</td>
<td>Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia (Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKB</td>
<td>Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (National Awakening Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKS</td>
<td>Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperous Justice Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPIM</td>
<td>Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat (Centre for the Study of Islam and Society)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (United Development Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preman</td>
<td>thug, gangster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pribumi</td>
<td>son of the soil, indigenous Indonesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pribumisasi</td>
<td>indigenisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSMTI</td>
<td>Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia (Indonesian Chinese Clan Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qigong</td>
<td>Chinese breathing exercise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xxii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qur’an</td>
<td>God’s word revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and the supreme source of Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAHIMA</td>
<td>Muslim NGO promoting rights of women in Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rakaat</td>
<td>the prescribed movements and words followed by Muslims while offering prayers to God. It also refers to a single unit of Islamic prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramadan</td>
<td>Islamic fasting month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reformasi</td>
<td>reformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaf</td>
<td>the ‘pious ancestors’ (the Prophet Muhammad, his companions and their followers of the first three generations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salafi</td>
<td>Muslim who seeks to emulate the practices of the pious ancestors (Salaf)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salafism</td>
<td>reform movements that seek to restore the ‘true’ faith, hostile to ‘improper’ traditionalist Muslim practice and sometimes also to ‘corrupted’ modern Western influences; attitudes and approaches associated with those movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>santri</td>
<td>student at a traditional Muslim school; a pious Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA</td>
<td>Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar Golongan (issues related to ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group relations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saresehan</td>
<td>discussion, meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarekat Islam</td>
<td>Islamic Union, the successor of Sarekat Dagang Islam (Islamic Trade Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDI</td>
<td>Sarekat Dagang Islam (Islamic Trade Union)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sesat</td>
<td>deviant, misguided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sholat</td>
<td>ritual prayers performed five times daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shalawat</td>
<td>prayer to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharia</td>
<td>Islamic law; the Islamic way of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silaturahim</td>
<td>friendship, good relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CHINESE WAYS OF BEING MUSLIM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sinetron</td>
<td>soap opera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slametan</td>
<td>communal feast to observe an occasion of ritual importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNB</td>
<td>Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa (Solidarity for Nation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEI</td>
<td>Sekolah Tinggi Ekonomi Islam (College of Islamic Economy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufi</td>
<td>one who follows Islamic mysticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufism</td>
<td>Islamic mysticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sujud syukur</td>
<td>prayer to express gratitude to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syahadat</td>
<td>the profession of Islamic faith: ‘There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah’s messenger’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syiar</td>
<td>preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syirik</td>
<td>idolatry, polytheism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tahlilan</td>
<td>the reciting of Qur’anic verses to mark life crises, in particular the death of family members and respected figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>takbiran</td>
<td>recitation of ‘God is great’; night of the last day of fasting month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taklid</td>
<td>strict following of traditional Islamic interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tangzhuang</td>
<td>traditional Chinese male clothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taraweh</td>
<td>non-obligatory evening prayers during fasting month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tauhid</td>
<td>doctrine of the unity of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tionghoa</td>
<td>Hokkien term for Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMII</td>
<td>Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totok</td>
<td>pure blood; Chinese Indonesians who practise Chinese culture and can speak Mandarin or a Chinese dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tradisi</td>
<td>tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuhan</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

UGM Universitas Gadjah Mada (The University of Gadjah Mada)
UI Universitas Indonesia
UIN Universitas Islam Negeri (State Islamic University)
ulama Islamic scholars
ummah the Islamic community
umrah the lesser pilgrimage to Mecca
ustaz religious teacher
ustazah female religious teacher
vihara Buddhist temple
Walisongo the nine saints popularly credited for spreading Islam in Java
wali kota mayor
WALUBI Perwakilan Umat Buddha Indonesia (The Indonesian Buddhist Council Association)
wayang kulit shadow puppet show
wisata religi religious tourist site
WNI Warga Negara Indonesia (Indonesian Citizen), but commonly refers to ethnic Chinese minority
yayasan foundation
Yayasan Karim Oei Karim Oei Foundation
YHMCHI Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia (Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation)
zakat almsgiving, one of the five pillars of Islam
ziarah visiting sacred places, such as tombs of Muslim saints, for prayer and worship
zikir Islamic mystical chanting
1. Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, Surabaya, East Java
2. Pandaan Cheng Hoo Mosque, Pandaan, East Java
3. Jember Cheng Hoo Mosque, Jember, East Java
4. Banyuwangi Cheng Hoo Mosque, Banyuwangi, East Java
5. Mbah Bedjo Mosque, Malang, East Java
6. Ponpes Mutiara Hati Beriman ('Arwana') Mosque, Salatiga, Central Java
7. Purbalingga Cheng Hoo Mosque, Purbalingga, Central Java
8. Tan Kok Liong (Anton Medan) Mosque, Cibinong, West Java
9. Batam Cheng Hoo Mosque, Batam, Riau Islands
10. Jambi Cheng Hoo Mosque, Jambi City, Jambi
11. Palembang Cheng Hoo Mosque, Palembang, South Sumatra
12. Makassar Cheng Hoo Mosque, Makassar, South Sulawesi
13. Gowa Cheng Hoo Mosque, Gowa, South Sulawesi
14. Banjarmasin Cheng Hoo Mosque, Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan
15. Kutai Kartanegara Cheng Hoo Mosque, Batuah, East Kalimantan
16. Samarinda Cheng Hoo Mosque, Samarinda, East Kalimantan

Chinese-style mosques built in post-New Order Indonesia (as in 2017)

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Emergence of Chinese Muslim Cultural Identities

‘The Prophet Muhammad urges Muslims to seek knowledge even as far as China. Since many ethnic Chinese reside in Indonesia, Indonesian Muslims are lucky enough that we can learn from them without traveling to Mainland China’ (field note, 16 October 2008). Tan Mei Hwa, a popular female Chinese Muslim preacher, delivered this message to her audience of mostly Javanese Muslims during a halal-bihalal (meeting for mutual forgiveness) in Surabaya in 2008. Dressed in stylish Islamic dress, she also claimed that some of the Walisongo (nine Muslims saints popularly credited with bringing Islam to Java) were of Chinese descent. She said this to re-assure her audience of her credentials as a Chinese preacher, and to promote a better relationship between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians.1 Also in 2008, at a breaking of the fast function during Ramadan, another Chinese preacher, Syaukanie Ong, wearing red traditional Chinese dress, spoke in front of Muslims crowded into the compound of the Muhammad Cheng Hoo Mosque, a Chinese-style mosque in Surabaya.2 These two events combine Chinese

1. In this book, most of the time, I use the terms ‘Chinese Indonesians’ and ‘ethnic Chinese in Indonesia’ interchangeably for those Indonesians of Chinese descent. It is also important to distinguish the usage of ‘Chinese Muslims’ and ‘Muslims in China’ in this book. I use ‘Chinese Muslims’ for those who are Muslims and happen to be ethnically Chinese in Indonesia, while ‘Muslims in China’ to refer to Muslims that reside in Mainland China who are mostly ethnic Hui. For more discussion of Muslims in China and the complex meanings of ‘Hui,’ see Gladney (1991) and Gillette (2000).

2. ‘Zheng He’ is the standard Romanisation of the name of the prominent Chinese Muslim admiral in the Hanyu Pinyin system. In Indonesia and Malaysia, the older Romanisation, ‘Cheng Ho’, is more commonly used. The Chinese-style mosque in Surabaya is called ‘Masjid Muhammad Cheng Hoo’, spelled with two ‘o’s. In this book, I use ‘Cheng Ho’ to refer to the historical figure and retain ‘Cheng Hoo’ in the name of the mosque.
cultural symbols and Islamic messages, as well as bringing together Chinese preachers and Muslim audiences, to challenge the widely held perception by both Chinese and Muslim Indonesians that ‘Chineseness’ and Islam are incompatible.

During the New Order period (1966–1998), Chinese Indonesians who converted to Islam had always been assumed to have lost their Chineseness and assimilated themselves into various local ethnic majorities.3 Today, there are increasing numbers of Chinese Muslims who are publicly performing their Chinese ethnicity along with Islamic religiosity to promote a ‘Chinese way of being Muslim’, exemplified by the popularity of Chinese preachers, the establishment of Chinese-style mosques, the celebrations of Chinese New Year in mosques, and the engagement of Chinese converts in various Islamic organisations. Who promotes Chinese Muslim cultural identities and why are they doing so? What does the emergence of Chinese Muslim culture tell us about cultural and religious diversity in Indonesia? This book aims to answer these questions.

Amidst the resurgence of Islamic religiosity and Chinese culture, studying the intersection of Islam and Chineseness provides relevant insights into the possibilities and limitations, as well as the patterns and paradoxes, of cosmopolitan Islam and inclusive Chineseness in contemporary Indonesia. Despite the self-essentialisation of Chineseness and the subscription to conservative religious understanding among some Chinese Muslims, I suggest that Chinese Muslim cultural identities, especially as manifested in their mosques, promote religious and ethnic diversity. Bringing

3. The differentiation between Chinese Indonesians and the local ‘native’ population has been always illustrated by the terms the ‘pribumi’ (literally meaning ‘sons of the soil’), used to refer to Indonesian natives, and ‘non-pribumi’, used mainly to refer to ethnic Chinese. Although the two terms have been officially abolished following the installation of the Presidential Instruction No. 26/1998, both Chinese and non-Chinese alike still often colloquially use the terms today. In this book, I avoid using these terms not only because of political correctness, but also because of my belief that all people born in Indonesia are equally ‘natives’. I use ‘non-Chinese’ and sometimes ‘local ethnic majority’ to refer to Indonesians who are not Chinese. I also use the specific ethnic labels, such as ‘Javanese’ and ‘Arab Indonesians’ if I refer to this ethnicity in particular. The term ‘pribumi’ and ‘non-pribumi’ are only used if I refer to literature and conversations that use such terminologies.
Chinese symbols and Islamic practices together, Chinese-style mosques provide a new model for multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence. Being ‘more Muslim’ does not necessarily mean being inward-looking and losing your cultural traditions. Being ‘more Chinese’ does not necessarily mean being exclusive and losing your local affiliations. Shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims, Chinese and non-Chinese, Chinese Muslim cultures open more spaces for social interactions and boundary crossings.

Certainly, the emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities is a reflection of the post-1998 cultural diversity in Indonesia. It demonstrates the return of Chinese cultural symbols in Indonesian public spaces, and highlights the tolerance of Indonesian Islam towards different cultural expressions. The appreciation of Chinese Muslim cultures shows the commitment of the Indonesian government, civil society and ordinary people to foster and celebrate diversity. Among Chinese Muslim leaders, there is also a shift from the dominant discourse of ‘the assimilation of Chinese Indonesians through Islam’ (asimilasi lewat Islam) during the New Order period to ‘preaching Islam through Chinese cultural approaches’ (dakwah pendekatan budaya) in the past decade.

In general, Chinese Muslim culture is well received by many local Muslims, as most followers of Chinese preachers and congregation members at Chinese-style mosques are non-Chinese Muslims. Although this might not mean the breaking down of ethnic stereotypes, such phenomena help in creating a better image of Chinese Indonesians among the broader Indonesian population. I would argue that the popularity of Chinese preachers and Chinese-style mosques is a commendable example of the celebration of inclusive Chinese cultural expression in Indonesia today, in which Chineseness is no longer a sign of exclusivity, but a common heritage shared by all Indonesians, and a symbolic commodity in the ‘pop Islam’ industry (see Chapter 4).

Despite objections from some ultra-conservative Muslims, many Muslim leaders endorse the expression of Chinese Muslim cultural identities, seeing it as a form of dakwah and a reassertion of plural Islamic traditions in Indonesia. For instance, although not
CHINESE WAYS OF BEING MUSLIM

contributing to a critical understanding of Islam, Chinese preachers creatively colour Islamic appearances and subtly promote the universality of Islam. Also, both the inclusive architectural design and the socio-religious activities in the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque show that the assertion of Islamic identity among Chinese converts does not affect their relations with non-Muslims. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, the mosque is arguably a local cosmopolitan space allowing Muslims and non-Muslims from different ethnic groups to interact with each other.

However, the manifestation of Chinese Muslim cultural identities does not reveal an existing ethno-religious reality, but rather brings a new reality into being. It does not reflect the heterogeneity of cultural interactions and religious practices of many ordinary Chinese Muslims. While some Chinese preachers parade their Chineseness, there are Chinese Muslims who reject being labelled ‘Chinese Muslim’ and claim to be ‘biologically Chinese, culturally Javanese.’ While some Chinese Muslim leaders celebrate Chinese New Year in mosques, there are also a few Chinese Muslims who insist that such celebrations are haram. Most Chinese Muslims are in between these two ends of the spectrum. Moreover, their ethnic identifications are not static, while their flexible religiosities are a negotiation between Islamic doctrines and everyday living conditions.

Furthermore, there is a distinction between the public performance and everyday living identities of Chinese Muslim leaders and preachers. As I will illustrate in Chapter 4, some Chinese preachers consciously use Chinese cultural symbols, such as traditional clothing and names to attract audiences. Yet, many of these preachers have little Chinese language ability and do not practise Chinese culture in their daily life. Similarly, some Chinese businessmen, dressed in Muslim attire, frequently attend the Friday prayers in the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, yet this does not necessarily mean they also observe Islam at home. In other words, they present their Chineseness and Islamic religiosity in public, but do not necessarily practise such identities in private.

The arguments laid out above are all related to the main aim of this book, which is to analyse the intersection between Chinese and
Islamic identities in Indonesia today. Amidst the concerns about the perceived ‘conservative turn’ of Indonesian Islam (Bruinessen 2013), this book sketches another face of Islam which is inclusive and in favour of diversity, albeit not without contestation. Amidst the propagation of ‘Islam of the Archipelago’ (Islam Nusantara) (Sahal and Aziz 2015), this book suggests that Chinese Muslim cultural identities are part and parcel of Indonesian Islam, contributing to the on-going negotiations of diverse Islamic traditions in the archipelago.

**Islamic resurgence, Chinese euphoria and Chinese Muslims in Indonesia**

All around the world, in the last few decades, there have been various attempts to create social movements based on common identities (Eriksen 2002; Castells 1997). Indeed, we have witnessed the rise of religious activisms, the spread of nationalist movements, and the redefinitions of claims to race and ethnicity in many parts of the world. Indonesia is no exception. The political openness after the fall of Suharto allowed a range of ethnic, religious and cultural groups to express their identities in the public domain more freely. For example, the resurgence of nationalist separatist movements, such as those in Aceh and Papua; the revitalisation of ethnic identities, such as Chinese and Dayak; and the rise of globalised religiosity, such as Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity and transnational Islamism.

Important to this book are the phenomena of ‘Chinese euphoria’ and ‘Islamic resurgence’, which refer to the rising assertion of Chinese and Islamic identities in Indonesia today. Indeed, the emergence of Chinese Muslim cultures is an outcome of several interrelated processes that occurred in Indonesia and abroad from the 1990s. Such events include China’s growing economic and diplomatic power; improving relations between China and Indonesia after the Cold war; Indonesia’s expanding democratic space; the recognition of Chinese cultures after the fall of the New Order regime; the rise and diversification of Muslim political activisms and consumer
markets; as well as the divergent progressive and conservative tendencies of Indonesian Islam. There has been considerable research done in post-New Order Indonesia on both Muslim (e.g. Salim & Azra 2003; Bruinessen 2002; Fox 2004; Hefner 2000; Fealy 2008; Hoesterey 2016) and Chinese identities (e.g. Budianta 2007; Heryanto 2008; Hoon 2008; Purdey 2003; Setijadi 2013; Suryadinata 2001). Drawing on these studies, I will briefly review a few phenomena which link to both Chinese and Muslim identities in Indonesia to locate this research in a broader context.

During the Suharto period, the introduction of the SARA (Suku, Agama, Ras, dan Antar-golongan) concept restricted Indonesians in discussing matters related to ethnic, religious, racial and inter-group differences in public spaces. Both cultural and political expression of Chinese and Islamic identities in public life were controlled and contained. The New Order regime systematically suppressed any expression of Chinese identities; and at the same time marginalised ethnic Chinese in all social, educational and political arenas. Meanwhile, although most Indonesians were Muslims, the expression of Islam, especially political Islam, was restricted, especially during the early period of Suharto’s regime. The collapse of this authoritarian regime in 1998 dramatically changed the political dynamics. Post-Suharto governments revoked the official ban on Chinese language, media, religion and culture in public spaces, as well as abolishing almost all discriminatory laws against Chinese Indonesians. At the same time, Islam regained its momentum as an ethical resource for political mobilisation.

Both Chinese and Muslim leaders used the political openness of the post-Suharto period to express their identity through political parties and social organisations (see Chapter 5). Some ethnic Chinese have formed organisations to promote Chinese culture and liberate their long-suppressed identity, as well as fighting against discrimination. Many Chinese Indonesians have also become candidates, some successful in elections, not only

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4. ‘SARA’ is an acronym that summarises the ‘sensitive’ issues of ethnicity (suku), religion (agama), race (ras) and inter-group (antar golongan) differences.
as legislators at both local and national levels, but also as govern-
ors and high-profile ministers. Meanwhile, some Muslims have
formed Islamic parties and NGOs to promote different versions
of Islamic interpretation, from liberal to radical, from progressive
to conservative. Although the performance of Islamic parties in
electoral politics is rather poor, Islam is playing a greater role in
general Indonesian politics today. Almost all major political parties
in some way uphold Islamic causes, including some nationalist or
secular parties, which have adopted some Islamic agendas in their
party organisations and slogans (Fealy 2008). Also, in certain re-

gions, local political authorities have implemented sharia-inspired
by-laws and regulations.

This resurgence of different forms of identity politics, on the one
hand, is celebrated as a reflection of political openness in democ-
ratising Indonesia and empowerment for marginalised groups; on
the other hand, it is criticised for emphasising ethnic differences
and increasing religious intolerance. As a few scholars (Budianta
2007; Heryanto 2004; Hoon 2009) have pointed out, there are
concerns that the exuberant public celebration of Chineseness
might promote social exclusivity, reinforce ethnic stereotypes
and deepen prejudice against ethnic Chinese among the broader
Indonesian population. Similarly, there are concerns that the affir-
mation of Islamic piety might generate political tensions, intensify
religious conservatism, undermine women’s rights and threaten lo-
cal cultural traditions (Beatty 1999; Hefner 2005; Robinson 2008).
Nevertheless, this book echoes the view of Kahn (2008) that there
is no necessary contradiction between cosmopolitan sensibilities
and identity assertions, by exploring the possibilities of ethnic and
religious cosmopolitanism in Indonesia.

The recent democratisation in Indonesia has not only contrib-
uted to the emergence of identity politics, but also to the increase
of identity contestation and manifestations in everyday practices.
Indeed, there is no single Chinese or Islamic identity in Indonesia.
Both identities are remarkably diverse, spanning a wide array of
cultural orientations, religious affiliations, socio-economic classes,
political involvement and regional variants (see Chapters 6 and 7).
Conventionally, scholars divide Chinese Indonesians into two main groups, the Chinese-cultured *Totok* (China-born, pure blood) and the acculturated *Peranakan* (local-born, mixed blood). Generally speaking, a *Totok* refers to those who still practise Chinese culture and speak Mandarin or one of the Chinese dialects. By contrast, a *Peranakan* refers to those who cannot speak Chinese and use Indonesian or a local language in their daily lives. During the Suharto period, largely as a result of the state’s assimilation policy, *Totok* Chinese were rapidly ‘peranakanised’ (Suryadinata 1978). After the collapse of the New Order regime, however, there has been a euphoric celebration of ‘Chineseness’, including the ‘re-discovery’ of Chinese identity among those who had previously assimilated. Yet, not all Indonesians of Chinese descent were keen to reclaim their Chineseness; some preferred to erase the marks of difference (Hoon 2008). In between these two attitudes, the majority of Chinese are relaxed and flexible about their ethnicity. Thus, the *Totok* and *Peranakan* distinction is insufficient to capture the heterogeneity and fluidity of their ethnic identifications and cultural orientations in Indonesia today (Tjhin 2002).

Similarly, scholars have used various terminologies to analyse Muslim religiosity in Indonesia, such as *abangan* (nominal) and *santri* (observant Muslims), modernist and traditionalist (Geertz 1960), radical-conservative and progressive-liberal (Anwar 2009), scripturalist and substantialist (Liddle 1996), and on the list goes. Such labels allow us to examine different Muslim practices and attitudes, but fail to capture the complexity and nuances of everyday religiosity. Furthermore, the post-1998 democratisation, together with the influences of consumer culture, urbanisation, social mobility and transnational flows have made Muslim religiosities more diverse, and the dichotomies mentioned above do not allow an accurate analysis of reality. Instead, some recent studies have proposed that Muslim religiosities are a negotiation between normative and non-normative Islam (Beatty 1999); an ambivalent relationship between Islamic resurgents and ‘ordinary’ Muslims (Peletz 1997); or a spontaneous social reality (Alam 2007).
Indeed, in contemporary Indonesia, the reality of Islam on the ground, as Ricklefs (2008: 133) concludes, is ‘complex, confused and confusing’. On the one hand, there is an increase in Islam that is puritan, inflexible and intolerant of other faiths, rejecting local culture, politically oriented and even willing to use violence. On the other hand, there is an increasing promotion of Islam that is liberal, supportive of multiculturalism, valuing local culture, politically disinterested and peaceful in approach. In between these two extremes are multiple combinations and permutations (Ricklefs 2008). The divergence of these two tendencies can be seen in the MONAS incident in June 2008, in which members of FPI (Front Pembela Islam, Islamic Defenders’ Front) attacked members of the National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Faith (AKKBB, Aliansi Kebangsaan Untuk Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan) who had rallied in opposition to a partial government ban of Ahmadiyah. FPI urged the Indonesian government to crack down on Ahmadiyah, which they considered a ‘deviant’ sect, while AKKBB supported the religious freedom of Ahmadiyah followers.

Parallel with political openness, we witness the proliferation of popular culture and identity consumption. There has been a rise in consumerism and new media in Indonesia over the last decade, leading to both the strategic adoption of cultural elements in the marketing of commodities and the prevalence of cultural consumption, especially among the urban middle classes. Chineseness and Islamicness are arguably the two most commodified and visible identities in Indonesian markets today. For the Chinese, Chinese-language news and drama programs are screened on TV, and transnational Chinese popular culture is well received. During Chinese New Year, lion dance performances and red lantern decorations are commonly found in most of the major shopping centres to attract consumers (Budianta 2007; Hoon 2009). In some places, Chinese cultural sites are repackaged as tourist attractions, such as Cheng Ho Temple (Sam Poo Kong) in Semarang and ‘Chinatown’ (Pecinan) in Surabaya. Remarkably, ‘Chineseness’ is not
only consumed or practised by the ethnic Chinese, but also by many non-Chinese Indonesians.

For Muslims, Islamic media, banking, insurance, tourism, entertainment and fashion are blossoming among middle class Muslims (Fealy 2008; Heryanto 2010). These trends demonstrate that rising religiosity does not necessarily contradict a growing consumer culture, but can complement it. Indeed, the popularity of Muslim celebrity preachers, Islamic-themed movies and Islamic-packaged financial products show the increasing levels of commercialisation of Islam, and at the same time, the ‘Islamisation’ of the market. Interestingly, ‘Islamic markets’ are not limited to Muslims and many non-Muslims are also the consumers of ‘Islamic products’. For instance, the popular Islamic-themed movie, ‘Verses of Love’ (Ayat-ayat Cinta), is watched by all Indonesians. What is the relationship between cultural consumption and identity practice? Does cultural consumption contribute to greater pluralism? I will investigate such questions in Chapter 4.

It should be also noted that both Chinese and Muslim identities have transnational dimensions, respectively connected to the ‘Chinese diaspora’ (in Malaysia, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan) and the ‘Islamic ummah’ (in Malaysia, the Middle East). There are also regional variations (Chinese in Jakarta vis-à-vis Chinese in Medan, Muslim in Surabaya vis-à-vis Muslim in Aceh, for example). The interplay of global flows, particularly the rise of China and global Islamism, and local politics, such as the expanded democracy and regional autonomy in the post-New Order era, shapes contexts as well as integral forces in the dynamics of their identity formations.

Globalised Islam, as Roy (2004) has argued, is often hostile to the preservation of local cultural tradition. Meanwhile transnational Muslim politics has been always in favour of ummah (Islamic community) and linked to the Middle East (Mandaville 2001). In Indonesia, there are contestations between Muslims who are in favour of the ‘purification’ or ‘Arabisation’ of Islam (Ghoshal 2010; Rahim 2006) and Muslims who support ‘indigenisation’ (Wahid 2007) or the ‘Indonesianness’ (Madjid 1987) of Islam. The former tends to embrace a ‘generic transnational Islamic identity’
(Bubalo & Fealy 2005: viii), reject local customs and adopt Arabic-influenced expressions of Islam. The latter aims to challenge the ‘purification’ of Islam, advocate religious pluralism and promote a ‘vernacular’ Islam that is grounded in local contexts (Rahmat 2003). The discussion of Chinese-style mosques in Chapter 3 adds another scenario: the transnational connection with Muslims in China and the manifestation of Chineseness through such linkages.

Undeniably, there are identical features for expressions and negotiations of both Chinese and Muslim identities in contemporary Indonesia. Since the post-New Order Indonesian state has lesser control over identity matters, various political movements and market forces, both transnational and local, along with social experiences and personal choices, play more important roles in the formation and contestation of Chinese and Muslim identities. Informed by these larger contexts, Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, despite their small population, are worth studying as a microcosm which helps us better understand the dynamics of ‘Islamic resurgence’ and ‘Chinese euphoria’. In addition, Chinese Muslims have a few unique qualities that make their identities deserve close examination and could offer us different analytical perspectives. First, Chinese Muslims are not a locally bounded ethno-religious group (such as Javanese Muslims, Acehnese Muslims) but dispersed minorities in Indonesia. Second, they are mostly converts. Third, they are a religious minority among Chinese Indonesians. Last, but not least, Chinese Muslims are in some ways, constituting a ‘contact zone’ (Pratt 1991), where Chinese cultures, Indonesian local customs and Islamic practices interact and mix.

**Chinese Muslims in this research**

There are several books and articles which examine Chinese Muslims’ historical existence in Indonesia, especially in Java from as early as the 15th and 16th centuries, and their role in Islamic propagation. Among them are: Al-Qurtuby (2003); Ali (2007); Budiman (1979); de Graaf and Pigeaud (1984); Kong (2000); Lombard & Salmon (2001); Muljana (2005); Tan (2009) and Zhuang
The two most contentious issues are: first, how significant was the role of Admiral Cheng Ho and his followers in preaching Islam; and second, how many of the Walisongo (nine saints), who spread Islam across Java, are of Chinese descent (see Chapter 2).

As assimilation dominated the cultural policy of the Suharto regime, and most Indonesians are Muslims, it is not a surprise that there are works on Chinese Muslims and their social blending during New Order Indonesia. Prominent authors on these topics include: Jacobsen (2005); Jahja (1985, 1988, 1991, 1999); Riyanto (1997); The (1986, 1990, 1993) and Tan (2008). Jahja has consistently promoted the conversion to Islam and thus total assimilation among Chinese Indonesians, as a way to escape social discrimination (Jahja 1979, 1981, 1999). However, The, Tan and Jacobsen investigate the limitations of this conversion movement and its implications. A more detailed discussion of the idea of assimilation will be presented in the next chapter.

Another major theme of studies of Chinese Muslims is their conversion experience and the difficulties faced by them after entering the faith. Most of the writings are unpublished theses written by graduate students in Islamic universities or institutes, such as Siregar (1972); Ibnudaud (1979); Rubaidi (1999) and Elizabeth (2003). In Chapter 7, I will investigate Islamic conversions and the religiosity of Chinese Muslims in detail.

This present book differs from the above-mentioned scholarship in two main ways: the period of the study and the analytical perspective. I focus on the identity negotiation of Chinese Muslims in the post-New Order period. There have been only a few writings on Chinese Muslims in contemporary Indonesia. Some of them are rather brief articles (Marijan 2008; Suryadinata 2008), while others are rich with empirical data and historical details, but lack in-depth analysis (Afif 2012; Maulana 2010; Ong 2007; Perdana 2008). Closer to the theme of this book, Chiou (2007, 2010, 2012), Muzakki (2009, 2010) and Dickson (2008, 2009) have discussed the construction of Chinese Muslim identity in post-1998 Indonesia. Their papers mostly centre on the Indonesian Chinese Muslim
Association (PITI, Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia), Chinese Muslim leaders and the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya.

By focusing on Chinese Muslim elites, most of these works neglected the voices of ordinary Chinese Muslims. They 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. They also do not capture and explain the distinction between public manifestation and private enactment, the disjuncture between the symbolic unity and the everyday diversity of Chinese Muslim identities. Furthermore, previous studies paid little attention to other aspects of identity formation, such as media representation, market consumption, cultural practices, religious rituals and everyday living strategies. This book fills these gaps, by providing a more nuanced understanding and sophisticated analysis. It examines 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 Muslim identities.

**Chinese Muslims as a double minority**

All Indonesians have to register themselves as following one of the six official religions – Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism – on their identity cards (KTP) in order to receive government services.\(^5\) In 2000, census data from the Central Bureau of Statistics reported that 88 per cent of Indonesians classify themselves as Muslim, 5.9 per cent as Protestant, 3.1 per cent as Catholic, 1.8 per cent as Hindu and 0.2 per cent as ‘other’ (Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta 2003).\(^6\)

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5. Confucianism was de-recognised by the Suharto regime from 1979, but was restored as a recognised religion by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2006 (Pausacker 2007). For more detail on the development of Confucianism in Indonesia, see Coppel (2002) and Suryadinata (1998).

6. The ‘Muslim’ figure in the census included those who follow ‘unrecognised’ beliefs, such as Javanese mysticism, or those who are nominally Muslim. Meanwhile, given
There are more than 1000 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups coded in the 2000 Indonesian census, in which the Javanese (41.7 per cent) and Sundanese (15.41 per cent) are two of the largest ethnic groups. According to the census, there are only about 2 million, or 1 per cent of the population, who are ethnic Chinese, but this figure is problematic because of under-reporting. The assimilation policies of the Suharto government and the fear of identifying as Chinese after the traumatic events of May 1998 meant that many Indonesians of Chinese descent identified themselves as belonging to other ethnic groups in the 2000 census (Suryadinata, Arifin & Ananta 2003). According to Mackie (2005), it is more realistic to assume the population of Chinese is about 5–6 million (2–3 per cent), even though this figure may not be much more than a ‘well-informed guess’.

There is no specific information in the census on the breakdown of religious adherents for each ethnic group. However, calculated from the raw data, Ananta, Arifin & Bakhtiar (2008) estimated the distribution of religious followers among Chinese, Arab and Indian Indonesians.7 According to their calculations, more than half of Chinese Indonesians are Buddhists (53.82 per cent), 35.09 per cent are Christian, 5.41 per cent are Muslim, 1.77 per cent are Hindu and 3.91 per cent others.8 While this figure reflects the common perception that the majority of Chinese are non-Muslims, I do not find the number for Chinese Muslims convincing. The percentage of Chinese Muslims is over-estimated, and some of my informants share my opinion. According to a Chinese Muslim leader, Junus

7. I would suggest that we should have a careful reading of the census numbers regarding ethnic and religious affiliations, given the consideration of ethnic and religious identification when someone is interviewed for official purposes. I am referring to these numbers only to give a general idea of the minority position of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia.

8. According to Ananta, Arifin & Bakhtiar (2008), there were 87,066 Arab Indonesians, forming 0.043 per cent of the Indonesian population. Not surprisingly, they estimate 98.27 per cent of Arab Indonesians are Muslims. It is also assumed that most non-Chinese Indonesians, especially Javanese and Sundanese, are Muslims.
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Jahya, there are about 30,000 to 50,000 Chinese Muslims across Indonesia (Jahya 2005). This means Chinese Muslims make up only 0.5–1.0 per cent of the total Chinese population and a very tiny proportion of the total Muslim population in Indonesia.

Therefore, Chinese Muslims can be seen as a double minority: a minority within Chinese Indonesians, as well as a minority within Muslim Indonesians. However, by converting to Islam, a Chinese could also escape his or her membership of an ethnic minority and become a part of a religious majority in Indonesia.

**Chinese Muslims as a contact zone**

Chinese Muslims can be seen as constituting a ‘contact zone’ (Pratt 1991) for social interaction, cultural mixing and identity contestation, between and within three sources of identity: Indonesian, Chinese and Muslim. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the relations between Indonesian, Chinese and Islamic identities went through different dynamics at different historical periods: from a hybrid Sino-Javanese Muslim culture in the 15th and 16th centuries to its decline during the Dutch colonial period; from organising Chinese Muslim associations in the early independence period to the notion of ‘assimilation through Islamic conversion’ during the New Order regime; and recently the re-emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural expression. Generally speaking, in post-1998 Indonesia, by mixing Chinese cultural symbols and Islamic messages, there

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9. This figure is highly contested for at least two reasons. First, since many Chinese Muslims intermarried with non-Chinese and assimilated into the local ethnic majority, some of them would not regard themselves as Chinese. Second, some of them convert for practical reasons, such as to marry and for business considerations, thus they do not necessarily practise Islam and involve themselves in Chinese Muslim circles.

10. Based on my personal observation during fieldwork, I speculate about 3–5 per cent of Chinese Indonesians are Muslims. I have asked a few informants to give me an estimation of the Chinese Muslim population and many of them did not think Chinese Muslims consist of more than five per cent of the Chinese Indonesian population. However, given that ethnic and religious identities are complex and cannot be easily quantified, instead of being obsessed with numbers, this book focuses on the cultural politics of Chinese Muslim identities.
are various attempts to reconcile the perceived incompatibility between an Islamic identity and a Chinese identity.

Nevertheless, in reality, there are various outcomes of intersections between Chinese ethnicity and Islamic religiosity. Four categories of Chinese Muslims can be identified, based on their attitudes towards Chinese traditions and Islamic practices. The first category is those who are observant Muslims and have culturally assimilated into the local ethnic majorities. This includes many Chinese Muslim activists and religious teachers. The second category is those who are practising Muslims and ‘perform’ their Chineseness in public, perhaps best represented by a number of popular Chinese preachers. The third category is those who are nominal Muslims and do not practise Chinese culture. This includes some Chinese Muslims who work in government departments and universities. The last category is those who are nominal Muslims yet observe Chinese culture, as exemplified by some Chinese Muslim businessmen.

The above-mentioned classifications indicate the heterogeneity of Chinese Muslim attitudes and behaviours, yet fail to address questions such as: Since both ‘Islam’ and ‘Chinese’ are plural realities with multiple meanings, which strain of Islam do they follow and which aspects of Chinese cultures do they practise? Given that identity positioning can be strategic and flexible, can Chinese Muslims downplay or emphasise their Chinese and Islamic identities depending on conditions? Do their public manifestations of identity reflect their everyday practices? My analysis in this book goes beyond this typology to investigate the multifarious processes and divergent results of the encounters between and within Islamic and Chinese identities among Chinese Muslims.

**Chinese Muslims as a complex reality**

The term ‘Chinese Muslim’ generally refers to a Muslim of Chinese descent in Indonesia. Yet, this definition is problematic and contestable depending on who uses it and why. I would like to suggest that there are at least three different levels of definition:
official, organisational and individual. The ‘official’ definition refers to Indonesians who identify themselves as ‘Chinese’ in the census and as ‘Muslim’ on their identity cards. The ‘organisational’ Chinese Muslim refers to their collective identities represented by various Chinese Muslim associations. The ‘individual’ Chinese Muslim refers to those who self-identify or are identified by others as ‘Chinese Muslim’ in everyday life.

Chinese Muslims as a subject to study are also problematic due to three major historical-generational differences: ‘the lost Chinese Muslims’, ‘second-generation Chinese Muslims’ and ‘new converts’. ‘The lost Chinese Muslims’ refer to Chinese Muslims in Indonesia back to the 15th century, as well as to Chinese who converted to Islam after that. Their subsequent generations are difficult to trace since most of them have been assimilated. ‘Second-generation Chinese Muslims’ refer to those who are the next generation of Chinese Muslim families, meaning either both parents are Chinese Muslims or intermarriage between Chinese Muslims and non-Chinese, including those who no longer self-identify as Chinese. Meanwhile, ‘new converts’ refer to Chinese who were not born Muslim, but converted later in life. Most Chinese Muslims today are converts, and are referred to as ‘mualaf’ in Indonesia. There are various reasons for conversion, including political strategy, business considerations, religious interests and intermarriage. Conversion factors, together with religious experiences, economic statuses, social networks and localities influence the identity negotiation of different Chinese converts, within broader historical and political contexts (see Chapter 7).

Some Chinese converts, especially those who have married non-Chinese Muslims, would not regard themselves as Chinese anymore. Similarly, those who convert for practical reasons, such as for political and economic purposes, might not practise Islam

11. ‘Mualaf’ is an Arabic term which literally refers to those who are interested in learning about Islam. This term is used in Indonesia to refer to Muslim converts. In Malaysia, some converts have rejected the use of such a term as it implies the convert has little knowledge of Islam, while others propose that they are ‘reverts’ instead of ‘converts’. There is less dispute about the use of this term in Indonesia.
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despite stating ‘Muslim’ on their identity cards. Although focusing on first-generation Chinese converts and self-identified Chinese Muslims, who are easier to access, my research also covers some second-generation and ‘non-self-identified’ Chinese Muslims to examine their identity dynamics. In this book, I use ‘Chinese Muslim’ in an inclusive way to refer to any Muslim who has Chinese descent in Indonesia, regardless of their cultural orientation or religious understanding. Meanwhile, I use ‘Chinese Muslim cultural identity’ or ‘Chinese Muslim culture’ to refer to their identity expressions that combine both Islamic religiosity and Chinese ethnicity.

Chinese Muslims as an analytical category

Chinese Muslims, who are engaging with two sets of competing identities in Indonesia, are extremely diverse. Thus, there is a dilemma here: how can we understand and make sense of these multifarious identities? Is there a distinctive Chinese Muslim culture in Indonesia? To answer these questions, I follow the approach of Brubaker (2004) that the study of ethnicity, race and nationalism should go beyond ‘groupism’, a tendency to reify ‘ethnic groups’ as ‘internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes’ (Brubaker 2004: 8). He advocates studying the way ethnicity works in social and political life without treating ‘ethnic groups’ as substantial entities, or even taking such groups as units of analysis at all. I borrow Brubaker’s concept of ‘ethnicity without group’ to analyse Chinese Muslims, by analysing their complex identities without treating them as a bounded community. This analytical approach allows me to examine both the demarcation of Chinese Muslim cultural identity by community organisations and leaders, as well as the contestation of everyday identities among ordinary Chinese Muslims.

In this book, I treat Chinese Muslim cultural identities in Indonesia today as ‘culture beyond group’. By doing so, my work is not only affirming that there are divergent identifications among Chinese Muslims, but also to a certain extent pinpointing the ‘instability’ of such ethno-religious grouping without discrediting the
emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities in contemporary Indonesia. This way of conceptualising Chinese Muslim identities might suggest the cosmopolitan possibilities of their cultural expressions, which are characterised by voluntarism and inclusivity: a Muslim who has Chinese descent can say no to ‘Chineseness’, while a non-Chinese Muslim can embrace Chinese Muslim culture if he or she wants to do so.

In other words, this work does not reify Chinese Muslims as a ‘fixed group’, but as an ‘analytical category’. The overarching questions that guide this research are: How, under what conditions and for what reasons does the construction and negotiation of Chinese Muslim identities take place? Does the emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities contribute to greater ethnic and religious pluralism in Indonesia?

I combine both the political economy of identity formation and the cultural politics of identity negotiation to study the multi-layered and multifarious nature of Chinese Muslim identities, by asking questions such as ‘who constructs or imagines such identities? Why were they constructed or imagined, and why did such constructions take the form that they did?’ (Kahn 2006: 3) I look into how and why their identities are constrained by political situations, constructed by community organisations, represented in public media and negotiated in everyday life, by exploring six sites of identity contestation: historical memories, mosque architecture, preaching strategies, social participation, cultural celebration and religious practices.

This work is also informed by the debate on the possibilities of ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ (Werbner 2006, 2008), suggesting there is not necessarily a contradiction between cosmopolitan vision and identity claims. I investigate how Chinese Muslims engage with and contribute to the political discourses and cultural representations of both Islam and Chineseness, and I explore the interaction, mixing and contestation between these two sources of identity. By doing so, I review the possibilities of inclusive Chineseness and cosmopolitan Islam, of whether the assertion of Chinese ethnicity
and Islamic religiosity enhances or obstructs cultural freedom and religious pluralism.

Identity formation, cultural diversity and religious cosmopolitanism

Most current studies of identity formation do not follow a narrow range of theoretical and methodological approaches, but prefer interdisciplinary and multi-dimensional styles of inquiry (Brubaker 2009). Informed by recent debates from various academic disciplines, especially anthropology, sociology, history, cultural studies and political science, this present study can be viewed as a theoretically informed case study and as an empirically grounded analysis of Chinese Muslim identities in Indonesia.

Given that there is a large body of debate related to identity formation, I do not intend to provide an all-encompassing review of this here, but will instead focus on examining certain concepts that guide my analysis. A more detailed discussion of some aspects of identities will be incorporated in other chapters. I am also aware that some terminologies I use, such as ‘hybridity’, ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘translocal’ are highly contested and there are on-going debates on how such terms should be used. In this book, despite acknowledging such complexities and specificities, I use these terms in a broader sense and in a more inclusive way. Instead of abstract theorising, I critically engage with these terms when analysing my findings, and I hope that this academic exercise can contribute to a more grounded understanding and reflexive theorising of such concepts.

Contexts, sites and forces of identity formation

Conventional discourses on identity may be characterised as essentialist, in assuming that identity is guaranteed in nature, rooted in deep historical and emotional bonds, given, uniform and fixed. More recent and critical accounts, however, have tended to adopt an anti-essentialist position, and to emphasise the socially constructed status of identities. Identities are in this way seen as
invented, imagined, contested, performative, fluid, multiple, flexible and strategic (Anderson 1991; Bhabha 1996b; Butler 1990; Hall 1987; Ong 1993, 1999; Storey 2003). As Hall (1996: 4) reminds us, identities are the product of institutional sites and historical development, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, characterised by change and transformation. Since identities are constituted within, not outside, representations, instead of reflecting ‘who we are’ or ‘where we come from’, identities better describe ‘how we might become,’ ‘how we have been represented’ and ‘how we might represent ourselves’ (Hall 1996: 4).

Nevertheless, essentialist invocations of racial and religious identities remain common in both public and everyday discourses throughout the world. Such identities are generally expressed and politically mobilised because they feel natural and essential (Ang 2000). These cases in some ways show that construction theory fails to grapple with the real and present-day reasons why essentialist identities continue to be invoked (Calhoun 1994). Some studies suggest recasting both positions (essentialist and constructionist) to see them as complementary rather than mutually exclusive (Haraway 1991). Meanwhile, Werbner (1997b: 229) advocates a critical differentiation between essentialism as ‘objectification,’ a positive type of collective self-identification, and essentialism as ‘reification,’ which distorts and silences difference. Although rejecting essentialism, Spivak (1990) states that it is impossible to be completely non-essentialist and coined the term ‘strategic essentialism’ which refers to a sort of temporary solidarity for the purpose of social movement to reclaim power based on a certain collective identity.

Perhaps political economy analysis can complement the limitations of social construction theory, by linking ‘the question of how identities are constructed’ to ‘the enquiry into why identities are constructed.’ Termed the ‘political economy of meaning,’ Roff (1987: 2) proposes linking ‘symbolic or cultural analysis of what is said and done’ with ‘analysis of the material and other conditions in which the saying and doing occur’ to understand how Muslims ‘dis-course’ about their lives. In his study of South Africa, MacDonald (2004) uses the term ‘the political economy of identity politics’ to
analyse the different usages of racial nationalism: mobilising resistance for ethnic equality under apartheid, but legitimising political patronage for wealth accumulation in the post-apartheid period. In other words, no identity is, per se, progressive or regressive outside its social context. Therefore, the critics of identity politics should take into account the political conditions in which such identity claims take place, while the promoters of identity movements should recognise the multiple meanings of such identities.

Yet the relationship between political economy (focus on structural constraint) and cultural politics (focus on social interaction) is dialectic, whereby personal strategies for constructing identities are constrained by larger social contexts, which are in turn primarily the products of individual thought and action. In resonance with Bourdieu’s influential work (1990) on intertwining relations between structure and agency, I agree with the idea that identity formation is the outcome of the strategic action of individuals operating within a constraining, but not determining, social context. Similarly, Song (2003) has argued that while significant constraints surround the exercising of ethnic options, there are always ways in which individuals and groups contest and assert particular meanings and representations associated with their ethnic identities.

Thus, identity studies should go beyond ‘identity’ per se and be situated in the ‘sites’ where ‘identity’ works. Cornell and Hartman (1998) outline six construction sites of identity: politics, labour markets, residential space, social institutions, cultures and daily experience. Meanwhile, Brubaker (2004: 27) proposes that we frame our analysis not in terms of ‘ethnic group’, but rather in terms of ‘practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, common sense knowledge, organisational routines and resources, discursive frames, institutionalised forms, political projects, contingent events and variable groupness’. Identities are produced through representation, which involve the use of language, signs and images (Hall 1997); constructed through the remembering of the past (Halbwachs 1980); circulated through cultural consumption (Storey 1999); invented through the reappropriation
of traditions (Hobsbawn 1983); and imagined through mass media (Anderson 1991).

Furthermore, Friedman (1994) argues that the interplay between local and global processes, between consumption and cultural strategies, is part of one attempt to discover the logics involved in identity construction. In other words, identity formation is not only situated within the boundaries of a territorial space, but also configured across and in between such spaces (Gupta & Ferguson 1992). To examine such dynamic processes, Appadurai (1996) proposes five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes. As with other kinds of identities, this book sees Chinese Muslims in Indonesia as an incremental and dialogic construction of lived identities (Ang 2000), which oscillate between self-constructed narratives and those constructed by significant others; between public performance and private enactment; between structural constraint and personal negotiation; between collective construction and individual identification; between social discourses and everyday practices; between global imaginations and local variances; between being and becoming.

Cultural hybridity and vernacular cosmopolitanism

Recently, embodying ‘middle-path alternatives between ethnocentric nationalism and particularistic multiculturalism’ (Vertovec & Cohen 2002: 1), the notion of cosmopolitanism, despite being highly contested, has been deployed by many scholars to examine, theorise and sometimes promote the ideal of living together among people from different ethnicities and religions in this globalising world.

The cosmopolitan vision is different from the ‘multiculturalist’ or ‘pluralist’ paradigm of cultural diversity. Although multiculturalism calls for the equal existence of diverse cultures, it is still preoccupied with ethnic and religious boundaries; whereas cosmopolitanism promotes an intense interaction, mixing and sharing that tend to blur communal boundaries, generating hybrid identities and ‘impure’ cultural practices (Bayat 2008; Hollinger 1995). In the
past, cosmopolitanism has always been associated with the notion of universalism, identical to mobility and confined to elite groups; yet recent scholarship, in the genre of ‘new cosmopolitanism’ or ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’, has challenged such perceptions, arguing that cosmopolitanism can be grounded in a specific culture, rooted in a certain locality and shared by ordinary people. The term ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’, possibly first coined by Bhabha (1996a: 195) to refer to ‘cosmopolitan community envisaged in a marginality’, is now ‘an apparent oxymoron that seems to join contradictory notions of local specificity and universal enlightenment’ (Werbner 2008: 14). Other terms that share similar concepts include: working-class cosmopolitanism (Werbner 1999), cosmopolitan patriotism (Appiah 1998), rooted cosmopolitanism (Cohen 1992) and cosmopolitan ethnicity (Werbner 2002).

Speaking of grounded cosmopolitanism, Kahn (2008: 268) suggests that not only is there no necessary contradiction between cosmopolitan sensibilities and cultural particularism, but that in fact many cosmopolitan practices may always be grounded in the experiences of a particular cultural group. Likewise, Appiah (1998) uses the term ‘cosmopolitan patriotism’, proposing that cosmopolitanism always begins from membership in morally and emotionally significant communities, such as families and ethnic groups, while advocating notions of tolerance, the transcendence of ethnic differences, and moral responsibility for others. Similarly, Bayat (2008: 5) uses the term ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’ to describe ‘the ways in which the ordinary members of different ethno-religious and cultural groupings mix, mingle, intensely interact, and share in values and practices’.

Cosmopolitanism is always linked to cultural hybridity, and perceived as contradicting the search for authenticity. While many scholars have celebrated the potential of cultural hybridity in developing cosmopolitan attitudes and transforming binary positions into new syntheses, such tendencies are not without criticism. As Kahn (2006: 166) points out, ‘... essentialism does not always imply exclusion. Neither does cultural hybridity guarantee genuine cosmopolitanism.’ Nonetheless, Kahn (2008: 269) reminds us that grounded
cosmopolitanism of certain cultural forms is not only about their
tolerance of cultural difference, but also their ‘openness to other’ and
‘willingness to transform their own culture’. In other words, cosmo-
politan practices are ‘both grounded and particularistic in origin,
but universalising and culture-transforming in aspiration and effect’
(Kahn 2008: 271). Such sophisticated theoretical propositions, I
suggest, enable us to have a more nuanced perspective in exploring
cosmopolitan possibilities, as well as limitations, inherent in existing
processes of identity formation and cultural interaction. How and
under what circumstances do the contestation and reconciliation
between identity claims and cosmopolitan visions take place? Who
supports or undermines ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’ and why do
they do so?

‘Hybridity’, an analogy from biology, is one of the key concepts
in contemporary cultural criticism and has been celebrated as
the antidote to essentialist notions of identity. The term entails
cultural mixing and the emergence of ambiguous identities, which
reject rigid boundaries. According to Friedman (1994: 208; 2000:
83), all cultures are in fact, in various ways, hybrid; therefore any
analysis, which tries to understand hybridity as the convergence of
‘distinct’ cultures is engaging in a form of ‘confused essentialism’. In
other words, for assertions of cultural ‘hybridity’, one might have
to assume that an ‘authentic’ form has to be posited first. The same
applies to religious ‘syncretism’ which presupposes a conceptual
distinction between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ practices (Asad 1993;
Yeoh 2009). Therefore, Rosaldo (1995: xv) suggests we understand
hybridity as ‘on-going conditions of all human cultures, which
contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous
processes of transculturation (two-way borrowing and lending
between cultures)’. Given that all cultures are hybrid in practice, it
is important for us to explain how and why the notions of cultural
purity are still prevalent. Instead of seeing hybridity as an outcome,
I would suggest that it is more insightful to analyse cultural and
religious hybridisation as contested processes between cultural
understandings, religious interpretations, social contexts and
everyday practices.
Also, the distinction between unconscious ‘organic hybridity’ and conscious ‘intentional hybridity’ is crucial for us to distinguish between hybridity as everyday practice and hybridity as symbolic strategy (Bakhtin 1981). For Werbner (1997a: 4–5), ‘organic hybridity’ is a feature of the historical evolution of all cultures through unconscious exchanges and everyday adaptation, while ‘intentional hybridity’ is a conscious effort to create a double consciousness, a ‘collision between differing points of views on the world’ (Bakhtin 1981, cited in Werbner 1997a: 5). In other words, organic or everyday hybridity leads towards fusion and blurs the cultural boundaries; while intentional hybridity tends to draw a new cultural border zone that is ‘double-voiced’ and in which it generates ‘a conversation between mixed but competing voices whose result is not fusion but on-going mutual illumination of their differences’ (Kaup and Rosenthal 2002: xxii).

To contextualise my discussion, I illustrate how some scholars have deployed the analytical concepts discussed above to examine Islamic religiosity and Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia. As an alternative to navigating between outright secularism, bland traditionalism and literalist interpretations of Islam, Kersten (2009) discusses how some Muslim intellectuals create hybrid Islamic discourses to develop cosmopolitan attitudes. In particular, he examines the adaptation of Islam to specific Indonesian settings, which is called ‘Indonesianness’ (keindonesiaan) by Madjid (1987) or ‘indigenisation’ (pribumisasi) by Wahid (2007). According to Kersten (2009), both Nurcholish Madjid (a prominent Muslim thinker) and Abdurrahman Wahid (a former NU leader) are cosmopolitan Muslim intellectuals who not only promote Islamic teachings that are pluralist and tolerant of local cultures, but also form alliances with non-Muslims.

However, such progressive ideas are not uncontested and have been the subject of attacks by some ‘counter-cosmopolitans’ (Appiah 2006, Robinson 2008: 124; for a similar discussion of ‘civil’ and ‘uncivil’ Islam, see Hefner 2000, 2003, 2005).12 Such

12. During my fieldwork, I met many Chinese Muslims who praised Abdurrahman Wahid for his tolerant attitude towards Chinese Indonesians. Yet, I also encountered a couple of informants, who claimed he was a ‘Western agent’ and not a ‘true’ Muslim.
‘counter-cosmopolitan’ Muslims include groups who are strictly scriptural in religious interpretation, conservative in social attitude and sometimes radical in action. They are hostile to non-Muslims, as well as to ‘impure’ and ‘deviant’ Muslim practices. Meanwhile, Kahn (2008) explores the possibilities and limitations of cosmopolitanism among revivalist Muslims in Malaysia. On the one hand, revivalist Islam might have positive implications for its advocacy of social justice and its opposition to racial politics. On the other hand, it might be a suppressive force, which limits artistic, intellectual, personal, religious and sexual freedoms (Kahn 2008: 265–266).

Studying the complexity of Chinese identities in post-1998 Indonesia, Hoon (2006, 2008) suggests hybridity as an alternative to both the discourse of assimilation projected by the New Order regime and the essentialised version of Chineseness promoted by Chinese cultural gatekeepers. Hoon (2008) notices that although the everyday living realities of many Chinese Indonesians are more or less hybrid, the ethnic boundary between Chinese and non-Chinese in Indonesia is still maintained due to ‘racial, class, religious and educational factors’. While he unmistakably criticises the identity assertions of some Chinese leaders for re-enforcing ethnic stereotypes, he does not explore the potential inclusivity of such identity practices.

In an interview discussing his book on the Chinese-Indonesian journalist Kwee Thiam Tjing, Benedict Anderson suggests that ‘the contrast between cosmopolitanism and nationalism is mistaken; it’s actually conjoined’ (Foo 2009: 21). Anderson also describes the cultural negotiations demonstrated in Kwee’s multilingual writings as ‘cosmopolitanism from below’: the idea of being cosmopolitan without needing to travel. Such cultural intermingling and cosmopolitan practices, according to Anderson, are not peculiar to Kwee, but shared by many colonial and post-colonial subjects in different localities, especially among the minorities. Indeed, cosmopolitan practice is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. For instance, Lombard and Salmon (2001) view the cultural interactions of Chinese and local Muslims in 15th and 16th century Java, exemplified in mosque architecture, as a form of ‘cosmopolitan sacred
union’, combining positive contributions of Islamic ideology and Chinese techniques.

I would like to conclude these discussions with a few points. As Knauft (1996) points out, cultural diversity is a site of political struggle, and so to speak of the possibilities of cosmopolitanism, we have to place identity practices in their historical and political settings. Depending on different contexts, identity assertions can be empowering or repressing, inclusive or exclusive, cosmopolitan or ‘counter-cosmopolitan’. Therefore, instead of dichotomies, I view boundary making and crossing, essentialism and hybridity, authenticity and syncretism, particularism and cosmopolitanism as dialectics: they are not necessarily contradicting, but sometimes are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, concepts such as hybridity and cosmopolitanism as I have indicated above are highly contested. In this work, most of the time, I use such terms in a broad sense. For example, hybrid is deployed to imply cultural mixing, while cosmopolitanism is used to indicate openness to difference. While I use the term ‘hybrid’ to describe certain Chinese Muslim cultural practices, I do not mean that there is an ‘authentic’ Chineseness and a ‘pure’ Islamic religiosity, since both Chinese cultures and Islamic traditions in Indonesia and elsewhere are more or less hybrid. I also distinguish the intentional hybridity of Chinese Muslim cultural expression from their everyday hybridity: the former implies the conscious mixing of both Chinese and Islamic elements to manifest a unique identity, while the latter refers to the unconscious mixing and crossing of cultures in everyday life.

Research, fieldwork and reflections

This book encompasses historical research, ethnographic fieldwork, as well as the analysis of media reports (such as newspapers and the internet) and cultural signifiers (such as mosque architecture, language, clothing and naming), to investigate Chinese Muslim identities. Not only does this research cross various disciplinary boundaries, it also traverses a range of boundaries, including national, ethnic and religious one. Below, I describe my research
sites, timeframes and methods, then share some challenges I faced and reflections I made on my fieldwork.

*Research sites, timeframes and methods*

In total, I spent about thirteen months (2008–2009) in Indonesia for this research, including seven months in Jakarta, five months in Surabaya, and about a week respectively in Madura, Central Java and Palembang, South Sumatra. Jakarta and Surabaya were my main fieldwork sites, while the short trip to Palembang gave me some idea of Chinese Muslims outside Java.13 I am aware that my selection of locations might be criticised for being ‘Java-centric’. However, the voices of Chinese Muslims from other parts of Indonesia are not excluded, given that almost one-third of my informants in Jakarta were originally from cities outside Java, such as Medan, Bangka, Makassar and Pontianak.

As mentioned earlier, Chinese Muslims are dispersed minorities and do not form a locally bounded ethno-religious community. My fieldwork, therefore, did not centre on a single locality. Yet, I was aware in conducting multi-sited ethnography of the risk of a lack of in-depth investigation. Thus, my decision to focus on two major cities with a few short visits to other places was to overcome the limitations of both multi-sited fieldwork and geographically bounded ethnography.14 My lengthy periods in Jakarta and Surabaya gave me enough time to have a deeper engagement

13. Jakarta and Surabaya are chosen as the main fieldwork sites, given that both of them are big cities in Indonesia with relatively high Chinese populations. Jakarta is not only the capital city where major political and economic decisions are made, but also a hub for Chinese from different parts of Indonesia and Muslims from different religious affiliations. Surabaya is an important site in which to study Chinese Muslim identities, because PITI Surabaya is the most active branch in Indonesia and the first Chinese-style mosque in the post-New Order period was built there. Yogyakarta was chosen because it is a stronghold for Muhammadiyah, as compared to Surabaya, the base for Nahdlatul Ulama. Meanwhile, I visited Palembang because a Chinese-style mosque was built there and it was the first one outside Java after the collapse of Suharto’s regime.

with my informants and to gather detailed accounts in the field. My short trips to other places, such as Palembang, allowed me to explore the mobility, interconnectivity and dynamics of Chinese Muslims in different localities. This solution in some ways enabled me to ‘compare people, places and problems in a sensible and reasonable way’ and helped to avoid thinness and superficiality (Welz 1998: 188).

My fieldwork research consists of semi-structured formal interviews, spontaneous informal conversation and participant observation. I have good contacts in three major Chinese Muslim associations – PITI, the Karim Oei Foundation (Yayasan Karim Oei) and the Chinese Muslims and Families (MUSTIKA, Muslim Tionghoa dan Keluarga) – as well as with many Chinese Muslim individuals. Their generosity allowed me to attend various Chinese Muslim events, including religious talks, Islamic study sessions (pengajian), Friday prayer sessions, conversion ceremonies, breaking of the fast, cultural celebrations, political events, social gatherings and conferences. All those engagements not only allowed me to get closer to my informants, but also helped me observe their everyday identity negotiation and examine whether ‘what they said’ is consistent with ‘what they did’.15

I conducted 95 recorded semi-structured interviews (not including informal chatting). About one-third of them were with women. I expanded my sources from Chinese Muslim associations to broader Islamic organisations, Chinese associations, universities and personal contacts. My interviewees went beyond Chinese Muslim leaders who were mainly businessmen, to include ordinary Chinese Muslims, who were non-organisation-based, and

15. In Jakarta, I attended Lautze Mosque every Friday for its afternoon prayer sessions and Sunday for its Islamic study sessions; visited the PITI office on Saturday for its Islamic study sessions; and joined activities organised by MUSTIKA in various locations. In Surabaya, I based my fieldwork in Cheng Hoo Mosque, attending both their social and religious activities. The first month of my fieldwork in Surabaya coincided with Ramadan, the fasting month for Muslims, allowing me to join the breaking of fast events almost every day in the mosque. In addition, I occasionally attended various activities, seminars and discussions of Chinese and Muslim Indonesians.
from various backgrounds (both men and women, of difference ages, generations, occupations and socio-economic statuses), to gain balanced views and to allow different voices to be heard. Most of the interviews were conducted in Indonesian, sometimes Mandarin and occasionally English.

Besides making observations and conducting interviews, I also collected various primary and secondary source documents during my fieldwork. With the help of the staff in Chinese Muslim organisations, I managed to collect some of their historical documents, minutes of meetings, bulletins, brochures, media reports and video recordings. I also looked into the conversion narratives of Chinese Muslims, both in printed magazines and online media. In this age of information technology, many Chinese Muslim organisations and preachers have their websites, blogs or facebooks, providing me with much interesting material for analysis.

Fieldwork challenges and reflections

Some fieldwork experiences deserve mention because they might have had an impact on my findings. The first and the most challenging question was how to identify Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, and how to gain access to Chinese Muslims who did not want their identities revealed. This further lead to another dilemma: how to avoid cultural ‘essentialisation’ when searching for Chinese Muslim informants? Eriksen (2002) reminds researchers that ethnicity is not only created by the people we study but also by ourselves as observers. He says, ‘If a researcher looks for ethnicity, he or she will find it – possibly at the cost of missing out on other kinds of relationship which are also “there”’ (Eriksen 2002: 161). Therefore, to study ethnicity without inadvertently contributing to its reproduction, we

16. As a Malaysian, I took some time to pick up Indonesian terms and spoke Indonesian with a slightly different accent. Most of the time, I did not have major language and communication problems.

17. Many young Chinese Indonesians do not speak Chinese. Therefore, those who I interviewed in Mandarin and sometimes in Hakka dialects were mainly older Chinese Muslims.
Chinese Ways of Being Muslim

should not overlook contexts ‘which are not ethnic’. Informed by such a proposition, I reminded myself not to impose the label of ‘Chinese Muslim’ on my informants, and rather allowed them to reveal their diverse subjectivities and identifications.

As already noted, some Indonesians of Chinese descent do not consider themselves as Chinese after converting to Islam. Some were officially Muslim but did not practise Islam, thus they preferred to keep a low profile. During my fieldwork, I also encountered a few informants who were hesitant to talk to me because they thought they were not ‘Chinese Muslims’, worrying that they were not ‘good Muslims’ or ‘authentic Chinese’. To solve this problem, I explained to them that my research was not only concerned with their identities per se, but also their life stories and social experiences. More importantly, I did not take their Chineseness and Islamic religiosity for granted. For example, at the end of the interview, a few of them told me that they did not see themselves as ‘Chinese Muslim’ despite having Chinese descent or appearance.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, most people I met were helpful and cooperative. It was not uncommon for some converts to approach me to be interviewed, so that their stories could be heard, and some also saw this as a way of preaching Islam. Except for some businessmen, many Chinese Muslims eagerly shared their conversion experiences and religious opinions. While a few interviewees preferred to remain anonymous, many did not mind if I used their real names. Some informants, who were initially willing to use their real names, mentioned that they did not want to be quoted on a certain controversial statement they had made.

18. According to my conversation with Nanta, who was researching female Chinese Muslims, many of her informants talked to her because they were friends and knew each other before. They were reluctant to meet other researchers, either because they wanted to conceal their Chineseness or they did not want their religiosity to be scrutinised.

19. Let me cite a few reasons why some ‘Chinese Muslims’ were hesitant to talk to me – ‘I am just a small figure and also I am not a good Muslim’, ‘I am a new convert and do not know many things about Islam yet’, ‘Although I look Chinese, I am culturally Javanese, are you sure you want to interview me?’, ‘I am not really a Chinese. My father is a Chinese and my mother is a Javanese. I grew up as a Javanese. I do not qualify as a Chinese Muslim.’
Introduction

Therefore, this book uses both real names and pseudonyms.20 To maintain the integrity of the work, I use real names to refer to my informants as long as they permitted me to do so and especially if they were public figures, such as organisation leaders, businessmen, politicians and preachers. I use pseudonyms when an informant preferred to remain unknown and to protect my informants from possible repercussions from their ‘sensitive’ statements.21

Another potential influence on my fieldwork was my own identity. As a non-Muslim Chinese from Malaysia, I was both an ‘outsider’ to them because of my different nationality and religion, and an ‘insider’ because of sharing the same ethnicity.22 As a non-Indonesian, I needed some time to get familiar with Indonesian languages and to gain trust from my informants. Yet, as a non-local, I also had a certain advantage compared to Indonesian researchers. Some informants felt more ‘secure’ to share their opinions with me on ‘sensitive’ issues, such as their negative perceptions of non-Chinese, their experiences of discrimination, their ‘un-Islamic’ practices and their criticisms of Indonesian authorities.

With few exceptions,23 as a non-Muslim, my attendance in Chinese Muslim circles was well received.24 Many tried to convert me to Islam, both verbally and by example, both directly and indirectly, yet they were not insistent or impolite.25 There were at least three

20. In all but Chapter 7, most of the names I use in this book are real.
21. Examples of ‘sensitive’ statements are those by Chinese Muslims who said they eat pork at home, gamble at casinos or are involved in certain radical religious groups.
22. As a male researcher, I had both advantages and disadvantages accessing female informants. Some female converts, especially those who are religiously conservative, were reserved about talking to me, while other female respondents accepted my invitation warmly, treating me as their ‘younger brother’ or ‘son.’
23. These exceptions include, a Chinese convert who was worried I was a spy from the Australian government, and another informant who questioned my research aims, by saying, ‘You are here everyday and ask us a lot of questions. But are you really interested in Islam or are you just treating us as your research objects, then you will forget us and Islam after you have finished your research.’
24. I was not only welcomed to their religious activities, some informants also bought me lunch, invited me to their homes for dinner, took me sightseeing and even tried to matchmake me.
25. Most of the time, I did not reject their invitation to Islam, but kept smiling or replied with ‘Isnyaallah’ (God willing) or ‘masih tunggu hidayah’ (waiting for God’s
forms of *dakwah* (preaching) that I encountered: ‘direct invitation’, ‘indirect persuasion’ and ‘non-verbal preaching’. ‘Direct invitation’ included those who invited me to observe Islamic practices, such as fasting and praying, or to recite the *syahadat*, the testimony of Islamic conversion. Instead of ‘direct invitation’, many Chinese Muslims adopted ‘indirect persuasion’, by promoting positive images of Islam, sharing their benefits of being a Muslim, and comparing Islam with their previous religions. Their *dakwah* went beyond verbal expression to their generosity, offering me various forms of assistance. As one of my informants told me, ‘It is a form of *dakwah*. By acting as a good Muslim and showing our friendliness to a non-Muslim, we hope you will get the *hidayah* (God’s guidance), or at least, you will have a better perception of Islam.’

In short, being a non-Muslim, to some extent, facilitated rather than obstructed my research.

In addition, my Chinese background and ability to speak Mandarin enabled me to form close connections with some Chinese Muslims and to gather information not available to non-Chinese researchers. Speaking to me in Mandarin, a couple of informants revealed their ‘real’ motives for Islamic conversions and their ‘un-Islamic’ practices, such as eating pork at home. Other informants shared their experience of being a minority and how they coped with it. Yet, my Chinese ethnicity also sometimes influenced how my informants responded to me, and how they acted in my presence. Some of them intentionally emphasised their Chinese identity to me as a form of *dakwah*, to show that Islam and Chineseness was not incompatible. For example, a female convert asked me to address her by her Chinese name, while others called her by her Indonesian name. Acknowledging the influence of my identity during fieldwork does not make this work less convincing;

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26. Besides such ‘Islamic’ encounters, I also went through some ‘un-Islamic’ experiences in the field. For example, I interviewed a Chinese Muslim girl in a pub; a Muslim businessman offered me wine; a female convert invited me to gamble; and a Muslim man suggested I visit Dolly, a red-light district in Surabaya.
instead it is, in some ways, consistent with my proposition that Chinese Muslim identities are not fixed but situational.

**Organisation of this book**

This book consists of eight chapters. This introduction has located the study of Chinese Muslim identities in a broader social context. The following chapters (Chapters 2 to 7) analyse the constructions and negotiations of Chinese Muslim identities, from six different but interrelated aspects. Chapter 2 is a temporal journey. It begins with a brief historical survey of the continuities and changes of Chinese Muslim identities throughout different periods. It further discusses the rearticulation of their historical memories in Indonesia today: who imagines the histories, how the histories have been represented and for what reasons. I argue that, by promoting the role of Admiral Cheng Ho in spreading Islam and claiming that some of the Walisongo (nine Muslims saints popularly credited with bringing Islam to Java) have Chinese descent, Chinese Muslims seek to redefine their minority position, to preach Islam to non-Muslims, and to improve the image of the ethnic Chinese.

Built around a discussion of Cheng Hoo Mosques, Chapter 3 explores the spatial formation of Chinese Muslim identities. I suggest that Chinese-style mosques are a form of negotiation between transnational imaginations and local dynamics to manifest a unique Chinese Muslim identity. I also argue that the Chinese Muslim leaders’ efforts in building Chinese-style mosques in various cities might contribute to the emergence of a rather new translocal ethno-religious imagination within Indonesia. By demonstrating the inclusive architectural design and social activities of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, I describe it as a local cosmopolitan space, allowing Muslims and non-Muslims from various ethnic groups to get together.

Chapter 4 analyses the popularity of Chinese Muslim preachers. I argue that there is little correlation between the ‘commodified’ identity performances in public and the everyday practised identities of Chinese Muslim preachers. In addition, the popularity
of Chinese preachers reflects the paradox of identity consumption: that the diversity of styles is not always accompanied by a plurality of discourses. As I have described, while Chinese preachers help to promote a positive image of the ethnic Chinese and a culturally diverse expression of Islam, their preaching does not necessarily break down ethnic stereotypes and pluralise the substance of religious discourses.

In Chapter 5, I examine the identity politics of Chinese Muslims in democratising Indonesia. Firstly, I review the strategic solidarity and internal dynamics of Chinese Muslim organisations, such as PITI and the Karim Oei Foundation. Secondly, I explore Chinese Muslims’ social and religious participation beyond such organisations. Thirdly, I examine the engagement of Chinese Muslims in electoral politics. Despite attempts to stabilise Chinese Muslims as a distinctive group, I argue that there are competing identity mobilisations amongst them for various reasons, including Islamic preaching, ethnic empowerment and personal political or economic interests.

Through the celebration of Chinese New Year (Imlek) in mosques, Chapter 6 studies how Chinese Muslims accommodate cultural elements in Islamic preaching, a practice they call ‘dakwah pendekatan budaya’ (preaching through cultural approaches). Such an event is not without controversy, as it raises debates about whether Imlek is halal or haram (permitted or prohibited according to Islamic law). I therefore examine how and under what conditions Muslim leaders offer a fatwa (a religious opinion), and how Chinese Muslims respond to such offerings. I propose that religious hybridisation is a contested process, stemming from the interaction of religious texts, social contexts and everyday practices.

Focusing on naming practices, female veiling experiences and life stories, Chapter 7 examines the political economies of religious conversion and shifting ethnicity, as well as the cultural politics of flexible piety and multiple identifications. I investigate the multiple ways of being ‘Chinese Muslim’ and reveal a range of subjectivities, self-expressions and identity negotiations in their everyday lives. I also unfold multiple, selective and sometimes inconsistent Islamic piety among converts according to their various living conditions.
and religious understandings. This affirms that Muslim religiousities do not only rely on an interpretation of Islam, but also on the contingent political, social and economic circumstances of the converts’ understanding of Islamic teachings.

Pulling together the main arguments from each chapter, and locating them in a broader context, this book concludes by examining the possibilities and limitations of cosmopolitan Islam and inclusive Chineseness in contemporary Indonesia. I argue that the mediation between a growing Islamic religiosity and the existing cultural diversity in Indonesia is leading to a form of Islamic piety which is both assertive and inclusive.
CHAPTER 2

Remembering the Past for the Present: Rearticulating Chinese Muslim Histories

Sunan Ampel, Sunan Drajad, Sunan Muria, and Sunan Bonang are Chinese Muslims, including myself. Therefore, we as Chinese Muslims should not be ashamed to be called Chinese, since our ancestors spread Islam in Java and Sumatra, followed by most residents.1

Former Indonesian President and past NU Chairman, Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur, reiterated that he himself had Chinese ancestry, in an international seminar entitled Cheng Ho, Walisongo dan Muslim Tionghoa Indonesia Di Masa Lalu, Kini dan Esok (Cheng Ho, Walisongo and Chinese Muslims in Indonesia: Past, Present and Future), which was held in Surabaya on 26–27 April 2008, by the Cheng Hoo Foundation (YHMCHI, Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia).2

1. This phrase is quoted from a report ‘Cheng Ho dan Walisongo dalam Sejarah Bangsa Diseminarka’ in Komunitas, edition 40, April 2008. The original Indonesian text is ‘Sunan Ampel, Sunan Drajad, Suna Muria, dan Sunan Bonang adalah Muslim Tionghoa, termasuk saya sendiri. Maka kita sebagai kaum Tionghoa tidak boleh malu dikatakan Tionghoa. Karena nenek moyang kitalah yang menyebarkan agama Islam di tanah Jawa dan Sumatera yang dianut mayoritas penduduknya.’ I myself also witnessed the speech of Gus Dur during the seminar in Surabaya. In various locations, Gus Dur has openly stated that he had Chinese heritage. Abdurrahman Wahid claimed that he is a descendant of Tan Kim Han or Sheik Abdul al-Shini Qodir, a Chinese Muslim who helped Raden Patah seize power from the Majapahit kingdom and founded the Islamic Kingdom of Demak (Al-Qurtuby 2003: 125). However, Gus Dur downplayed his Chinese descent when interviewed by me personally. Instead of specifically claiming that he has Chinese blood, he told me that most Indonesians, including himself, have mixed blood (interview, Abdurrahman Wahid, 10 January 2009). On other occasions, Gus Dur also said that he has Arabic as well as European ancestors.

2. Admiral Cheng Ho (1371–1433), or Zheng He, was also known as Sam Poo in Indonesia. He was a Hui Muslim mariner, explorer, diplomat and fleet admiral, who made expeditions (1405–1433) to Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Africa during the Ming Dynasty. For further information about Cheng Ho and
Gus Dur’s statement on his Chinese heritage has been quoted by some Chinese Muslim leaders to show that their identity is not a new phenomenon. By promoting Cheng Ho’s Islamic identity and the Walisongo’s Chineseness, Chinese Muslim leaders want to emphasise the Chinese Muslims’ contribution to preaching Islam and their role in bridging ethnic differences in Indonesia. Many non-Muslim Chinese leaders and non-Chinese Muslims also endorse these claims. The former do so to emphasise the participation of ethnic Chinese in the Indonesian nation, while the latter do so to bolster claims about the inclusivity and plurality of Indonesian Islam.

This chapter consists of two main parts, ‘Chinese Muslims as historical construct’ and ‘the historical rearticulation of Chinese Muslims’. The first part provides a historical survey of Chinese Muslims, while the second examines how they represent their histories in contemporary Indonesia. To contextualise the formation of Chinese Muslim identities in a longer timeframe, I begin this chapter with a brief historical account of the change and continuity of their identities throughout different periods in Indonesia. There have been many writings on Chinese Muslim histories and their roles in disseminating Islam (Ali 2007; Al-Qurtuby 2003; de Graaf & Pigeaud 1984; Kong 2000; Lombard & Salmon 2001; Muljana 2005; and Tanggok 2006). Therefore, instead of discussing the histories in detail, this chapter will focus on exploring the construction of historical memory of Chinese Muslims today in Indonesia: who imagines the histories, which parts of the histories are rearticulated, how the histories have been represented and for what reasons.

his expeditions to Southeast Asia, see ‘Admiral Zheng He & Southeast Asia’ (Suryadinata 2005), ‘Zheng He and the Treasure Fleet 1405–1433’ (Rozario 2005), ‘Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia’ (Tan 2009) and ‘Muslim Tionghoa Cheng Ho: Misteri Perjalanan Muhibah di Nusantara’ (Kong 2000). Walisongo, refers to the nine saints who are mythologised as the first persons to spread Islam in Java. ‘Sembilan Wali & Siti Jenar’, by Ajidarma (2008) is an interesting photographic and historical book about the nine saints. The nine saints are Raden Patah, Sunan Ngampel Denta, Sunan Giri, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Kalijaga, Sunan Gunung Jati, Sunan Muria and Sunan Drajat.
As I argue, such selected remembering of history is not to resurrect a ‘pure’ past, but to give meaning to the present. Indeed, identities are always imagined through remembering (Halbwachs 1980), which memory can be potentially political: ‘the power to manage the past to order the present’ (Storey 2003: 85). Therefore, although describing the efforts of Chinese Muslim leaders in promoting their version of historical memory, I do not necessarily regard their claims as historically accurate. The frequent interaction between Chineseness and Islam in the past is undeniable, as exemplified by the Chinese influences in some old mosques in Indonesia, yet the contribution of Chinese Muslims in spreading Islam has always been contested, if not disputed.

History, identity and politics

Studies of identity formation need to be historically contextualised, given that cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories. According to Hall (1993: 394), cultural identities are subject to the continuous interplay of history, culture and power, as they undergo constant transformation and are far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past. Furthermore, the remembering of the past can be political and selective, since the past can be reinterpreted for political purposes (Boyarin 1994) and memories can be revised to suit current identities (Gillis 1994). Indeed, as argued by Friedman (1994: 118), making history is a way of producing

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3. Although most of the historical writings I refer to in this chapter support the Chinese role in Islamisation, it does not mean that I totally endorse their claims. There is little dispute that Cheng Ho was a Muslim, but his contribution to the Islamisation of Indonesia is contested. Although there is recognition that some Walisongo might have had Chinese heritage, how many and to what extent is debatable. However, I will not go into these debates. Instead of searching for historical truth, this chapter is focused on how histories are constructed for present purposes.

4. It is generally agreed by many scholars that Islam came to Indonesia through Arab and Indian Muslims, but there is a lack of consensus among historians about the contribution of Chinese Muslims due to the lack of convincing evidence. For a discussion of the coming of Islam to Indonesia, see Ricklefs (1979).
REMEMBERING THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT

identity, as it produces a relation between what has supposedly occurred in the past and the present state of affairs.

Halbwachs (1980) further argues that remembering is always a practice of reconstruction, in which what is significant is not the ‘facts’, but how the ‘facts’ are interpreted to make meaning in the present. Such historical narratives are always embodied in for example mnemonic artifacts, forms of commemorations, museums, textbooks: what historian Pierra Nora (1989: 7) calls ‘sites of memory’. Similarly, Storey (2003: 84) coined the term ‘memory industries’ to refer to cultural industries concerned with articulating the past – not limited to heritage sites, but also mass media and popular culture. As he points out, ‘The memory industries produce representation (“cultural memories”) with which we are invited to think, feel and recognise the past’ (Storey 2003: 83).

As with other identities, Chineseness in Indonesia is also a product of history, shaped by government policies and past traumatic events. Budianta (2007: 172) points out that ‘To write that history – be it in a critical, alternative way – is to participate in the creation of Chineseness. One can confront it, challenge it, redefine it, but it will always haunt.’ Using Appadurai’s concept of ‘imagined nostalgia’ (1996: 77), Dawis (2009) shows how some Chinese Indonesians experience their sense of belonging, which was suppressed by the New Order regime; and imagine some sort of cultural connection to the ‘mythic homeland’, Mainland China, to which they have never been, through the consumption of transnational Chinese films. Since the downfall of Suharto in 1998, some Chinese leaders have striven by various means to reclaim their displaced Chineseness, such as through the building of the Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park in the ‘Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park’ (TMII, Taman Mini Indonesian Indah).

In this chapter, I describe and analyse how Chinese Muslim leaders rearticulate their histories for present purposes through various ‘sites of memory’ (mosques, libraries), popular culture (songs, drama serials, preaching), mass media (newspapers, publications) and seminars. Such efforts show their creativity in engaging history for their present interests, albeit sometimes at the
expense of historical facts. In other words, on the one hand, such rearticulation of history can empower the minority through selective memory; on the other hand, it can simplify their complex past. Before examining such memory construction in post-New Order Indonesia, I begin this chapter with a brief historical contour of Chinese Muslim identities.

**Chinese Muslims as an historical construct**

Chinese Muslim identities have had different dynamics through different periods of history. In this section, I discuss five transformations: from a hybrid Sino-Javanese Muslim culture in the 15th and 16th centuries to its decline during the Dutch colonial period, from organising Chinese Muslim associations during the early independence period to the erasing of Chineseness under the New Order regime; and recently the re-emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural expression in post-1999 Indonesia. This survey might not capture all the complexities of Chinese Muslim histories, yet is important to locate the recent manifestation of their identities in a broader view and to understand that encounters between the Chinese and Muslims in Indonesia have long historical roots.

**The pre-colonial period: Chinese Muslims as hybrid culture**

Chinese Muslims are not new to Indonesia. There is some evidence of Chinese Muslims existence in Java from as early as the 15th century, and of their engagement in Islamic preaching from that time (Al-Qurtuby 2003; Ali 2007). According to historians Lombard and Salmon (2001), the interaction of Chinese and local culture at that time was reflected in the mosque architecture. Termed as ‘Peranakan Muslim subculture’, they see such interaction as a form of cosmopolitan ‘sacred union’, which combined positive contributions of Islamic ideology and Chinese techniques.

There are a few historical texts which mention the existence of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia before the Dutch colonial period. A Chinese Muslim, Ma Huan, who accompanied Admiral Cheng
Ho on his series of expeditions to the South Seas (1405–1433), reported in his book, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores (1433)* (Ma 1970), that there were already ethnic Chinese in Java at that time and that some of them were Muslims. Yet, the report did not mention the preaching of Islam by Cheng Ho at that time. Nevertheless, using local histories and other sources, Budiman (1979), Kong (2000) and Tan (2009) argue that Cheng Ho and his followers either directly or indirectly disseminated Islam in Java.

A controversial text, *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, is often cited to support the role of Chinese Muslims spreading Islam in Java. The Annals were first edited by M. O. Parlindungan as an appendix to his book on Sumatran legends, *Tuanku Rao* (Parlindungan 2007). The title of this appendix is *Peranan orang-\textit{orang} \textit{Tionghoa/Islam/Hanafi di dalam Perkembangan Agama Islam di Pulau Jawa, 1411–1564} [The Role Played by Hanafi Muslim Chinese in the Flourishing of Islam in Java]. This text was reproduced, translated into English and commented upon in a book by de Graaf and Pigeaud (1984). M. C. Ricklefs, who edited the book, although recognising the efforts of both authors, questions the authenticity of the Malay Annals.\(^5\)

By referring to the Malay Annals and other local historical texts such as *Babad Tanah Jawi* and *Serat Kanda*, Slamet Muljana, a Javanese historian, in his controversial book entitled *Runtuhnya Kerajaan Hindu-Jawa dan Timbulnya Negara-negara Islam di Nusantara* [The Decline of the Hindu-Javanese Kingdom and the Rise of an Islamic State in the Archipelago] also suggests that Chinese Muslims were important in the establishment of

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\(^{5}\) According to Parlindungan, he received the text of the Annals from a Dutchman, Poortman. Poortman claimed that the Annals were found in the temples in Semarang and Cirebon. However, serious efforts by Dutch scholars to identify this person have come to nothing. Therefore, Ricklefs wonders whether Poortman might not be just a creature of Parlindungan’s imagination, or perhaps an elaborate whimsy. Some historians like Denys Lombard and Sartono Kartodirjo also doubt the existence of these documents in the two temples in Semarang and Cirebon, and therefore reject the idea that most of the saints were Chinese \textit{Peranakan} (Ali 2007). Meanwhile, according to Berg (1989), most of the saints were of Arab Hadrami descent.
Islamic kingdoms in Java, and that some of the Muslim saints in Java, the Walisongo, were of Chinese origin (Muljana 2005). His controversial book, published in 1968, was withdrawn from circulation in 1971 by the Indonesian authorities, but was recently republished by The Institute for Islamic and Social Studies (LKiS, Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial) in 2005. Another controversial Javanese text, called Serat Dermagandul, also considered some of the Walisongo to be of Chinese Origin (Ali 2007). Although the reliability of these local records should be scrutinised as to whether they are ‘historical fact’ or ‘legend,’ Leo (2005: 91) proposes that they should not be ignored since they are part of the collective memory of the people, which are important in providing clues to the relationship between Chinese and Muslims in the past.

Al-Qurtuby (2003) in his book, Arus Cina-Islam Java [Chinese-Islam-Javanese Flows] has attempted to gather more sources to support the case for the contribution of Chinese Muslims in Islamisation. According to him, the existence of Chinese Muslims in the early propagation of Islam is proved by Western scholars, Chinese sources, local Javanese texts and oral traditions as discussed above, but also by the strong Chinese influence on the architectural designs of old mosques and tombs in Java, such as the tombs of Sunan Giri in Gresik, the design of Cirebon Palace and the architecture of Demak Mosque in Central Java (Al-Qurtuby 2003). Two related examples in Jakarta are Angke Mosque and Kebon Jeruk Mosque. Angke Mosque has some Chinese ornaments on its gate and ropes like that of a Chinese temple, while there is a Muslim tombstone in Kebon Jeruk Mosque that has Chinese and Arabic scripts.

Supported by these historical sources and religious sites, Al-Qurtuby (2003) argues that there was a ‘Sino-Javanese Muslim culture’ across Java, as a result of the interaction between Cheng

6. According to Ali (2007), the question of whether or not some or most of the nine saints in Java were of Chinese origin is a controversial one, thus such claims need to be further supported by more evidence before being accepted as ‘historical facts’. What has been less controversial, however, is the argument that one saint, Raden Fatah, the founder of Demak Kingdom, was a son of a Javanese Prabu Brawijaya and a Chinese wife (Ali 2007: 19).
Ho and other Chinese Muslims with the local Javanese. Also, Kong (2000) has noted that some Chinese religious sites might have links to Admiral Cheng Ho, such as Ancol Temple in Jakarta and Sam Poo Kong (Cheng Ho Temple, also known as Gedung Batu) in Semarang. Some even suggest that such temples once functioned as mosques (Tanggok 2006). In addition, Tan (2009) describes cultural contacts between China and Indonesia, as well as the development of Islam in China during the 13th to 15th centuries, to support his claim about the close relations between Cheng Ho’s expedition and Islam in Southeast Asia. In my opinion, all these sources have convincingly suggested that there is a close interaction between Chineseness and Islam in Indonesia, especially Java in the past, yet still fall short of proving the significant role of Chinese Muslims in the preaching of Islam at that time. In other words, such sources, to a certain extent, might have exaggerated the Chinese influence on the development of Islam in Java.

According to The (1993), before the arrival of the Dutch there were many Chinese who converted to Islam as a way of integrating themselves into Javanese society, by marrying locals and adopting Javanese names so as to be able to move up the social and political ladder. It was also not uncommon for them to assimilate into the local majority group. However, with political developments accompanying Dutch colonialism, this form of cultural interaction between Chinese and Muslims went into decline. Therefore, the generations of Chinese Muslims are difficult to trace since most of them eventually assimilated, and there was a breakdown of the ‘Sino-Javanese’ Muslim culture. There were many factors causing this changing situation, including (a) the increased power of the Dutch colonial regime, (b) the changing politics in China, (c) the more orthodox turn of Islam, and (d) the increasing arrival of Chinese women and the rise of Chinese nationalism. The breakdown of the ‘Sino-Javanese’ Muslim culture meant that the ethnic Chinese were then mostly non-Muslim and were perceived by some indigenous Indonesians as significant ‘others’ and unassimilated ‘foreigners’.
The divide and rule policies of the Dutch led to the drawing of stricter boundaries between Chinese and native Indonesians, as well as to reducing the number of conversions of ethnic Chinese to Islam. Benedict Anderson argued that it was Dutch colonial policy which artificially created a ‘Chinese minority’ in the then Netherlands East Indies (noted in Ang 2001b: 33). In terms of civil status, the Dutch created three racial categories, each with different legal rights and privileges: the Europeans were at the top, Foreign Orientals (mainly Chinese, but also Arabs and Indians) were in the middle and Natives were at the bottom. This special status gave the ethnic Chinese the impression that the social status of the ‘indigenous’ Indonesian was inferior (Reid 1996). Since Islam was commonly associated with the ‘indigenous’ Indonesians, many ethnic Chinese considered that converting to Islam would downgrade their social status (Skinner 1996). At the same time, Dutch policies preferred to keep the ethnic Chinese from intermingling with locals and converting to Islam. As a result of these policies, the ethnic Chinese became an intermediary class who were mainly involved in economic activities and resided in certain districts. Some ‘indigenous’ Indonesians increasingly held negative perceptions towards Chinese Indonesians, such as separating from ‘majority’ Indonesians and exploiting Indonesian resources.

Despite the Dutch policies, there were still some ethnic Chinese who converted to Islam, mainly for security and economic considerations. After the mass killings of Chinese by Dutch troops and local soldiers in Jakarta in 1740, many converted to Islam to avoid becoming victims. Others converted for economic reasons, so that they would be considered ‘natives’ and thus liable for lower taxes. This led the Dutch to take further action to prevent the religious conversion of ethnic Chinese, as it was producing large losses for the colonial administration (Lombard and Salmon, 2003: 22). For example, in 1745, Chinese converts were prohibited from assimilating with local Muslims and obliged to pay higher taxes.
The Dutch colonialists also worried that a close interaction between ethnic Chinese and the locals could destabilise the Dutch colonial power. In order to segregate converts from local Muslims, the Dutch appointed a special kapitan\(^7\) to lead the Chinese Muslims and built Krukut Mosque specifically for converts (Lombard and Salmon, 2003: 23).\(^8\)

During my fieldwork, many Chinese Muslim leaders blamed Dutch colonial rule for fewer Chinese converting to Islam. Some of them saw the Dutch colonial era as the darkest period in the history of Chinese Indonesians in general and Chinese Muslims in particular (interview, Syarif Tanujaya, 9 Jun 2008). Therefore, for them, it is important to emphasise the history of Chinese Muslims before the arrival of the Dutch as a means of repositioning themselves in contemporary Indonesia and of preaching Islam to ethnic Chinese. I will discuss in more detail how Chinese Muslims rearticulate their historic memories in the second part of this chapter. It is also important to note that there are other reasons contributing to the decrease in Chinese conversions to Islam, such as the increasing strict orthodoxy of Islam and the rise of Chinese nationalism after the 19th century (Jacobsen 2005). The growing assertive form of Islam which required Muslims to observe their religion more rigidly, such as not eating pork and abandoning deity worship, no doubt further discouraged Chinese Indonesians from becoming Muslims.

The relationship between ethnic Chinese and local Muslims also worsened after the Java War (1825–1830) and the attacks of Sarekat Islam (1912). During the height of the Java War, Diponegoro, a Javanese leader, took an uncompromising attitude toward ethnic Chinese. He was said to have promulgated an edict ordering the Chinese in certain districts to convert or face the death penalty (Lombard and Salmon, 2001: 197). He also required an immediate circumcision for those men declaring themselves to be Muslim. In 1905, Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI, the Islamic Trade Union)

\(^7\) Kapitan refers to the leader of Chinese, Arab and other ethnic groups under Dutch colonial rule.

\(^8\) For details about Dutch attitudes towards Chinese Muslims, see Lombard and Salmon (2003: 22–23)
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was founded by some native Muslim businessmen to protect their business interests against better-established Chinese merchants. In 1912, SDI reorganised under the name of Sarekat Islam (SI). In the same year, it launched a boycott of Chinese dealers that turned into riots against the Chinese a few days later, around Surakarta and Central Java (Shiraishi 1990; Azra 1994). Such events reinforced negative stereotypes among Indonesians. For many Chinese Indonesians, Islam was perceived as incompatible with Chineseness and even ‘anti-Chinese’. Meanwhile, for some Muslim Indonesians, the Chinese were associated with social exclusivity and economic dominance. The New Order regime manipulated these stereotypes and they still persist in Indonesian society today.

From the 1900s to independence: grouping Chinese Muslims

Despite the tensions mentioned above, Islamic conversion among Chinese Indonesians did not stop and some Chinese Muslims became involved in various local anti-colonial and religious movements (Ali 2007). In the early 1930s, there was an increase in Islamic proselytising by Chinese Muslims to convert non-Muslim Chinese (Lombard and Salmon, 2001). In Sulawesi, Ong Kie Ho founded the Islamic Party (Partai Islam) and was later deported to Java in 1932. Despite the arrest of Ong Kie Ho, the movement continued in Makassar, where in around 1933 the Indonesian Muslim Chinese Party (Partai Tionghoa Islam Indonesia) was established, which aimed to increase the status of ethnic Chinese through Islamic conversion. Meanwhile in Medan, a Chinese Muslim Association (PIT, Persatuan Islam Tionghoa) was established by Yap A Siong or Haji Abdussomad with a few companions in 1936. Through

9. Muhammad Ali (2007) suggests that despite these tensions there were a fair number of Chinese Muslims involved in local anti-colonial wars and nationalist movements, including Johan Muhammad Chai, a Chinese Muslim who signed the Youth Oath (Sumpah Pemuda) in 1928. Discussing the religiosity of Chinese Muslims, Ali (2007) also suggests that, by the early 20th century, there were different religious orientations among them, ranging from syncretic, orthodox to political Islam. Such diversity in religiosity indicates that Chinese Muslims have integrated into local cultures in various ways.
such organisations, they tried to express their Islamic and Chinese identities at the same time.

After Indonesia gained independence, the Chinese Muslim Association PIT moved its headquarters from Medan to Jakarta, under the leadership of Abdul Karim Oei Tjeng Hien. In 1961, PIT merged with the Bengkulu-based Muslim Chinese Association (PTI, Persatuan Tionghoa Islam) led by Kho Goan Tjin, which became the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (PITI, Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia). PITI aimed to preach Islam to Chinese, as well as promote better relations between Chinese and Muslim Indonesians. During its earlier period, almost all of the PITI board members were ethnic Chinese and there was a momentum expressing Chinese Muslim identity. However, the change in Indonesian politics after 1965 forced PITI to downplay its Chinese identity.

Abdul Karim Oei (1905–1982), the co-founder and the leader of PITI, was one of the most significant and prominent Chinese Muslims during this period. He was a successful businessman, politician and preacher. Born in Padang as a Christian, he converted to Islam in 1931, aged 26. From that time, he was actively involved in Muslim circles and developed close relationships with local Muslims. He also formed a close relationship with the Indonesian President Sukarno and the Muslim leader Buya Hamka. He was described by Junus Jahya as a role model for Chinese Muslims in Indonesia because he had ‘3 in 1 quality’ (Jahja 2005), which is ‘Indonesian Nationalist, Faithful Muslim and Successful Entrepreneur’ (Nasionalist Indonesia, Muslim Taat dan Pengusaha Sukses). He was once a branch leader of Muhammadiyah, the head of its economic council (1964–1973) and a member of the Masyumi Party Council (1957–60). He was also a Masyumi member for the House of Representatives representing ethnic Chinese (1956–1959).10

During Sukarno’s presidency, the Indonesian cabinet had several Chinese Muslims as high-ranking ministers, such as Lee Kiat Teng/Ali Mohammad who was minister of health from 1953 to 1955, Tan

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10. For more details about Abdul Karim Oei, see his autobiography (Oei 1982) and Suryadinata (1993).
The New Order period: assimilation and Chinese Muslims as transitional identities

The momentum of expressing Chinese Muslim identities during the early independence period came to a halt when Suharto assumed power in 1966. The allegations that Chinese Indonesians were linked to the People’s Republic of China and their involvement in the September 1965 abortive coup determined the fate of the Chinese in New Order Indonesia. ‘Chineseness’ was perceived by the Suharto regime as a ‘problem’, known as the ‘Chinese Problem’ or ‘Masalah Cina’. Chinese Indonesians were accused of undermining the nation’s solidarity, due to their perceived economic domination and social exclusivity. In order to ‘solve’ the ‘problem’, the regime systematically repressed any expression of Chinese ethnic, cultural and religious identities; and at the same time marginalised ethnic Chinese in all social, educational and political arenas. Thus, except for economic activities, Chinese Indonesians had limited space for cultural expression and political involvement. Chinese schools, newspapers and organisations were all banned and ethnic Chinese were forced to adopt ‘Indonesian’ names (Suryadinata 1997). Yet, though discrimination against the Chinese continued in most aspects of public life, some businessmen enjoyed economic privileges through their connections to the Suharto regime. Such policies, as argued by Hoon (2008), were to maintain Chinese Indonesians as ethnic ‘others’ as compared to the ‘indigenous’ citizens, and further reinforced perceptions that Chinese Indonesians were socially exclusive and economically better off.

The New Order government also actively promoted religious affiliation in order to prevent the re-emergence of communism.
Every Indonesian was required to declare a religious belief, choosing one of the six religions recognised by the regime. In 1965, Confucianism was officially recognised as a religion together with Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism and Hinduism, but in 1979, the Ministry of Religion declared Confucianism not a religion. In order to escape accusations of being communist or exclusivist, many ethnic Chinese converted to religions that were observed by majority Indonesians. Most became Christians, but some also became Muslims. Conversion to Islam was seen by some assimilation advocates as the finishing touch to assimilation (*pembauran secara tuntas*), in which the Chinese could liberate themselves from the status of non-indigenous and escape social discrimination (*The 1990*).

At the same time, the Suharto regime endorsed a military-backed ‘Assimilation Program’ (*Program Pembauran*), which suggested the idea of the eventual disappearance of the ethnic Chinese as a cultural community and their absorption into local cultural groups. Such ‘assimilationist’ policies also had an impact on the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association, PITI. After 1965, there was a change in the structure and membership of the board. In order to get broader

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11. President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) in 2000 abrogated Suharto’s 1967 Presidential Instruction, which banned the open celebration of Chinese religion, belief and customary practices. In 2006, under the government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Confucianism was again officially recognised as one of the formal religions of Indonesia (Pausacker 2007). For more detail on the development of Confucianism in Indonesia, see Coppel (2002) and Suryadinata (1998).

12. *Pembauran* is a contested term. It can carry different meanings. In general, it means mixing or blending, but during the New Order it implied the assimilation of ethnic Chinese into local communities. However, the *pembauran* program in the Suharto period is contradictory: on the one hand, it aims to erase Chineseness; but on the other hand, it retains the official discrimination of ethnic Chinese, including the *Peranakan* who have more or less assimilated. In post-New Order Indonesia, *pembauran* is sometimes still used by some Chinese Muslims, but in a different way. As one of my informants said: one can *membaur* or blend well with the local community without losing his or her Chinese cultural identity. In other words, *pembauran* used by Chinese Muslim leaders today has similar connotations to the ‘integration’ concept, which demands that Chinese be accepted as an ethnic group under the nationalist principles of ‘Unity in Diversity’. For further discussion of assimilation and integration debates among Chinese Indonesians, see Purdey (2003).
official support, many military leaders were included as advisers for PITI and the composition of its board became more ethnically mixed. Among the new board members were Letjen H. Sudirman, a counsellor and Buya Hamka, an adviser. In order to be able to preach Islam to ethnic Chinese who still read and spoke Mandarin, PITI requested permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs on April 1972 to print the Qur’an and publish a *dakwah* magazine in Mandarin. This request was denied by the then Minister of Religious Affairs H. A. Mukti Ali, due to the government’s assimilation policy, which held that the use of the Chinese language strengthened ethnic separateness.

Later, in the same year, the Prosecutor General prohibited the use of ‘Tionghoa’ in the name of the PITI, as it could be an indication of ‘exclusivity’. Ten days later, the organisation changed its name to Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam (Islamic Faith Cultivator Association, the abbreviation remained PITI). Some Chinese Muslims I met have described the New Order Period as the dark period of PITI, in which its leadership was controlled by Indonesian military leaders and the preaching of Islam by using Chinese cultural elements was not allowed (interview, Muliawan, 11 August 2008). Chinese elements in Indonesian Islam were also being abandoned by the Ministry of Religion, which rejected the proposition that the Chinese had contributed to the Islamisation of Indonesia (Taylor 2005). One of the best examples of this is the ban of Slamet Muljana’s book in 1971 which suggested that most of the Walisongo were of Chinese descent.

In this period, some Chinese leaders suggested conversion to Islam as a solution to the prejudice against Chinese Indonesians, since the majority of Indonesians were Muslims. Junus Jahya became the leader of the movement to convert ethnic Chinese to Islam and suggested it was the best and only way to resolve the ‘Chinese Problem’, as by embracing the religion of the majority of the population, the difference between ethnic Chinese and indigenous Indonesians would disappear (Riyanto 1997; Tan 1998). Junus Jahya was born as Lauw Chuan Tho, in 1927 in Jakarta. He has always been a promoter of assimilation, even as a student
when he studied economics in the Netherlands. There in 1952 he agitated for the abolition of an ethnic Chinese organisation, called Chung Hua Hui, as he saw it as an exclusive organisation. When he returned to Indonesia, he actively engaged with the assimilation movement. In 1979, he converted to Islam and a year later married a Sundanese woman. Besides leading several convert organisations, he was also a member of Muhammadiyah, a board member of MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Indonesia Council of Ulama) and an advisory member of ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals).13

As quoted by Suryadinata (1979: 170), Junus Jahaya once said:

By embracing Islam, young ethnic Chinese experienced that immediately they are fully accepted as fellow Muslims and compatriots by the people at large who are 90 per cent Muslim. All kinds of hostility and controversy as an inheritance of the past disappear. They are heartily welcomed now and totally integrated within the community. So they have at last a permanent ‘place in the sun’. This is exactly what ethnic Chinese are so looking and longing for.14

Although he promoted full assimilation, Junus Jahya’s stand towards his Chinese identity after becoming a Muslim was both contradictory and strategic: the more he wanted to escape his Chineseness, the more he was trapped by the notion of Chineseness defined by the New Order regime. He stopped using his Chinese name after conversion, yet still saw himself as ‘a Muslim, an Indonesian, with Chinese descent’. Later, he proposed that the Muslim community of Chinese descent in Indonesia should ultimately become just a ‘Muslim community’ and not ‘a separate

13. For a compilation of Jahya’s articles and comments on his ideas, see Riyanto (1997).
14. The concept of assimilation fell from favour in post-Suharto Indonesia, yet Junus Jahya defended Islamic conversion as one of the best options for Chinese Indonesians to escape ethnic prejudice. In an interview, he told me that, ‘I did not ask all Chinese to convert to Islam, but I provided an alternative way for us to survive, especially during the New Order period. By sharing religious affinity with the majority indigenous Indonesians, it shows that not all of us are exclusive’ (interview, Junus Jahya, 25 December 2008).
Chinese community with a mosque’ (The 1986: 67). Thus, the label of ‘Chinese Muslims’ was problematic since it was assumed that they would lose their ‘Chineseness’ in the end. In other words, the Chinese Muslim identity was only ‘transitional’, as a step on the way to full assimilation into ‘indigenous Indonesians’. However, as I discuss later, he established Lautze Mosque in 1994 to show that there are Chinese Indonesians who are Muslims.

There is no doubt from his writings that the 1980s and the early 1990s were the most active years for his involvement in religious conversion and assimilation advocacy. He edited and wrote many books to promote his ideas, including *Dakwah dan Asimilasi* [Preaching and Assimilation] (1979), *Kisah-kisah Saudara Baru* [Stories of New Converts] (1988b), and *WNI Beragama Islam* [WNI Muslims] (1991). Through various foundations, such as Yayasan Ukhuwah Islamiyah (the Foundation of Muslim Brotherhood), he converted many ethnic Chinese, especially those who were educated, middle class and younger. Some of the prominent Chinese converts are academic Muhammad Budyatna, female badminton national player Verawati Fajrin and businessman Yusof Hamka. Junus Jahya believes that the number of Chinese Muslims is gradually increasing and, compared to before, there are more converts from middle and upper classes. In 2005, he estimated that there were about 50,000 Chinese Muslims, including some 50 Chinese preachers and several hundred converts who had undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca (Jahja 2005).

However, in reality, the response of ethnic Chinese towards Islamic conversion was tepid. Many Chinese Indonesians hesitated to convert to Islam for various social, historical and religious reasons. It was not uncommon for Chinese parents to tell their children, ‘You can convert to any religion, but not Islam.’ For those who converted to Islam, they often faced objections from their family members, and sometimes rejections from their Chinese colleagues and friends. As discussed earlier, since the Dutch colonial period, Chinese Indonesians began to have negative perceptions of Islam, and some of these suspicions still persist today, such as ‘Islam is religion for native people’, ‘Islam is a backward and low
status religion,’ ‘Islam is a violent and anti-Chinese religion,’ ‘Islam is a conservative and rigid religion,’ ‘Islam is incompatible with Chinese culture,’ ‘Islam allows polygamy.’ Junus Jahya was aware of these difficulties in his preaching of Islam and he once wrote that ‘In the view of many Chinese Indonesians, Muslims are hypocrites, untrustworthy, can have many wives and are anti-Chinese’ (Jahja, 1993: 9). As I further discuss in other chapters, many Chinese Muslim leaders and preachers seek to challenge these negative perceptions of Islam in diverse ways.

Although the notion of assimilation through Islamic conversion was dominant during this period, not all conversions were undertaken for that reason. Conversion reasons are far more diverse, including intermarriage, business, influence of friends and religious interest. Some have converted to Islam for security reasons, becoming Muslims because they want to be safe from tensions caused by the hostility of some local Muslims towards ethnic Chinese. For example, some Chinese converted to Islam after the anti-Chinese riots in Surakarta which spread through several towns in 1980 (Ali 2007). After the implementation of the 1974 Marriage Law that discouraged inter-religious marriage, some Chinese Indonesians converted to Islam in order to marry Muslim Indonesians. For them, conversion to Islam thus became a precondition for intermarriage rather than a voluntary action. I further discuss the diverse conversion motives of Chinese Indonesians in Chapter 7.

Apart from Junus Jahya, there were other prominent Chinese Muslims during the New Order period. One of them is Masagung or Tjo Wie Tay, the founder of the large publishing company Gunung Agung. He converted from Hinduism to Islam in 1981. He then established the Clear Path Foundation (Yayasan Jalan Terang) aimed at financing the construction of mosques, a hospital and a museum for the Walisongo. Later, he also founded Yayasan Masagung (Masagung Foundation) that offered religious activities to converts. Rubaidi (1999) contrasted the different religious

15. For details about Masagung, see ‘Haji Masagung Dalam Kenangan’ (Yayasan Idayu 1990a; 1990b).
thoughts and preaching strategies of Junus Jahja and Masagung. He argued that Junus Jahja's religious viewpoint was close to that of a 'scripturalist' Muslim, as he was a member of Muhammadiyah and his ambition to convert non-Muslim Chinese to Islam was similar to the *dakwah* movement on campus which aimed to Islamise Indonesian society. In contrast, Masagung's religious viewpoint was close to that of a 'substantialist' Muslim, as he practised Sufistic religious spirituality and preached Islam through everyday life practice (*dakwah bi al-Hal*) and publications.

However, in my opinion, Junus Jahya is not a 'scripturalist' Muslim. As distinct from the *dakwah* movement on campus, his promotion of Islamic conversion amongst Chinese is aimed at placing them in a better position, rather than at cultivating Islamic piety. Hasan Widjaya, who supported his notion of assimilation through Islam, viewed Jahya's attempt to combine both Islam and Indonesian nationalism as a form of 'patriotic Islamisation' (Widjaya 1989). During my fieldwork, one of my informants even told me that Junus Jahya did not encourage female Chinese converts to wear Islamic clothing. This shows that despite his close relationship with Muhammadiyah and ICMI, Jahya's religious viewpoint is far from being 'scripturalist'.

Chinese Muslim leaders Bambang Sujanto in Surabaya and Budi Setyagraha in Yogyakarta also offer interesting comparisons to Junus Jahya. Both have different views on 'pembauran'. While they agree that conversion to Islam could promote better relationships between ethnic Chinese and local Muslims, they reject the idea of 'total assimilation' as one can 'membaur' or mix well with the local community without losing one's Chinese cultural identity (interview, Bambang Sujanto, 27 November 2008; Budi Setyagraha, 12 February 2009). It is interesting to note that even Junus Jahya

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16. As noted in Rubaidi (1999: 103), he borrowed such typology of Indonesian Islamic thought from Liddle (1996). 'Scripturalist' Muslims refer to those who read the religious texts literally and tend to be 'Islamist-minded.' 'Substantialist' Muslims refer to those who engage with contextualised interpretations of the holy books and tend to reject the idea of an 'Islamic state'. As I discuss in Chapter 7, such dichotomy is rather simplified and does not reflect the complex religiosity of many Muslim Indonesians, especially the converts.
himself slightly modified his stand on assimilation later. In 1991, he founded the Karim Oei Foundation to facilitate a rapprochement between Chinese and Muslims, and to attract new converts. The Lautze Mosque which is painted in red and decorated with Chinese calligraphy, was established in 1994. According to Junus Jahya, it was decided to use this Chinese name for the mosque with the purpose of making clear that ‘there are ethnic Chinese who are Muslims’ (noted in Tan 2008: 82). He justified the establishment of a mosque that focused on preaching among ethnic Chinese by saying that most converts prefer to learn Islam together with their fellow converts first, but in the end most of them will mix well with the majority Muslims (Jahya 1999).

The establishment of the Lautze Mosque would not have been possible without the support of ICMI and other Muslim organisations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah. Furthermore, after the end of the Cold War and the decline of communism, the last decade of the New Order administration softened its stance towards Chinese cultural expression. At the end of the Suharto presidency, Mohammad (Bob) Hassan, a Chinese Muslim businessman, was chosen as the Minister of Industry and Trade. He was in fact, the only ethnic Chinese in any New Order cabinet. The collapse of the New Order regime in 1998 opened a new chapter for Chinese Muslims in Indonesia.

The post-New Order period: a resurgence of Chinese Muslim culture

Over the 13–15 May 1998, at the climax of the Reformasi movement that was spurred by the economic crisis of 1997, Jakarta exploded in a fury of looting, burning and rape, directed mostly at the business and residential areas where ethnic Chinese were concentrated.17 These ‘anti-Chinese’ riots made many Chinese Indonesians convinced that Suharto’s assimilation project had

17. In the final two years of the New Order, there was strong ‘anti-Chinese’ sentiment and portrayal in a few publications by Islamic groups, such as Media Dakwah by DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia) and the Konsprisai Mengguling
failed.18 With regard to Chinese Muslims, some of whom were convinced, that being Muslims, they would be treated fully as part of the Indonesian ethnic majority, the impact of the events was remarkable. Many people put up signs in front of their shops reading ‘Milik Pribumi’ (Native property), ‘Milik Muslim’ (Muslim property) to prevent their property from being looted or burned. Yet some Chinese Muslims store owners said that they were not spared, even though they pointed out that they were Muslims. Apparently, they were then still asked whether they were ‘pribumi’ or ‘non-pribumi’ Muslim. According to Tan (2008: 88), Junus Jahya was shocked when he heard that some Chinese Muslims were among the victims of the riots.

In Surabaya, two Chinese Muslim leaders told me, PITI played a significant role in minimising the riots in this capital city of East Java. They said that their close relations with local Muslim organisations and military officers had helped to keep Surabaya peaceful as compared to Jakarta (interview, Abdul Chalim, 3 October 2008; Bambang Sujanto, 27 November 2008). They rejected the idea of ‘total assimilation through Islamic conversion’ and argued that they could only effectively bridge the divide between local Muslims and ethnic Chinese by combining their Chinese ethnicity with their Islamic identity. By sharing their ethnicity with the Chinese minority and their religion with the Muslim majority, they see themselves as ‘cultural mediators’ and ‘bridge builders’, as I further discuss in Chapter 5. In general, the approach of assimilation has been contested, if not rejected, by many Chinese Muslims today. Many of them feel that they can retain their Chinese cultural practices as long as those practices are not incompatible with Islamic teachings. In other words, by converting to Islam, ethnic Chinese can be ‘more Indonesian, but no less Chinese’.

Soeharto (The Conspiracy to Overthrow Soeharto) booklet, which are linked to Suharto’s regime.

18. For detailed analysis of the May 1998 ‘anti-Chinese’ riots, see Purdey (2006). Some have argued that such riots were systematically instigated by the regime to divert mass anger away from Suharto and his cronies to the Chinese (Heryanto 1999). For critical accounts of changing Chinese identities after the event, see Hoon (2008).
This shifting meaning of being a ‘Chinese Muslim’ has been further triggered by the changing attitudes of successive governments towards Chinese ethnicity. In order to distance themselves from the old authoritarian ideology and to show their commitments to a reform agenda, post-New Order governments adopted the policy of multiculturalism, and amended almost all of the discriminatory policies against the Chinese. Chinese Indonesians today enjoy the freedom to express their cultural and religious identities, as well as to participate in various political and social organisations. This resurgence of Chinese identity also needs to be put in the wider context of the recent economic rise and diplomatic power of China and its ramifications for the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, as well as the better relationship between China and Indonesia after the end of Cold War. Furthermore, in democratising Indonesia, mainstream Muslim organisations such as NU and Muhammadiyah also cultivate better relations with Chinese Indonesians to show their commitments to pluralism and to win over support from Chinese Indonesians, both financially and politically. The ‘moderation race’ of Muslim groups, especially after 9/11 and the Bali Bombings, also led many Muslim leaders to endorse the expression of a Chinese Muslim cultural identity to emphasise the tolerance and inclusivity of Indonesian Islam.

In these contexts, the commemoration of Cheng Ho’s histories, the establishment of Chinese-style mosques and the celebration of Chinese New Year in mosques were all made possible in contemporary Indonesia. In parallel with the emergence of both Islamic and Chinese NGOs, PITI also gained momentum and revived its activities. In addition, media, market and consumption began to play a bigger role in the construction of both Islamic and Chinese identities. At the same time, there has been growing conversion to Islam amongst middle and upper class Chinese for religious and other reasons, rather than political considerations. The popularity of Chinese Muslim preachers and Chinese nasyid (Islamic music) groups in Indonesia today should also be read in these wider contexts.

Such a resurgence of the expression of Chinese Muslim cultural identities reminds us of the ‘Peranakan Muslim subculture’
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(Lombard and Salmon 2001) during the pre-colonial period in Java. However, whether the expression of Chinese Muslim identity in post-New Order Indonesia is a revival of a hybrid Sino-Javanese Muslim culture, a reverse identity strategy as compared to the New Order period, a form of ‘double consciousness’ (emphasis on both ‘Chineseness’ and Islam) or ‘strategic essentialisation’ is open for discussion. If ‘the Islamisation of Indonesia’ or ‘the indigenisation of Islam’ is a continuing debate amongst Muslim Indonesians in general, then ‘the Sinification of Islam’ or ‘the Islamisation of the Chinese’ or ‘the Indonesianisation of the Chinese’ is an on-going process among Chinese Muslims in Indonesia.

The rearticulation of Chinese Muslim histories

The traumatic past of Chinese Indonesians (Purdey 2006; Coppel 1983, 2009) informs the historical rearticulation and social participation of many Chinese Indonesians today, including those who are Muslims. Yet, instead of interrogating the dark histories or reconciling the violent pasts, many Chinese Muslim leaders tend to promote historical accounts and cultural initiatives that emphasise a co-existence between Islam and Chineseness. By doing so, Chinese Muslims think they can improve ethnic relations between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians, thus helping prevent the recurrence of ‘anti-Chinese’ riots.

In the following sections, I discuss in particular the ‘memory industries’ (Storey 2003: 85) which promote the Chinese role in Islamisation. I begin by exploring the representation of Cheng Ho and the Walisongo through popular culture, preaching, celebration and mosques. This is followed by an examination of the discourses of Cheng Ho and the Walisongo in books and seminars. Such commemorations of Cheng Ho in post-1998 Indonesia, as I discuss, are undertaken for various reasons, which include reconstructing identity, preaching Islam, promoting religious pluralism, establishing business networks and improving ethnic relations.
Representing Cheng Ho and the Walisongo

‘Before the Dutch period, Sam Poo Tay Jin (Cheng Ho) from China arrived in Java for business and to preach Islam, as well as to build relations between China and Java.’ This is a part of the lyrics of a song, entitled Dulur Tuwa (Elder Sibling), written and sung by Mbah Pringis or So Khing Hok, a Chinese Muslim in Semarang. This song, which is recited in Javanese and arranged with traditional Chinese musical instruments, is one of the ten songs in Mbah Pringis’s album, Tembang Dulur Tuwa (Song of the Elder Sibling), released in 2007. According to Mbah Pringis, this song is written to illustrate the journey of Admiral Cheng Ho from China which propagated Islam in Java as well as promoting good relationships between the ethnic Chinese and Javanese. He said, ‘Dulur Tuwa (Elder Sibling) in this song refers to Cheng Ho. Through this song, I hope the interaction between Chinese and Javanese could return to the era before Dutch colonial period.’

Mbah Pringis, who used to own a printing business, sees himself as an amateur musician and guitarist. He is now also a fortune-teller, combining Javanese astrology and Chinese fengshui. Most of the songs in his album, such as Jaran Sam Poo (Horse of Sam Poo), Beduk China (Drum from China) and Warak Ngendhog (Rhinoceros Lays Egg), illustrate the everyday events of the ethnic Chinese and native Javanese, as well as their interactions and friendships. Although all the songs have Islamic messages, he said he does not intend to convert everyone to Islam, but to promote the spirit of Islam embodied in Cheng Ho as a unifying force for

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20. Mbah Pringis is a nickname for this amateur musician and fulltime fortune-teller. Mbah is a Javanese title for a respectworthy person, while Pringis means ‘grin’ to reflect his ability to make people laugh. His Chinese name is So Khing Hok and Indonesian name is Haryanto Hadi Sukendro.

multicultural Indonesia. As he told me, ‘Your religion is yours, my religion is mine. I am not going to convert you to Islam’ (interview, Mbah Pringis, 18 February 2009). In fact, his wife and two of his children are Chinese Catholics. Therefore, his album promoting the spirit of togetherness is different from the Islamic-themed album by the Chinese Muslim *nasyid* (Islamic music) group, Lampion (Lantern), which focuses on preaching Islam (see Chapter 4).

His album is supported and sponsored by a local non-Muslim Chinese businessman, Harjanto Halim, in the hope of reminding both Chinese and Javanese of the existence of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia who help to bridge the divide between the two ethnic groups. Harjanto Halim, who is also the chairperson for Kopi Semawis (Komunitas Pecinan Semarang untuk Pariwisata, Semarang Chinatown Community for Tourism), said he was touched by the ‘spirit of multiculturalism’ of the album, which combines Javanese lyrics, Islamic messages and Chinese musical instruments (Permana 2007). Mbah Pringis’s ‘*Tembang Dulur Tuwa*’ was launched in 2007 in Semarang during a Chinese New Year celebration, *Pasar Imlek Semawis*. The album, is part of the ‘memory industry’ in contemporary Indonesia, striving to retell and recognise the contribution of ethnic Chinese in the spreading of Islam. The contribution of Chinese Muslims in Islamisation was once a taboo subject, but discussion of it emerged again in various media in post-1998 Indonesia. Chinese Muslim preachers, such as Tan Mei Hwa, always highlight the role of Cheng Ho in spreading Islam, and emphasise that some of the revered Walisongo in Java were of Chinese descent. During a preaching in Surabaya in 2008, she said,

> Among those who first brought Islam to Java was Admiral Cheng Ho. Cheng Ho was requested to go back to China, yet some of his followers stayed in Java. One of them was Bun Sui Ho. Both of his son and grandson, Sunan Bonang and Sunan Ampel, are respected Walisongo who spread Islam across Java. Sunan Bonang’s original name is Bun An, but the Javanese pronounce it as Bonang. This is a historical fact that can’t be denied. (Field note, 16 October 2008)
Although not all of her mostly Javanese Muslim audiences accept fully such arguments, they do not hesitate to applaud her. She then urges audiences not to hold negative perceptions of Chinese Indonesians in general and converts in particular, as an indirect way of establishing her credentials as a Chinese preacher. Meanwhile, another Chinese Muslim preacher, Syaukanie Ong, believes that referring to Cheng Ho and the Walisongo in preaching is a form of *dakwah* to non-Muslim Chinese, to show that ‘Islam and Chineseness are not incompatible’ and ‘Islam is not an anti-Chinese and foreign religion’ (interview, Syaukanie Ong, 19 November 2008).

Apart from in songs and preaching, Cheng Ho is also remembered through the building of mosques and libraries by Chinese Muslim leaders and businessmen. Two mosques have been built in Chinese architectural style and named after Cheng Ho, respectively in Surabaya and Palembang, two cities that Cheng Ho visited during his voyage. Meanwhile, a Cheng Ho library has been built in the compound of the Indonesian Chinese Cultural Park in the ‘Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park’ (TMII, Taman Mini Indonesia Indah), Jakarta, in order to remember the contribution of Cheng Ho and to promote his spirit of togetherness. Jos Soetomo, a Chinese Muslim businessman who sponsored the library said:

> The voyage of Cheng Ho to Indonesia was not for colonising or conquering, but for peace, togetherness and progress. He came here for business and preaching Islam. He promoted better relations between Chinese and Muslims, and he respected his followers, who were mostly non-Muslims. Indonesians should learn from his spirit, which emphasise peace and kindness, which are recommended by Islamic teachings. (interview, Jos Soetomo, 24 October 2008)

The remembering of Cheng Ho goes beyond Chinese Muslims, as non-Muslim Chinese and non-Chinese Muslims also participate in the ‘memory industry’ of Cheng Ho. This was best exemplified in the commemoration of the 600th anniversary in 2005 of Cheng Ho’s visit to Semarang, which is organised by the temple committee of
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Sam Poo Kong (Cheng Ho Temple), with the support of Central Java’s regional government. The anniversary was billed as a ‘contribution to the inter-racial life and harmony’ of Indonesia. According to Hooker (2005: 7), this celebration is an example of how Semarang draws on the legends and symbolism surrounding a the 15th century Chinese Muslim admiral to fashion its own 21st-century image as a lively centre of regional commerce, as well as an example of religious and ethnic tolerance. A serial drama, Laksamana Cheng Ho (Admiral Cheng Ho), was made and screened by Metro TV in 2008. Interestingly, the role of Cheng Ho in the drama is played by a non-Chinese Muslim, Yusril Ihza Mahendra, who is a former Justice Minister and Chairman of an Islamic party, Crescent and Star Party (PBB, Partai Bulan Bintang).

A Javanese Muslim comedian in Surabaya, Muhammad Cheng Ho Djadi Galajapo, adopted ‘Cheng Ho’ as part of his ‘Islamic’ name after he performed his pilgrimage to Mecca. He said, ‘There are many Chinese Indonesians who adopt Javanese names, but very few Javanese use Chinese names. Therefore, I decided to adopt the Chinese Muslim name to show my commitment on “pembauran” (blending). This is a true blending. Javanese uses Chinese names and Chinese uses Javanese names.’ (Muhammad & Nabonenar 2008: 88) There are also economic considerations lying behind the celebration of Cheng Ho. During my interview with a Chinese Muslim businesswoman in Jakarta in 2008 (interview, Sias Saputra, 9 April 2008), I had a chance to talk to a Javanese television producer. He was approaching Chinese Muslims to sponsor his production of a documentary film for Idul Fitri television broadcasting, which narrated the histories and contributions of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. He told me that it was the best topic to get sponsorship from Chinese Muslim and even non-Muslim Chinese businessman to support the production of an Islam-themed television program.

Discourses of Cheng Ho and the Walisongo

Not many people are aware that, according to historical records, eight of the nine saints that spread Islam in Indonesia...
are ethnic Chinese and that their original Chinese names are: Sunan Ampel alias Bong Swie Ho; Sunan Drajet alias Bong Tak Keng; Sunan Bonang alias Bong Tak Ang; Sunan Kalijaga alias Gan Si Cang; Sunan Gunung Jati alias Du Anbo – Toh A Bo; Sunan Kudus alias Zha Dexu – Ja Tik Su; Sunan Giri was the grandson of Bong Swie Ho; Sunan Muria Maulana Malik Ibrahim alias Chen Yinghua or Tan Eng Hoat. (INTI 2007: 15)

A short article in Suara Baru (New Voice), a bi-monthly magazine of the Chinese Indonesian Association (INTI, Perhimpunan Indonesia Tionghoa), entitled 8 dari 9 Walisongo adalah Tionghoa? (Eight of the nine saints are Chinese?), suggested that most of the Muslim saints in Java were of Chinese descent. In 2009, Suara Baru also featured a special edition highlighting the contributions of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia (INTI 2009). This promotion of the Chinese role in Indonesian Islamisation can be seen as part of the effort of Chinese organisations and leaders to emphasise the contribution of Chinese Indonesians to the Indonesian nation.

Although there has been no hostile reaction or government response to such claims, which would have happened during the New Order period, their arguments are not without controversy and have generated discussions online. Many have criticised such claims as exaggerating the Chinese influence and lacking in convincing evidence.22 Meanwhile, some Muslims question the motivation for what they regard as over-emphasising Chineseness. During my fieldwork, referring to the former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid, one of the Muslim staff in a PITI office told me:

I do not understand why people like him want to claim that they have Chinese descent, even though they have been assimilated. Why can’t we just say that we are Indonesians? Maybe I have Chinese blood, but it should not be raised as an issue. If there should not be a difference between

Indeed, to a certain extent, what she said reflected the paradox of reclaiming ‘Chineseness’ in post-authoritarian Indonesia – the resurgence of ‘Chineseness’ today is a reaction to the suppression of Chinese cultural expression of the past; yet the more some Chinese Indonesians press to reclaim their displacement during New Order period, the more they are trapped by the racialised discourse of the New Order regime that they opposed.

Despite these controversies, driven by various motivations, be they ethnic, religious, economic or personal, many Chinese Muslim leaders today enthusiastically endorse the ‘memory industries’ of Cheng Ho. Based on controversial texts, such as *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, these industries reproduce narratives that link Cheng Ho to the Walisongo and Islamisation in Indonesia. However, in general to date such narratives are seen as ‘legends’, rather than ‘historical facts’. As the secretary of PITI, Willy Pangestu, told me, such narratives are not yet written in Indonesian historical textbooks. Therefore, PITI sees it as important for them to publish books and organise seminars to ‘mensosialisasikan’ (socialise) the Chinese Muslims’ influence in Islamic propagation among a wider population of Indonesians (interview, Willy Pangestu, 6 November 2008).

In 2008, Muslim leaders and Chinese scholars, both from China (mainly Beijing and Yunnan) and Indonesia were invited to speak at and participate in a conference entitled *Cheng Ho, Walisongo dan Muslim Tionghoa Indonesia Di Masa Lalu, Kini dan Esok* (Cheng Ho, the Walisongo and Chinese Muslims in Indonesia: past, present and future), which was held in Surabaya by the Cheng Hoo Foundation and PITI, East Java. The keynote speaker of the conference was Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur. His attendance was greeted with ‘Hidup Gus Dur’ (long live Gus Dur) and whenever he mentioned the role of Chinese Muslims in Indonesian Islamisation, there was applause from the floor (field note, 26 April 2008). Other invited
prominent speakers included Lin Song, a Muslim scholar from Mainland China; Kong Yuan Zhi, a Chinese specialist on Cheng Ho from Beijing University; Leo Suryadinata, an Indonesianist based in Singapore, specialising in Chinese Indonesians; Tan Ta Sen, Director of the Cheng Ho Museum in Malaysia; Azyumardi Azra, a Muslim scholar from the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (absent); Djoko Suryo, a historian from the University of Gadjah Mada; and Kacung Marijan, a social scientist from the Airlangga University. This conference was also supported and attended by local government officers, members of Islamic organisations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, as well as leaders of local Chinese organisations.

Through the commemoration of Cheng Ho and the Walisongo, the conference aimed to celebrate the Chinese participation in and contribution to disseminating Islam in Indonesia. Many speakers at the conference emphasised, either directly or indirectly, the role of Cheng Ho in propagating Islam, or the Chinese background of the Walisongo. Through these selective memories of the past and connections to Mainland China, Chinese Muslim leaders seek to prove that Chinese Muslim identity is not new, but a continuity of long historical processes in Indonesia. By acknowledging the contribution of the Chinese Muslims in promoting ethnic interactions, they try to lift themselves to a better position in contemporary Indonesia, from a marginalised minority to an intermediate community between Chinese and Muslim Indonesians.

Some Chinese Muslim leaders have suggested that such celebrations of Cheng Ho have political implications, as they can help to reduce ‘anti-Chinese’ sentiment and prevent inter-ethnic conflict. Referring to Arab Indonesians, a Chinese Muslim leader argued that:

Ethnic Arabs are also foreigners, rich and exclusive, but the indigenous people do not hold the same prejudice for them, because ethnic Arabs claim that they have a significant role in spreading Islam in Indonesia. Using this parallel, Chinese Muslims should uphold their ethnic heritage and inform
indigenous Indonesians that ethnic Chinese have a role in the process of Islamisation too. We should promote the contribution of Cheng Ho. We should emphasise that part of the Walisongo have Chinese blood. We should tell them that Islam came to China earlier than it did to Indonesia. By promoting the Chinese contribution in Islamisation, indigenous people will have a better perception of ethnic Chinese, including non-Muslim Chinese. (Interview, Bambang Sujanto, 27 November 2008)

Many non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians endorse such a proposition. Given that the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, some of them suggest that by emphasising that ‘the Chinese are one group of the Indonesian Muslim ancestors,’ it will help to improve the Chinese Indonesians’ image among local Muslims. To some extent, the promotion of Cheng Ho by Chinese Indonesians is driven by their traumatic past. By spreading Cheng Ho’s message of peaceful co-existence, they hope ‘anti-Chinese’ riots will never happen again. A non-Muslim Chinese retired journalist explained why he supported the efforts of Bambang Sujanto:

I have witnessed a few anti-Chinese violent incidents in Indonesia. There are always attempts to separate Chinese Indonesians from the pribumi to create disunity. I think we need a role model to bridge the difference. Such a model has to be accepted not only by the Chinese, but also local Muslims. I think Cheng Ho is the best option. By emphasising his Islamic piety and his peaceful approach, local Muslims might be less hostile towards us. (Field note, 22 November 2009)

In May 2008, the China Islamic Association, the Indonesia Marketing Association (IMA), and NU co-organised a seminar, entitled Seminar Internasional Budaya Islam Nusantara-Tiongkok (International Seminar on Islamic Cultures in Indonesia and China) in Surabaya and Jakarta. According to the chair of the organising committee, M. Paiman, the seminar aimed to understand
Islamic cultures in Indonesia and China, and to improve the relationship between the two countries. NU stated that this seminar was important in acknowledging the richness and diversity of Indonesian Islamic cultures. In his speech, Y. W. Junardy, the President of the IMA, pointed out that both Indonesia and China have large Muslim populations, and that thus there was great potential for mutual cooperation and development between the countries in the economic, social and cultural spheres. The speakers in the seminar included Amir Zhang Guanglin and Esa Gao Zhanfu from the China Islamic Association, and Ikhsan Tanggok and Komaruddin Hidayat from Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta. Among the topics presented was *Islam Masuk Ke Indonesia Juga Dibawa oleh Orang China Dari Negeri China* (the role of Chinese communities in the spread of Islam in Indonesia) by Ikhsan Tanggok (field note, 28 May 2008).

As this seminar was sponsored by the IMA, it is reasonable to speculate about the economic considerations that lay behind it. Indeed, Mr Junardy openly stated in his speech that cultural sharing is crucial in generating better economic co-operation. Promoting the Islamic cultural connections between China and Indonesia provides cultural niches for better economic relations between the countries. Chinese Muslims have a strategic position in this situation and some of them use it for their business interests. Furthermore, by endorsing such events organised by Chinese businessmen, NU and its leaders might be given funding for their activities, mosques and boarding schools. In a private conversation, a Chinese Muslim businessman told me that he has provided business training for NU members, funded a couple of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and collected donations from Chinese businessmen to build mosques. In return, NU leaders provide him with business networks and religious credibility in the Muslim community (field note, 27 November 2008).

Beyond seminars and conferences, after 1998, books were published or republished, mostly written in Indonesian language by non-Chinese Muslims, to acknowledge the contribution of Chinese Muslims in Indonesian Islamisation. The most provocative one is
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*Arus Cina-Islam-Jawa: Bongkar Sejarah atas Peranan Tionghoa dalam Penyebaran Agama Islam di Nusantara Abad XV & XVI* [the Chinese-Islam-Java flow: revealing the history of the Chinese role in spreading Islam in the archipelago during the 15th and 16th centuries] by Sumanto Al-Qurtuby, who is an activist in NU’s Institute for Human Resources Studies (Lakspesdam NU) and Liberal Islam Network (JIL, Jaringan Islam Liberal). Without discrediting the contribution of Arabs and Indian Muslims, Al-Qurtuby, is a strong advocate of the theory that the ethnic Chinese played an important role in the spread of Islam in Indonesia, and especially to Java. In his book, he bolsters his argument by using four types of historical sources: Western records; Chinese sources; local Javanese written texts and oral traditions; and an examination of the historical monuments found in Java (Al-Qurtuby 2003). To further promote his thesis, he proposed the production of a documentary film, *Jejak Budaya Tionghoa & Islam Nusantara* [The path of Chinese culture and archipelago Islam] (Al-Qurtuby 2005).

Responding to his critics who claim that he is undermining the notion that Islam came from the Middle East or India, Al-Qurtuby argues that his promotion of the Chinese contribution does not dismiss such influences, but strives to illustrate another side of Islamic histories previously covered up by the New Order regime. He said, ‘I do not reject the contribution of Arab Muslims in the Indonesian Islamisation. What I reject is the opinion that it is only the Arab and Middle Eastern Muslims who played such roles.’ (Matraji 2007) ‘Arus Cina-Islam-Java’ was published in 2003 with the cooperation of INTI. The then chairman of INTI, Eddie Lembong, a non-Muslim Chinese businessman, recommended and supported the publication of the book, because he echoed the view of Al-Qurtuby that ‘by showing the contribution ethnic Chinese had on Islamisation, it can strengthen the emotional interaction and spiritual solidarity between the Javanese Muslims and the ethnic Chinese, because the Chinese have been always seen as identical to Buddhism and Confucianism’ (Al-Qurtuby 2003: 22). The book also contained a preface written by the prominent Muslim scholar, Nurcholish Madjid, in which he expressed
his hope that the book help to reduce the social stigma of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

In 2005, LKiS republished Slamet Murjana’s book *Runtuknya Kerajaan Hindu-Jawa*, which was banned during the New Order period. This controversial book argued that Chinese Muslims played an important role in the fall of Hinduism and the rise of the Islamic Kingdom in Java. According to the book’s editorial foreword, the reprint aims to emphasise that Islamisation processes in Java were not only based on ‘authentic’ and ‘puritan’ forms of Islam from the Arabs, but also on various kinds of hybrid and plural Islam (Muljana 2005: v–vii). Apart from the Dutch colonial policy that broke down the harmonious interaction between Chinese and Javanese, the foreword suggested that the ideology of Islamic authenticity, which is often ‘Arab-centric’, has also contributed to ‘memiskinkan’, the impoverishment of the richness and diversity of Islamic experiences in Indonesia.

It is important to note that JIL, the organisation that Al-Qurtuby is involved in, is a Muslim network that promotes liberal interpretations of religious texts, and LKiS is a publishing house active in translating work on indigenised and progressive understandings of Islam. Their promotion of Chinese participation in Indonesian Islam fits well with their agendas of advocating liberal and indigenised Islam, as a response to the perceived rising ‘Arabisation’ or ‘purification’ of Islamic expression in Indonesia. As another NU activist suggests, the manifestation of Chinese Muslim cultural identities is an endorsement of a ‘vernacular Islam’ that is flexible and accommodative to ethnic traditions, and an antidote to the ‘puritan Islam’ that is ‘keras’ (stern) and hostile to non-Islamic cultures (interview, Rubaidi, 15 November 2008). Other publications that emphasise the indigenised histories of Indonesian Islam, are *Islam Pesisir* [Coastal Islam] (Syam 2006), *Islam Pribumi: Mendialogkan Agama, Membaca Realitas* [Indigenous Islam: dialoguing religion, reading realities] (Rahmat 2003), Sembilan Wali and Siti Jenar [Nine saints and Siti Jenar] (Ajidarma 2008), and Menjadi Indonesia: 13 Abad Eksistensi Islam di Bumi Nusantara [Becoming Indonesia: 13 centuries of Islam in the archipelago]
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(Hidayat & Gaus 2006). In short, for some Muslim leaders and scholars, their support for rearticulating Chinese Muslim histories is to help make clear the localised nature, inclusivity and plurality of Indonesian Islam.

Some books that were written in English or Chinese have been translated into Indonesian language and made available in Indonesian bookshops, such as *Laksamana Cheng Ho dan Asia Tenggara* [Admiral Cheng Ho and Southeast Asia] (Suryadinata 2005) and *Muslim Tionghoa Cheng Ho: Misteri Perjalanan Muhibah di Nusantara* [Chinese Muslim Cheng Ho: The Mystery of the Goodwill Journey to the Archipelago] (Kong 2000). Beyond academic publications, there are also some historical fiction and comics that illustrate the journey of Cheng Ho to Indonesia (Kwartanada 2009). In 2008 there was an exhibition entitled ‘Chinese Muslims in Indonesia’ held in Surabaya, showcasing the photographs of Chinese Muslims’ lives and histories, taken by Zhuang Wubin, a Singaporean photographer and writer, which was later published as a photography book (Zhuang 2011).

The remembering of Cheng Ho has diverse meanings for Chinese Muslims, non-Muslim Chinese and local Muslims in Indonesia today. Among them, ‘Cheng Ho fever’ is most prevalent among Chinese Muslims, whereby some of them see Cheng Ho as a role model for their identity in Indonesia. The commemoration of Cheng Ho is also needed to put in a wider international context the recent rise of China’s economic and diplomatic power, in which Cheng Ho has been strategically promoted by the Chinese government to reassure other nations that its rise will be a peaceful one and not a threat. In addition, Cheng Ho has also been promoted by both leaders and scholars in Indonesia and China to symbolise the good relationship between the countries, which is dated back to the 15th century. In the Indonesian context, the endorsement of Cheng Ho’s commemoration is an important gesture showing the post-New Order government’s commitment to multiculturalism, to tolerance toward ethnic minorities, and to attracting investment from Mainland China.23

23. Beyond Indonesia, the remembering of Cheng Ho is also prevalent in Mainland China and Malaysia. The former is to promote the peaceful nature of China’s
Remembering past for present; imagining there for here

Having illustrated the re-articulation of Chinese Muslim histories in detail, here I conclude with a broader discussion of their role in historical memory and identity formation. According to the Palembang Al-Islam Muhammad Cheng Hoo Mosque brochure (PITI Palembang 2009), the naming of the mosque after Cheng Ho is a way of ‘straightening history’ (pelurusan sejarah), in order to commemorate the Chinese admiral who visited Palembang during the 15th century and contributed to the spread of Islam in Sumatra. While the religiosity of Cheng Ho as a pious Muslim and his visiting of many parts of Indonesia have been less disputed, his exact contribution to Islamisation has been questioned, given that most of his activities were political and diplomatic, and not all of his followers were Muslims. In this sense, the remembering of Cheng Ho and his role in preaching Islam is less about ‘straightening history’ but more about ‘rearticulating history’ to place Chinese Muslims in a better position in Indonesia today.

In this remembering of the past, Chinese Muslim leaders have mostly focused on the journey of Cheng Ho and the Chinese ethnicity of the Walisongo to emphasise the close relationship between Muslims and Chinese before the Dutch colonial period. At the same time, Dutch colonial power has been criticised as the main reason for the break-down of such interaction, while the New Order regime is seen as a dark period for the expression of Chinese Muslim identity. These historical memories are not only selective, but also imaginary, given that most Chinese Muslims today are new converts and have no direct biological linkage to the Chinese Muslims of the past. Furthermore, during the pre-colonial period, many Chinese Muslims intermarried with non-Chinese and chose to assimilate into the local Muslim majority, and thus did not necessarily see themselves as ‘Chinese’. This ‘remembering’ can be seen as a form of ‘imagined nostalgia’ (Appadurai 1996: 77), in which various forms of representation and discourse are used
to create a shared experience of loss and a longing for things not directly connected to those ‘remembering’.

The identity construction of Chinese Muslims is linked not only to imagining of the past, but also to imagining a ‘homeland’, through the cultivation of ties to Hui Muslims in China. However, as I discuss in the next chapter, these strategic transnational links are not forms of desire for a return to China, but part of efforts to empower social position in Indonesia. In contemporary settings, such links with Mainland China among Chinese Indonesians are perceived by the government as economic opportunities, rather than political threats.

**Rearticulated histories: essentialising or empowering?**

As Storey (2003: 84) suggests, ‘our identities may seem grounded in the past, but they are also about becoming who we want to be or being who we think we should be in particular contexts’. Thus, although memory plays an important role in identity formation, ‘the profound interaction between memory and identity formation does not necessarily depend on the truth, but what is remembered’ (Storey 2003: 83). Indeed, the historical memories of Chinese Muslims are not necessarily veridical reports of past events, but are outcomes of their interpretations of the past. Through various ‘sites of memory’ and ‘memory industries’, Chinese Muslim leaders are not only ‘consuming’ the past, but also ‘producing’ historical memories to give meaning to the present. By promoting the role of Cheng Ho in spreading Islam and claiming that some Walisongo have Chinese descent, Chinese Muslims reconstruct their identity through an imagined past to redefine their minority position, to preach Islam to non-Muslims, and to improve the image of Chinese Indonesians.

This rearticulation of the past has to be put in a wider context in post-Suharto Indonesia, as there are various efforts to rearticulate and ‘straighten’ (*meluruskan*) the histories by different groups whose voices were suppressed during the New Order period. Various historical facts and figures have been brandished with more
or less questionable agendas, hopes and expectations. While some Muslims are arguing that the role of Muslim activists in the Indonesian nationalist movement in the early 20th century was important, some Chinese leaders are proposing that ethnic Chinese figures, such as John Lie, a high-ranking navy commander during the Indonesian National Revolution, are among Indonesia’s ‘national heroes’ (*pahlawan nasional*). At the same time, a Chinese organisation, PSMTI, is building a Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park (Taman Budaya Tionghoa Indonesia) at the Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park (TMII, Taman Mini Indonesia Indah) to position the ethnic Chinese as one of the many legitimatised ethnic groups in the Indonesian archipelago (Kitamura 2007).

After 35 years of restricted expression and disrupted identity, Chinese Indonesians are searching for their identity and one way of doing that is by approaching their histories and historical figures. These efforts give voice to a formerly suppressed Chinese ethnicity and show its contribution in Indonesian nation-building, yet they risk essentialising its complex history and solidify their fluid identities. Also, their rearticulation of histories is not without contestation. For example, which Chinese Indonesians should be nominated as ‘national heroes’? Did the hero see himself as ethnic Chinese or is this merely a labelling of identity by others? Which Chineseness should be represented in the cultural park? Does the representation reflect the diversity of Chinese Indonesian cultures? These same questions can be directed to the Chinese Muslim leaders who claim that some Walisongo have Chinese descent. If some of the nine saints really had Chinese heritage, did they perceive themselves as ‘Chinese Muslim’, as most of them had mixed parentage? If most Chinese Muslims during the pre-colonial period chose to assimilate with local ethnic groups, is it fair to label them now as ‘ethnic Chinese’? To a certain extent, these representations of identities derive from the state essentialising of the content of Chineseness during the New Order Period, as these representations are reclaiming what were labelled ‘Chinese elements’ and thus needed to be erased by the regime. In other words, ‘the more the ethnic Chinese want to escape from their
displacement by Suharto regime, the more they sustain their own “racialisation” (Tsai 2009).

However, I argue that the rearticulation of histories among Chinese Muslims in particular and ethnic Chinese in general in post-1998 Indonesia is a self–strategic essentialising which should be differentiated from an identity essentialisation and control by the state. This self-essentialising can be culturally and politically empowering. Furthermore, this essentialisation is voluntary, symbolic and situational, and does not silence differences within the group. Chinese Muslims from all walks of life can choose how they want to interpret the past, and whether they want to ‘revive’, maintain or escape Chineseness. In the following chapters, I discuss the diversity and complexity of their identities in Indonesia today.
Inclusive Chineseness, Cosmopolitan Islam and Translocal Imagination: Chinese-style Mosques

As Khan (2008: 52) has pointed out, ‘the mosque is Islam’s most emblematic building, as well as an expression of collective identity.’ Through Chinese-style mosques, Chinese Muslim leaders in Indonesia declare that there can be a Chinese way of being Muslim and that converting to Islam does not mean giving up Chinese cultural traditions. After the collapse of Suharto’s New Order regime (1965–1998), at least ten Chinese-style mosques have been built across Indonesia, reflecting the return of Chinese cultural symbols into public spaces, as well as the reassertion of the tolerance of Indonesian Islam. Such mosques always adopt the architecture of mosques common in Mainland China, yet these are also reconfigured to Indonesia’s local contexts. This choice can be seen as a manifestation of on-going negotiations between a transnational imagination and a local configuration, aimed at creating a distinctive ‘Indonesian Chinese Muslim’ cultural expression.

This chapter discusses both the symbolic and the operational dimensions of Chinese-style mosques in Indonesia, dedicating particular attention to the Cheng Hoo mosques in Surabaya and Palembang. I argue that such mosques are a form of ethno-religious

1. There has been considerable research done on how mosques throughout the world reflect or shape the development of Islamic expressions and Muslim identities. Mosques and their architectural styles can be seen as a legitimisation of political power through reference to Islamic symbols (Holod & Khan 1997), as a political contestation between Islamist and secularist in Turkey (Simsek, Polvan & Tayfun 2006), as an identity expression by the Muslim minority in Britain (Naylor & Ryan 2002), as an indicator of the relationship between local and migrant Muslims in Hong Kong (Ho 2002), as the symbol of the ‘Arabisation’ of some Hui communities in Mainland China (Gillete 2000), as the political control and cultural expression of local Islam in Indonesia (O’Neill 1993).
expression, as well as forming a local cosmopolitan space. Symbolically, Chinese-style mosques can be seen as a place for the display of a distinctive Chinese Muslim identity in Indonesia. It is an effort to construct an image reflecting Chinese Muslims, by combining both Chinese and Islamic elements. This is arguably a form of intentional hybridity that emphasises a symbolic unity and promotes a clear image of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. Given that Chinese Muslims are dispersed across the archipelago, the effort to replicate the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque in other cities helps to forge a translocal imagination of Chinese Muslim cultural identity in the country.

Operationally, Chinese-style mosques become spaces for the contestation of multiple Chinese Muslim identities in Indonesia. In the mosque, Chinese Muslims from all walks of life negotiate themselves between not only Islamic and Chinese identities, but also diversified Islamic and Chinese traditions. This is arguably a form of everyday hybridisation that emphasises organic diversity and implies fluid identities among Chinese Muslims. Both inclusive architectural designs and socio-religious activities show the Cheng Hoo Mosque as both a sacred and a social space, shared by all ethnic and religious groups. For example, during a Ramadan night in 2008, while Muslims (both Chinese and non-Chinese) were performing their evening taraweh prayers (non-obligatory evening prayers which take place during the fasting month) at the

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2. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, I use ‘hybridity’ to describe and analyse cultural mixing in a broader sense. I use ‘intentional hybridity’ and ‘organic hybridity’ to distinguish hybridity as a symbolic strategy and as an everyday practice. Organic hybridity refers to unconscious exchanges and everyday adaptation of cultures, meanwhile intentional hybridity is a conscious effort to create a double consciousness of one’s identity (Werbner 1997a, Bakhtin 1981). For further discussion, see Chapter 1.

3. I am aware that in many works ‘translocal’ usually has a ‘transnational’ connotation, which refers to the linkages, connections and imaginations between places, beyond nation states (Freitag and Oppen 2010). However, for analytical purposes, in this chapter, I use such terms to imply different spatial relations. ‘Transnational’ refers to the connection with places outside of the Indonesian nation-state, such as Mainland China and the Middle East. Meanwhile, ‘translocal’ refers to linkage between places within the Indonesian archipelago, such as Palembang in South Sumatra, Salatiga in Central Java and Pontianak in West Kalimantan.
mosque, non-Muslims (mostly Chinese) were practising *qigong* (a Chinese breathing exercise) in the corridor of the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association’s (PITI, Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia) office in the mosque compound. This mosque, then, can be seen as a local cosmopolitan space where diverse cultures converge and mingle.

**Space, identity and politics**

To understand architecture, Knobler (1980) states that there are three principles that any building serves: the operational, the environmental and the symbolic function. A building’s operational function relates to the purpose it is supposed to serve: residence, education or commerce, for example. Its environmental function refers to the psychological response of the human occupants to the environment created by the building. The symbolic function relates to what the building ‘says’ and ‘declares’; hence ‘a building may indicate wealth, power, modernity, tradition, ambition, or repose’ (Knobler 1980: 219). An architectural place is not just any physical volume, as it does not occur in nature, but is built, that is, it is humanly conceived, designed and constructed. Hence, architecture has social and political meanings – it ‘says’ something about those who inspired, built, arrange and use it (Goodsell, 1988: 8).

Distinguishing place and space, de Certeau (1988) contrasts place as an embodied experience of particular locales, and space as a practised place. Social space is a creation of movement and reflection, as well as a site for identity construction, contestation and representation. As stressed by Hetherington (1998: 17), identity formation as a process of identification is a spatially situated process. Spaces serve the purpose of providing a distinctive place in which social structures and cultural identities are shaped, negotiated or challenged by the community and individual. This chapter is inspired by two assumptions about spaces, politics and identities. First, all social and spatial formations emerge through contestation; they involve relations of power – they have a ‘politics.’ There is a ‘politics’ to architecture and the ‘cultures’ that produce
it. Second, social space is not merely an outcome of existing cultural and political processes. Rather, it plays an active role – it performs something – in ongoing social transformation and identity construction.

Seeing mosques as both architectural place and social space, this chapter examines the symbolic and operational functions of Chinese-style mosques in Indonesia, as well as investigating the spatial relations of such mosques. As argued by Appadurai (1996) and Gupta & Ferguson (1992), identity formation in contemporary societies is not only situated within the boundaries of a territorial space, but also configured across and in between spaces. It is informed by the interaction between locally specific practices of selfhood and the dynamics of global positioning (Friedman 1994). Studying the Pakistani Muslims in Manchester, Werbner (2002) examines the complex and interconnected relations between transnational flows and local forces, and suggests that there are multiple transnational orientations within such local communities. In this regard, I here explore the spatial dynamics of Chinese Muslim identity practices through three dimensions. First, the transnational connection to Muslims in Mainland China and in the Middle East. Second, the translocal linkage of Chinese Muslims from different parts in Indonesia. Third, the local adaptation of their Chinese Muslim identities. Through Chinese-style mosques, Chinese Muslim leaders creatively express and claim their connections to the ‘diasporic Chinese’, ‘the Islamic ummah’ and Indonesian society, to manifest their unique identity.

Changing mosque architecture

Mosque architecture can take various forms, taking into account local building materials, climatic factors and craft skills, as well as major political and historical events, through which the mosque serves as an important visible representation of Muslim identity and values (Frishman and Khan, 2002: 14). The shape of old mosques in Indonesia and Malaysia has different forms when compared to mosques in the rest of the world. Most of the old
mosques, such as those in Demak, Banten and Kudus, do not have domes and minarets but tiered roofs, and are often equipped with a bedug (large drum inside the mosque to summon to prayer). These mosques mostly predate colonisation and were highly influenced by local cultures (Malay/Javanese/Chinese) and religions (Buddhism/Hinduism), rather than being inspired by Middle Eastern architectural styles (Nasir 2004; Heuken 2003).

The first dome-shaped mosque in Indonesia dates from 1881. Built by the Dutch colonial government, this is the Baiturrahman Mosque of Banda Aceh. Over time, domes and minarets became the dominant features of mosques. After independence, such mosques were regarded as a marker of progress and modernity, as shown by the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, built between 1961 and 1978. Rising modernist and puritan Islam, as well as financial support originating in the Middle East (especially Saudi Arabia) also led to the spread of ‘pan-Islamic models’ of mosques in Indonesia. At the same time, in order to promote the Indonesian state ideology, Pancasila,4 and to suppress political Islam, the New Order regime promoted the establishment of traditional tiered-roof mosques through the Pancasila Muslim Charity Foundation (Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila), established in 1982 (O’Neill 1993). Instead of the crescent and star, the ornament on the roof is a reproduction of the word ‘Allah’ in Arabic script within a five-sided frame, a visual expression of the supremacy of the Pancasila ideology.

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, domes and minarets regained their supremacy. This change can be seen in the fate of the Bandung Great Mosque. In the 1950s, it received a dome which was then replaced in 1970 with a traditional roof. Between February 2001 and June 2003, the mosque once again underwent a transformation: the renovated mosque now has two small domes and one large one, and two 810-metre-high minarets (Dijk 2009). Although Middle-Eastern inspired mosque architecture is prevalent, other competing architectures are not absent in Indonesia. One of the

4. The five guiding principles of the Pancasila are belief in God, humanitarianism, nationalism, democracy and social justice.
contrasting forms is the multipurpose and hybrid-design mosque, such as the Grand Mosque of Central Java in Semarang, which was completed in 2006 (Wirjomartono 2009). It is not only a building for worship, but also a place for cultural, business and leisure activities. In terms of architecture, it is eclectic, adopting various styles, forms and decorative motifs, attempting to blend indigenous Javanese, European and Middle Eastern building traditions. Another interesting phenomenon in post-1998 Indonesia is the establishment of Chinese-style mosques. These diverse mosque architectures also, reflect the plurality of Islamic practices, as well the ongoing debates about the ‘Arabisation’ and localisation of Indonesian Islam.

**Chinese-influenced mosques**

Although Chinese-style mosques are commonly seen as a new phenomenon, Chinese involvement in building mosques and Chinese influence on mosque design have existed for a long time in Indonesia. For example, there is Chinese influence on the architecture of old mosques and tombs in Java, such as the tombs of Sunan Giri in Gresik, the design of the Cirebon palaces and the architecture of the Demak mosque in Central Java (Lombard & Salmon 2001; Al-Qurtuby 2003). Some mosques were designed and built by Chinese Muslims, such as Kebun Jeruk Mosque in Jakarta and Sumenep Mosque in Madura. Yet over time many of these mosques lost their Chinese features and became managed by non-Chinese Muslims. There are also some who argue that some of the Chinese temples in Indonesia today were originally mosques built by Chinese Muslims in the 15th and 16th centuries, such as Ancol Temple in Jakarta, Sampokong Temple in Semarang and Mbah Ratu Temple in Surabaya (Tanggok 2006). Another possible influence of Chinese culture in Indonesian mosques is the usage of *bedug*, a big drum to call to prayer.\(^5\)

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5. It is important to note that Chinese cultural expression in the Islam of the ‘olden days’ always blended with the local Javanese and other traditions. But over time, many of these old mosques somehow lost their Chinese features. For example,
These Chinese influences on Indonesian mosques declined during the period of Dutch colonial rule, as Chinese traditions and Islam were seen as incompatible and sometimes even conflicting. Then, during the height of the New Order period, conversion to Islam was seen as a marker of total assimilation and the influence of Chinese culture on Islam was a taboo subject. Only during the late New Order period did Chinese Muslims begin to find a way of expressing their identities. With the support of various Muslim organisations, Lautze Mosque was established in Jakarta by the Karim Oei Foundation in 1994 and is named after the street where the mosque is located. Lautze was a Chinese philosopher who taught Taoism and has been seen by some Indonesian Muslims as a Chinese ‘prophet’ (along with Confucius). The aim of the Lautze Mosque was to promote Islam among Chinese Indonesians. As the mosque was originally a shop and residence, the Chinese influence on Lautze Mosque is modest and implicit, reflected in the red colour of its entrance door and walls inside the mosque, and in the many Chinese-style Arabic calligraphy artworks hanging on the wall. Mosque Lautze II in Bandung resembles the design of its predecessor. The first explicit and indeed trend-setting Chinese-designed mosque was the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya, followed by its namesake in Palembang.

**Symbolic unity: Identity manifestation through the Cheng Hoo Mosque**

Chinese Muslim leaders have strategically used the political openness of the post-New Order period to celebrate their distinct identity, for example through the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya. This was established by East Java PITI through its Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation (YHMCHI, Yayasan Haji Muhammad the Kebun Jeruk Mosque in central Jakarta, which was built by a Chinese Muslim in 1972, has now become a base for Jemaah Tabligh activities. There is a tomb in the mosque with Chinese and Arabic, and Chinese ornaments, but ignored and covered by grass. I was denied entry into the compound of the tomb by the management of the mosque when I tried to visit it in 2008.
Cheng Hoo Indonesia). Its construction began in 2001 and was completed one year later. It was formally opened in 2003 by the then Minister of Religion, Said Agil Husain Al-Munawar. The mosque architecture was inspired by the Niu Jie (Ox Street) Mosque in Beijing, which has more than a thousand years of history. The modification to its architectural design was led by Aziz Johan, a member of PITI from Bojonegoro, East Java, and supported by a technical team consisting of Chinese Muslim leaders from PITI.

As Willy Pangestu, one of the Chinese Muslim leaders, and a member of the mosque design team, explained to me: ‘We wanted to build a mosque that can vividly show Chinese character. We studied a few mosques in Mainland China and we decided to use the historical Niu Jie Mosque in Beijing as our blueprint’ (interview, Willy Pangestu, 6 November 2008). The temple-like design provoked some disagreement among Chinese Muslims in PITI. As Willy told me, some worried that such a design might violate Islamic teachings, alienate local Muslims and promote exclusivity. There were also some concerns that the contribution of non-Muslims to the mosque might be not halal (permitted under Islamic law). However, with the endorsement of Muslim organisations and the local government, he managed to convince those opposed to the idea that Chinese-style mosques are not only acceptable under Islam, but actually desirable as a manifestation of cultural diversity and religious tolerance in Surabaya. Indeed, since its establishment, the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya has been regularly featured in various media outlets, visited by many prominent Muslims and listed as a site of religious tourism.

There are at least two different yet not contradictory motivations behind the establishment of the Chinese-style mosque: the first is ethnic empowerment (mostly promoted by businessmen and intellectuals) and the second is religious preaching (mostly promoted by religious teachers and preachers). Regarding ethnic empowerment, Cheng Hoo Mosque promotes the contribution of the ethnic Chinese in spreading Islam, in the hope that ‘anti-Chinese’ sentiments among Muslims will be reduced. This notion is supported by some non-Muslim Chinese businessmen, as most of
the funds for building the mosque came from them. Challenging the dominant discourse of ‘assimilation through Islam’ during the New Order period, they built a Chinese-style mosque to promote the idea of ‘blending through Islam’, suggesting that being a Muslim brings the ethnic Chinese closer to non-Chinese Indonesians, whose majority are Muslims, but not at the expense of losing their Chinese cultural identity. Although there are some historical Chinese-influenced old mosques and prominent local Chinese Muslim figures in Indonesia, PITI did not draw on them in building their Surabaya mosque, but adopted mosque architecture from China and named the mosque after a famous Muslim admiral from Mainland China, Cheng Ho.

According to Bambang Sujanto, the chairperson of the Cheng Hoo Foundation and a successful businessman, naming the mosque ‘Cheng Hoo’ is to commemorate the contributions of the legendary admiral in disseminating Islam and improving inter-ethnic relationships. Bambang, who probably initiated the idea of the Cheng Hoo Mosque, said:

> The idea of ‘assimilation through Islam’ did not work. During the 1998 riots, some shops owned by Chinese Muslims in Jakarta were looted. No matter how Islamic and Indonesian you are, you are still seen as Chinese because of your physical appearance. We can only maximise our potential to promote a better image of Chinese Indonesians by maintaining our cultural identity along with Islamic piety. We have to show the ethnic Chinese role in spreading Islam both in the past and the present, so that the indigenous people will respect us. The Chinese-style mosque is a good attempt in doing so, and so far we have received good responses. (Interview, Bambang Sujanto, 27 November 2008)

Meanwhile, many Chinese Muslim preachers and religious teachers supported the establishment of the Chinese-style mosque but for different reasons. They believed that the strategic use of Chinese cultural symbols could show Islam as a universal religion
and not a religion for ‘indigenous’ Indonesians only. One of the Chinese Muslim preachers, Syaukanie Ong, said:

Some Chinese are not interested in Islam because they are afraid they will lose their Chinese heritage after conversion to Islam. Chinese-style mosques help to eliminate this misperception. Furthermore, some new Chinese converts might feel insecure to visit other mosques, but find a Chinese-style mosque a more comfortable place for them to learn Islam in. (Interview, Syaukanie Ong, 19 November 2008)

In fact, most of the Indonesian Islamic organisations, including Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, endorse the establishment of Chinese-style mosques as a form of dakwah (preaching) to Chinese Indonesians. As stated by the former chairman of NU East Java, Ali Maschan, ‘The construction of Chinese-style mosques will help the development of the dakwah movement in Indonesia, especially among ethnic Chinese, who will potentially convert to Islam. Even if they do not convert to Islam, at least the mosque will reduce their prejudice toward Islam’ (interview, Ali Maschan, 27 November 2008)

Mixing Chineseness and Islam

In this section, through a discussion of Cheng Hoo Mosque’s architectural design, I argue that the mosque is both representational and aspirational, as it ‘says’ and ‘declares’ something, which hints at social interactions, ethnic identities and religious discourses in Indonesia. The architectural design of Cheng Hoo Mosque ‘says’ that Islam and ‘Chineseness’ can get along together, ‘declares’ that one can be both authentically Chinese and truly Indonesian, and ‘promotes’ an inclusive and tolerant Islam.

Indeed, Cheng Hoo Mosque, in mixing Chinese, Islamic and also local Javanese cultures, is a clear statement that Chinese, Islamic and Indonesian identities are compatible. According to the mosque’s handbook (YHMCHI 2008), its design resembles the architecture of a klon teng (Chinese temple) and is intended to
Figure 1: The Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)

Figure 2: An eight-sided roof, a sign of Chinese cultural influence inside the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)
display the Chineseness of Chinese Muslims, as well as ‘to remind the Buddhist forefathers of ethnic Chinese.’ The roof of the pagoda-like building is carved with the word ‘Allah.’ Decorations such as animal-like ornaments were omitted because they might be seen as un-Islamic by many Muslims. The building is dominated by three colours: red, green and yellow (see Figure 1). The green refers to the Islamic tradition; while the dominant red to Chinese cultural traditions, symbolising the spirits of luck, fortune and prosperity. To emphasise inclusiveness, the mosque’s handbook is published in four languages, Indonesian, English, Chinese and Arabic.

The main hall of the mosque is 11 x 9 meters large, with an eight-sided roof (pat-kwa). The length of 11 meters symbolises the measurement of the ka’abah (cubicle shrine within the Masjid al-Haram mosque complex in Mecca), demonstrating the commitment to the Islamic faith. The length of 9 meters represents the number of the walisongo (the nine Muslim saints that according to local beliefs Islamised Java), showing an appreciation of local Javanese traditions. Meanwhile, the design of an eight-sided roof (pat-kwa) which characterises the philosophy of luck and prosperity shared by the ethnic Chinese, suggests that the acceptance of Islamic and Javanese tradition does not blot out a Chinese cultural identity (see Figure 2).

Through the interior design of Cheng Hoo Mosque, Chinese Muslim leaders intend to send a message that the mosque belongs to all Muslim groups, and that this is a site of interaction between diverse Muslim organisations, especially NU and Muhammadiyah. By installing a bedug (a drum) and a podium (a pulpit used by an imam or preacher to deliver a sermon), they appropriate the traditions of both NU and Muhammadiyah to show that the mosque is a prayer hall for all Muslims regardless of their religious affiliations. A bedug is therefore placed to the side of the mosque, which is common for NU followers, as well as Muslims in China (see Figure 3). Meanwhile, the podium is specially designed to suit Muhammadiyah practices, as its front is closed rather than open (see Figure 4). Not only being inclusive of diverse Islamic groups, Cheng Hoo Mosque also tries to show that Islam is tolerant of
Figure 3: A bedug, a drum for the call to prayer, showing NU’s influence inside the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)

Figure 4: A podium or pulpit for an Imam to deliver sermons, showing Muhammadiyah’s influence inside the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)

Figure 5: A relief depicting the journey of Admiral Cheng Ho from China to Indonesia, inside the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)
Figure 6: Idul Fitri prayer at the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)
other religions, namely Christianity. According to the handbook of the mosque (YHMCHI 2008), the front structure of the prayer hall of the mosque was constructed like a church’s door (resembling a Romanesque arch), reflecting that Islam acknowledges Jesus Christ as one of God’s messengers, and strives to respect other religions.

On the right side of the prayer hall, there is a relief of Muhammad Cheng Ho and his fleet, which illustrates his journey from China to Indonesia in the 15th and 16th century (see Figure 5). The commemoration of Cheng Ho through the relief and the naming of the mosque have different meanings for different receivers. For Chinese Muslims, it delivers a message that being a Chinese Muslim has a long precedent, as 600 years ago there was a Chinese admiral who was a pious Muslim. For non-Chinese Muslims, it promotes the contribution of Cheng Ho to the spread of Islam in Indonesia. For non-Muslim Chinese, it proves that being a Muslim does not mean discarding one’s ‘Chineseness’.

The strategic architectural design of the Cheng Hoo Mosque does not symbolise an existing ethno-religious reality but rather seeks to bring a new reality into being. As I discuss in Chapter 7, Chinese Muslim identities in contemporary Indonesia are fluid, and different individuals have different attitudes towards their religious practice and cultural orientation. By way of the mosque, some Chinese Muslim leaders try to promote a distinctive Chinese Muslim identity through the co-existence of Islamic and Chinese identities. Indeed, the materiality and tangibility of the mosque makes Chinese Muslim cultural identity unequivocally ‘real’ and therefore essential to identity construction. According to the founder of the mosque, Bambang Sujanto:

The population of Chinese Muslims is small, diverse and scattered. As has happened in the past, our identity can easily disappear or be assimilated into the Muslim majority. Thus, we need a physical space – a mosque that can project and uphold our identity. The structure of the mosque can stand for a long time, and sustain our uniqueness over a few generations. Converting to Islam does not mean giving up our Chinese
Figure 7: A traditional Chinese musical performance at the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)

Figure 8: A traditional Banjarmasin dance at the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)
cultural identity. There can be a Chinese way of being Muslim.
(Interview, Bambang Sujanto, 27 November 2008)

The intentional mixing of Chinese, Islamic and local cultural elements expressed by the architectural design is also reflected in the activities of the mosque (see Figure 6). As I observed during the *halal-bihalal* (mutual forgiving event) and the 6th anniversary celebration of the Cheng Hoo Mosque in October 2008, a strategic intercultural mixing can be seen from the food, entertainment program, prayers and invited guests. The event began with a dinner that served *halal* dishes both Chinese and Indonesian. Various entertainment programs, including Chinese traditional music performances (see Figure 7), and traditional dances from Java and Southern Kalimantan were then staged (see Figure 8). The celebration was hosted by Priyo, a presenter from JTV, a local television station, mostly in the Indonesian language, sprinkled with some Javanese. The *doa* (prayer) for the event was recited by Gunawan Hidayat, a Chinese Muslim religious teacher, and then translated into both Indonesian and Mandarin. The Indonesian translation was read by Wang Zhan, a Hui Muslim student from China who was studying at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN, Institut Agama Islam Negeri) in Surabaya, while the Mandarin translation was read by Dion Sultan, a Javanese Muslim who had pursued his undergraduate studies in China.

Among the prominent invited guests to the celebration were the former governor of East Java, Muhammad Noer, the leading Chinese entrepreneur Alim Markus, the chairman of the Surabaya Chinese Association (Paguyuban Tionghoa Surabaya) Lin Ou Yen, as well as many local religious scholars. The then chairman of NU, Hasyim Muzadi was scheduled to give a religious talk, but he was replaced by Muiziddin, a Chinese preacher.

**Transnational connections and local configurations of the Cheng Hoo Mosque**

The monthly magazine of the East Java PITI, *Komunitas* (Community), creatively juxtaposes the images of both the Niu Jie Mosque in Beijing and the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya on
the cover of its 2008 Idul Fitri edition. Through the Cheng Hoo Mosque, Chinese Muslim leaders in Surabaya draw on both the architectural designs of old mosques in China and the religious symbols of two major local Muslim organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah, to produce a distinctive image of Chinese Muslim identity in Indonesia today.

Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are mostly converts and ethnically different from the Hui Muslims in China, and thus there are no direct historical relations between them. Although there might have been some Hui Muslims in Java during the 15th and 16th centuries, most have now been assimilated. Today, most Chinese Indonesians are non-Muslim Han and almost all Chinese Muslim leaders in PITI are converted ethnic Han. Furthermore, in terms of mosque styles, there is a tendency to ‘Arabisation’ among Hui Muslims in Xi An, China, as shown by the shift in style of their mosque architecture: some new mosques built by Hui communities now adopt the Arabic style, and the traditional Chinese style has been questioned as not sufficiently ‘Islamic’ (Gillette 2000). Despite the difference between the Hui and the Han, and the diversity of and changes in Hui Islamic expression in China, many PITI leaders still construct their own Islamic tradition through imagined linkages with Muslims in China by promoting the history of Cheng Ho and building Chinese-style mosques, because Islam in China is seen as more culturally authentic and historically rooted, compared to Chinese Muslims in Indonesia.

By referencing Muslim tradition in China, which they see as having a longer history than Islam in Indonesia, Chinese Muslims in Indonesia claim their religious credentials and reappropriate their cultural identities, asserting that being Muslim and Chinese at the same time is neither improper nor new. As stated by one of the mosque design team members, the adoption of mosque

6. The difference between the Hui and the Han is problematic and contested, as discussed in Gillette (2000). The Hui are not a homogeneous group and the word Hui has different meanings in different historical periods. Hui identities are also expressed diversely in different local contexts in China. For further discussion see Gladney (1991).
architecture from China is ‘a means of showing that Islam is one of the ancient religions in China. Islam is not a new religion for ethnic Chinese as perceived by many Chinese and Muslim Indonesians’ (interview, Willy Pangestu, 6 November 2008). To some extent, Hui Muslim culture in China has become their Islamic ‘imaginary homeland’ (Rushdie 1992), in which they find inspiration for identity formation in their ‘living homeland’, Indonesia.

Some Chinese Muslim leaders, especially those in the Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation, are keen to develop transnational Chinese Muslim networks, by paying visits to Hui Muslim communities in China and inviting Hui Muslim leaders to visit Indonesia. For many of them, the cultivation of ties with Muslims in China does not undermine their national belonging, but allows them to promote better relations between ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese in Indonesia through their cooperation with local Muslim organisations. For example, in 2008, with the support of the Surabaya Chinese Association, the Cheng Hoo Foundation organised a trip for local NU and Muhammadiyah Muslim leaders to visit Muslim organisations and observe Muslim life in China. Among the places they visited were Huai Sheng Mosque in Guangdong, the hometown of Cheng Ho, a garden named after him in Yunnan, and the Niu Jie Mosque in Beijing (Tjahjono 2008). Bambang Sujanto, who led the trip, believes that the trip not only deepened the understanding of Muslim leaders of Islam in China, but also improved the perception of local Muslims towards ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. He said:

By witnessing Muslim life in China, the religious leaders will acknowledge that Islam has long existed in China and that Islamic practices are still alive today. We hope they will share this information with their followers in religious classes or talk. This will improve the perception of ordinary local Muslims towards Chinese Indonesians. We are not all non-believers. We are not just ‘economic animals’. (Interview, Bambang Sujanto, 27 November 2008)

It is quite clear that, for many Chinese Muslim leaders in Indonesia, the strategic transnational connection with Muslims in
Mainland China is not a form of desire for return or attachment to Mainland China, but an effort to manifest their identity and to redefine their minority position. The transnational linkage does not imply disloyalty or lack of patriotism, but sometimes it helps in promoting better relations between Indonesia and China, as well as between local Muslims and ethnic Chinese. This transnational linkage is driven by local purposes and is not about shaping politics towards Mainland China. It is not a form of ‘long-distance nationalism’ (Anderson, 1992). To a certain extent, the transnational imagination of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia is similar to the diasporic actions of Pakistani Muslims in Britain (Werbner 2002: 130), which includes ‘buying into’ local citizenship and fighting for citizenship rights. The cultivation of ties with Muslims in China also adds another scenario to transnational Muslim linkages, which are often seen as hostile to ethnic culture (Roy 2004) and linked to the Middle East (Mandaville 2001). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the transnational linkages of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are not only limited to Muslims in China, but extend to Muslims in other parts of the world, such as those in Palestine, as well as to transnational Islamic movements, such as the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and the Muslim Brotherhood (see Chapter 7).

Furthermore, these transnational imaginations and linkages have been locally configured through Chinese Muslims’ connections with media networks, government officers, military leaders, religious groups and Chinese organisations. PITI especially has established a good relationship with both NU and Muhammadiyah in Surabaya. The provincial leaders of both Islamic organisations are named as advisers for the Cheng Hoo Mosque. Before the construction of the mosque, PITI leaders asked NU and MU leaders to endorse the mosque design. Despite some objections from the more hardline Muslim groups, the NU and Muhammadiyah leaders both supported the design.7 NU and Muhammadiyah leaders and preachers have been frequently invited to give sermons during

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7. Given that the Qur’an does not mention or regulate the mosque architecture, there are fewer controversies or debates surrounding Chinese-style mosques, as compared to the celebration of Chinese New Year, as I discuss in Chapter 5.
Friday prayers and Islamic study sessions at the mosque. One reason why the first Chinese-style mosque was built in Surabaya is because East Java is the stronghold of NU, which generally has flexible attitudes towards cultural expressions of Islam. In terms of language, Indonesian is the main functional language in the mosque. Most of the preaching, religious study sessions and meetings are conducted in Indonesian. At the same time, Javanese, Mandarin and Hokkien are also widely spoken during interpersonal conversations.

The establishment of Cheng Hoo Mosque would not have been a success without support from the non-Muslim Chinese too. Given that the mosque is situated in a majority non-Muslim neighbourhood, PITI consulted local residents and gained their support for the mosque. To ensure non-Muslim Chinese residents are not disturbed, the mosque does not use loud speakers when calling for the morning prayers (azan subuh). Most of the donors to the mosque are non-Muslim Chinese, who contributed about 70 per cent of the total construction fee. There is a plaque placed in the compound of the mosque which lists the names of donors with their respective contributions. Besides Chinese Muslim businessmen and Muslim leaders (such as former PAN chairman Amien Rais and former East Java Governor Mohammad Noer), many of the donors are non-Muslim Chinese businessmen and their companies. Among them are well-established Chinese-owned business groups, such as the Salim Group (with 200 million rupiah, c. US$15,000), Maspion Group (100 million rupiah, c. US$7,500) and Gudang Garam (100 million rupiah). As some Chinese Muslim leaders frankly admitted, the non-Muslim Chinese supported the construction of the Cheng Hoo Mosque because they acknowledged the role of PITI in protecting them from possible ‘anti-Chinese’ riots. Non-Muslim Chinese businessmen also sponsor some donors.

8. According to the mosque handbook (YMHCHI 2008), the first phase of its construction cost 500 million rupiah, collected through selling trilingual ‘Saudara Baru/Juz Amma’ (‘New Convert/Selected Verses from Qur’anic texts’). The total construction fee was 3,300 million rupiah and most of it came from public donations.
activities in the mosque, such as the distribution of goods to orph
phanages during Ramadan.9

In short, Chinese Muslim leaders-cum-businessmen, and their well-connected networks, are crucial to the success of the Cheng Hoo Mosque. On the one hand, they have business co-operation with non-Muslim Chinese businessmen. On the other hand, they have established close relations with Muslim organisations, especially NU, through religious affinity. Their relationship with NU goes beyond the religious domain, as some of them provide business training to NU members, while others are actively involved with the National Awakening Party (PKB, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa), which is closely linked to NU. Besides a close relationship with local government officials and military leaders, PITI has an effective media network, especially through Java Pos and several local Chinese newspapers. Activities in the Cheng Hoo Mosque are frequently reported in local newspapers, as well as on radio and TV stations. In addition, PITI in East Java publish a monthly magazine called Komunitas (Community), which contains articles about PITI’s recent activities, the activities of other Chinese organisations, Muslim life in China, various aspects of Islamic and Chinese culture, and stories about converts, with no lack of business advertisements, most of them placed by Chinese Muslim merchants.

Cheng Hoo Mosque thus plays a role in promoting good relationships between different groups of Indonesian society, including Chinese and Muslim. In fact, fostering these relations is a central aim of PITI. According to Chiou (2007), under the banner of Islam, PITI shares the same religious beliefs as other Indonesian Muslims by which they are able to provide social assistance for local Muslims and facilitate interaction with local government. Muzakki (2010) argues that Chinese Muslims in PITI work closely with religious organisations, especially NU, in order to guarantee their social security and fight against discrimination. The Cheng Hoo Mosque can be said to exercise both ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital (Putnam

9. I also have been informed that about 20–30 per cent of the construction fee of Masjid Agung Al-Akbar, the biggest mosque in East Java, was contributed by non-Muslim Chinese.
inclusive chineseness, cosmopolitan islam

2000), respectively referring to the building of cohesion within a group and to the building of mutual understanding between groups. On the one hand, it contributes to a symbolic cohesion among Chinese Muslims as a group. On the other hand, it has played a significant role as a bridge between different groups in Indonesia.

Translocal ethno-religious imaginations of Chinese-style mosques

Following the success of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, many Chinese Muslims in other parts of the country sought to replicate the Chinese-style mosque and, in some cases, adopted the Cheng Hoo name. Many PITI branches from Sumatra to Sulawesi, from Java to Kalimantan, announced their intention to build Chinese-style mosques. By 2011, two such mosques – the Palembang Cheng Hoo Mosque (Figure 9) and Purbalingga Cheng Hoo Mosque (Figure 10) – had been completed. Today more than ten such mosques exist (see map on page xxvi). Chinese Muslim individuals have also established Chinese-style mosques in the compounds of their Islamic boarding schools.

The Al-Islam Muhammad Cheng Hoo Mosque of Palembang, completed in August 2008, is the second Chinese-style mosque in Indonesia named after Admiral Cheng Ho. Its construction was initiated by PITI South Sumatra, as its leaders visited their counterparts in Surabaya and were inspired by the architectural design of the Cheng Hoo Mosque there. However, instead of mimicking the design of the Niu Jie Mosque in Beijing, the Palembang mosque reappropriates the pan-Islamic features of mosque architecture with Chinese and Palembang-Malay cultural influences. This mosque shares the same aims as the Surabaya one, include uniting Chinese Muslims, preaching Islam and showing that Islam and Chinese can co-exist harmoniously. The naming of the mosque after Cheng Ho was seen as ‘setting history straight’ (pelurusan sejarah), in order to commemorate the Chinese Muslim admiral who visited Palembang during the 15th century, thus contributing to the spread of Islam in Sumatra (PITI Palembang, 2009).
Figure 9: The Palembang Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2009)

Figure 10: The Purbalingga Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2013)
Painted in green and red, this mosque combines Chinese, Palembang and pan-Islamic architectural features. It has a dome topped by a crescent and star, and two minarets that resemble the design of Chinese pagodas. Each minaret has five floors, is adorned with the Palembang feature of a goat’s horn, and reaches 17 meters in height, thus symbolising the five daily prayers with 17 *rakaat* (unit of Islamic prayer). According to the mosque’s handout (PITI Palembang, 2009), its design reflects the similarities between Chinese and Palembang-Malay cultures. There it is also stated that the establishment of the Palembang Cheng Hoo Mosque is a response to the socio-cultural development of Islam among Chinese Muslims, resembling the cultural accumulation of Islamic practices among other Muslims in Indonesia, such as the combination of Minang culture with Islamic teachings and of Javanese custom with Islamic traditions. This suggests that the notion of ‘Chinese Islam’ is another form of ethno-religious identity in Indonesia, alongside ‘Javanese Islam’ and ‘Minang Islam’.

Given that Chinese Muslims are dispersed across the archipelago, PITI’s efforts to replicate the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque in Palembang and in other cities shows their attempts to forge a ‘translocal’ Chinese Muslim cultural identity. This is a rather new ethno-religious phenomenon, in contrast to other traditions, such as ‘Javanese Islam’ and ‘Bugis Islam’, which are based on geographically-bounded locations. As I mentioned before, I use ‘translocal’ in this chapter to refer to the linkages between places within the Indonesian archipelago, as contrast to ‘transnational’, which denotes connections with places outside of the Indonesian nation-state. Given that Chinese Muslims from Medan to Makassar are extremely diverse, mosque architecture that adopts Chinese features can be seen as a symbolically unifying characteristic. Today as in the past, the religious practices of Chinese Muslims across the archipelago are influenced by the localities in which they are

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10. It is important to note that such ethno-religious traditions are not static, as many of them have undergone various changes as the result of interactions with other cultures, and the influence of various translocal and transnational flows. For accounts of the dynamics of Javanese Islam, see Beatty (1999) and Ricklefs (2008).
situated, and many of them are eventually culturally absorbed into the local Muslim majority. Therefore, the Chinese-style mosques do not reflect an existing ethno-religious reality, but rather are constructing a new imagination of translocal Chinese Muslim identity within Indonesia. PITI branches across Indonesia, from Sumatra (Medan, Pekan Baru), Java (Semarang, Jakarta), Bali (Denpasar), Sulawesi (Makasar) to Kalimantan (Banjarmasin, Samarinda) intend to establish similar mosques, and the realisation of their plans will decide how far this translocal imagination can go.

This ‘translocality’ of Chinese Muslim identities, on the one hand, challenges ‘ethnolocality’ (Boellstorff 2002), which associates ethnicity with a specific region; on the other hand, it connects Chinese Muslims to their ‘imaginary homeland’ in China. Indonesian nationalism, generally speaking, allows different ethno-regional groups to imagine their connection to the nation, and to recognise each other as equal constituents of the nation. For example, one can simultaneously be both Javanese and Indonesian. This ‘ethnolocality’ is best exemplified in the ‘Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park’ (TMII, Taman Mini Indonesia Indah), which consists of different ethnic ‘houses’, representing, for example, Javanese traditions in Java, Balinese customs in Bali, Madurese culture in Madura. Chinese Indonesians, who do not constitute a specific locality and cannot claim aboriginality in any part of Indonesia, were denied a representation of their identity in the park during the New Order period.

In post-Suharto Indonesia, the Indonesian Chinese Clan Association (PSMTI, Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia) is building the ‘Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park’ (Taman Budaya Tionghoa Indonesia) at TMII to position the ethnic Chinese as one of the many legitimatised ethnic groups. Instead of manifesting a localised Chinese culture, the cultural park draws heavily on the designs of ancient buildings in Mainland China (Kitamura 2007). To some extent, PSMTI is trapped by the concept of ‘ethnolocality’, by which they can claim their aboriginality and geographically-bounded identity only through linkages with their ‘imaginary homeland’ in Mainland China. Chinese Muslims face the same
dilemma. In order to build translocal connections among them within the Indonesian nation-state, they have to refer to mosque architecture as featured in Mainland China, to bind them together. Nevertheless, their transnational linkages do not undermine their national belongings, and their translocal imaginations are not socially exclusive and are always locally grounded, as reflected in the adoption of Palembang cultural features in the Palembang Cheng Hoo Mosque and Javanese ones in the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque.

Besides PITI, individual Chinese Muslims such as Anton Medan and Iskandar Abdurrahman have also engaged in the production of a Chinese Muslim imagination through building Chinese-style mosques. In the compound of his Islamic boarding school in Bogor, the gangster-turned-preacher Anton Medan has built Mosque Tan Kok Liong (after his own Chinese name) to resemble the architectural design of a Chinese palace during the Qing Dynasty (see Figure 11). Anton Medan has also prepared himself
Figure 12: The Pandaan Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2013)

Figure 13: The Mbah Bedjo Mosque, inside the Malang Muhammadiyah University (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2013)
an Islamic grave that resembles the design of a pendopo, a Java-
nese-style hall. Meanwhile, Iskandar Abdurrahman or Chang I
Pao, a Muslim activist of mixed Chinese-Javanese heritage, has
built an ‘Arwana’ mosque, which is an acronym for Arab, Jawa
(Java) and China, as part of his Islamic school in Salatiga. As
Iskandar said, ‘The Chinese design of the mosque is not a sign
of exclusivity, but is to promote the multiculturalism of Islam,
as well as to manifest the harmonious co-existence of Islamic,
Chinese and Javanese cultures in Salatiga’ (interview, Iskandar
Abdurrahman, 13 February 2009).

In Pandaan, near Pasuruan, East Java, even non-Chinese Muslims
have built a mosque which resembles the architectural design of the
Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, with the intention to support social
blending (pembauran) and promote religious tourism (Muzakki
2009: 201) (see Figure 12). In Malang, the latest mosque inside
the compound of the Malang Muhammadiyah University, Mbah
Bedjo Mosque, has also adopted a Chinese architectural design.
According to the head of Muhammadiyah, Din Syamsuddin, the
mosque reflects the harmonious relationship between Islam and
Chineseness, and helps the Muslim organisation to build business
connections with Mainland China (see Figure 13).11

Nevertheless, not all Chinese Muslims share an enthusiasm
for building Chinese-style mosques. For example, Syafii Antonio,
a prominent Chinese Muslim intellectual, who is active in pro-
moting Islamic economics, avoided a Chinese architectural de-
sign for the mosque in his Andalusia Islamic Centre near Jakarta,
using instead a Moorish design from Spain. He told me that it
was his attempt to ‘revive’ what some view as a tolerant period
of Islamic civilisation. Since that there were already a number of
Chinese-style mosques in Indonesia, he advocated this different
style, hoping that his Islamic centre would be more open to all
Muslims regardless of their ethnicity (interview, Syafii Antonio,
11 January 2009).

Republika, 21 May.
Operational diversity: identity contestations in the Cheng Hoo Mosque

In the preceding sections, I discussed Chinese-style mosques as forms of an intentional hybridity that emphasises a symbolic unity and promotes a translocal imagination of Chinese Muslim identity. Rather than promoting a fixed image of Chinese Muslims, I here argue that Chinese-style mosques are also a space for the contestation of diverse and multiple Chinese Muslim identities, for example between Chinese-cultured and non-Chinese-cultured, between first-generation converts and second-generation Muslims, between NU and Muhammadiyah followers, between upper and lower class, male and female, leaders and ordinary members, merchants and preachers, conservative-inclined and liberal-oriented. In the Cheng Hoo Mosque, Chinese Muslims from all walks of life negotiate themselves between not only Islamic and Chinese identities, but also diversified Islamic and Chinese traditions in Indonesia. This is arguably a form of everyday hybridisation that emphasises organic diversity and implies fluid identities among Chinese Muslims. I provide a few snapshots of such diversified identities as I observed at the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque during my fieldwork. More about their shifting ethnicity and complex religiosity will be discussed in Chapter 7.

The contestation of religious affiliations and practices

During Idul Fitri 2008, after morning prayers at the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, Dr Fuad Amsyari, vice-chairman of the advisory board for Indonesia’s Ulama Council (MUI, Majelis Ulama Indonesia), gave a sermon in front of a thousand Muslims from various ethnic backgrounds. Ironically, although he was speaking in a mosque that promotes diversity and tolerance, his sermon emphasised the importance of sharia implementation, not only at the personal and family level, but also at the societal and state levels. He also reiterated the 2005 MUI fatwa denouncing secularism, pluralism and liberalism. Meanwhile during the celebration of
Maulid 2008 (the birth of the Prophet Muhammad), the hardliner Habib Rizieq Shihab, the leader of the Islamic Defenders’ Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam) delivered a fiery religious speech in the Palembang Cheng Hoo Mosque. This occasional presence of conservative or hardline preachers in Cheng Hoo mosques reflects both the neutrality of the mosque (in terms of religious affiliation), and the diversity of religious practices there.

Most religious speeches and sermons in the mosque are rather moderate and tolerant, however. For example, during Idul Adha 2008, in his sermon, K. H. Abdurshomad Buchori, Chairman of MUI East Java criticised both Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in Indonesia and abroad. During a talk before the breaking of the fast in Ramadan, Syaukanie Ong, a Chinese preacher, urged the non-Chinese majority crowd to embrace cultural diversity and abandon their negative stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians. According to the Friday sermon schedule of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, the invited preachers and religious teachers came from all religious backgrounds, including local leaders from NU and Muhammadiyah, lecturers from Islamic institutions and public universities, as well as Chinese Muslim preachers. This is a conscious decision by mosque officers to get along with a variety of Muslim groups in Indonesia.

The Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque is committed to the country’s state ideology, Pancasila, and is neutral in term of religious and political affiliations (YHMCHI 2007). Some Chinese Muslim leaders claim that PITI played a significant role in bringing NU and Muhammadiyah together in the early 1990s, when interaction between these major religious organisations was rare and tense. At a personal level, members of PITI freely participate in any Muslim organisations and political parties. Many of them remain neutral and do not have specific religious affiliations, and those who do have strong affiliations opt not to talk about them publicly. Given that Surabaya is the stronghold of NU, it is not surprising that many Chinese Muslim leaders and businessmen at the mosque are affiliated to this group. Some of them have close relations with local kiai, establishing business networks and to ensuring protection,
while some favour NU because of its flexible attitude towards religious practices. Among middle-ranked leaders, religious teachers and ordinary members of PITI, their religious affiliations are more diverse. A few of them are members of Muhammadiyah and other Muslim organisations.

The differences of religious affiliations among members of the mosque community do not generate serious tensions or conflicts. The only major incident that I heard of during my period of fieldwork was the replacement of the mosque committee chairman, changing from a Muhammadiyah-inclined to an NU-affiliated ustaz (religious teacher). One of my informants reported that the relatively rigid and conservative ustaz, Burhadi, was not favoured by some Chinese Muslim leaders because he often criticised ‘un-Islamic’ practices, such as people not wearing ‘proper’ Islamic dress in the compound of the mosque. Hariyono Ong, who trained in an NU Islamic boarding school replaced Burhadi in early 2008, and is said to be more flexible in religious practice, as he has attended non-Muslim Chinese funeral ceremonies.

During fieldwork, both NU- and Muhammadiyah-affiliated religious teachers active in the mosque maintained that they were tolerant of each other’s activities (interview, Hariyono Ong, 30 September 2008; Lukman Tjoe, 2 November 2008). Hariyono Ong, the imam of the mosque, organised Islamic studies and chanting (zikir) during Ramadan, every 10 days. The sessions began with NU-affiliated kiai delivering religious speeches, followed by Hariyono leading the zikir before breaking of the fast. Meanwhile Lukman Tjoe, a Surabaya PITI ustaz, organised weekly study sessions on Sunday morning (pengajian minggu), to which most speakers came from Muhammadiyah. There were also Islamic guidance classes for new converts every weekend, facilitated by ustaz Gunawan, who did not have any strong affiliation. Apart from these different affiliations, a broad spectrum of religiosity and Islamic piety exists at the Cheng Hoo Mosque. When the female candidate for East Java governor, Khofifah Indah Parawansa, led the takbiran (recitation of ‘God is great’) during the last night of Ramadan 2008 in the mosque, some conservative-inclined Chinese Muslims condemned
this, stating that women were not supposed to lead men in rituals. At the opposite ends of the spectrum are a Chinese Muslim who admitted he still drinks beer and eats pork at home, and a Chinese woman who privately stated that she is a supporter of Abu Bakar Basyir, the former leader of the terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah.

Generational differences and ethnic identifications

Here, I explore the dynamics of generations, languages and ethnicity among Chinese Muslims. Some older Chinese Muslim businessmen, who often spoke to me in Mandarin, told me that they were disappointed with most of the young Chinese converts, who cannot speak Mandarin or any Chinese dialect. They said that most of the young Chinese Muslims had lost their ‘roots’ and had become ‘indigenous’ after their conversion, abandoning Chinese cultural practices and even forgetting their Chinese surnames. Indeed, age is one of the major indicators that shape differences among the mosque community. In general, but not always, elder Chinese Muslims who are mostly businessmen and leaders of the Cheng Hoo mosque can speak Mandarin and still practise Chinese culture. Their conversion is usually politically or economically driven. They are proud of their ‘Chineseness’ and see themselves as middle persons bridging Chinese and non-Chinese. For example, a Chinese businessman told me that he had converted to Islam to ‘intermingle with the local’ and that he hardly practises any Islamic rituals except Friday prayers in the mosque.

Meanwhile, younger Chinese Muslims are both male and female converts, who have mostly become Muslims for reasons of marriage or religious motivation. Most of them cannot speak any Chinese, and know very little about Chinese cultural traditions. They have little concern about their Chinese heritage and often see themselves as ‘Indonesian,’ ‘Muslim’ or even ‘Javanese’, rather than ‘Chinese’. They do not see a great need to play a ‘bridging’ role, as they already mix well with local Muslims. For those who are more religiously pious, they see their Islamic identity as more important than their ethnicity. For example, a young convert told me that
he is unhappy with Chinese Muslim leaders who put an emphasis on personal business and ethnic integration, rather than religious preaching and education. Meanwhile an officer in the mosque, whose father is a Chinese convert and mother is a Javanese Muslim, told me that she sees herself just as an ‘Indonesian’ and that Chinese ethnicity does not mean anything for her. She refused to be interviewed as one of my informants, as she did not see herself as a ‘Chinese Muslim’.

There are also some converts who are only conditionally or symbolically Chinese. For example, Hariyono Ong, the imam of the mosque, who has married a Javanese woman, purposely uses his Chinese surname during preaching to show the compatibility between Chineseness and Islam. There were some cases in which a few Muslims approached me and claimed that he or she is a Chinese or half Chinese, although they did not look like an ethnic Chinese or like someone of Chinese descent. Some said they were peranakan Chinese (mixed Chinese), and others claimed they were HITACHI (Hitam tapi Cina, which literally means ‘black but Chinese’). On the other hand, there were cases where I mistook a non-Chinese Muslim for a Chinese, due to his or her fair skin.

**Class and gender**

What are the class dynamics of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque community? A couple of informal conversations with Javanese staff working for the mosque gave me deeper insight into the interaction between class, religiosity and ethnic identification in the mosque. To illustrate such dynamics, a Javanese Muslim clerk contrasted the two cases of a rich Chinese businessman and a middle-income religious teacher. She said,

> The rich Chinese businessman converted to Islam for economic interest, in order to obtain a licence to open a factory. He always talks about ‘pembauran’ (blending) to bridge the differences between indigenous and non-indigenous Indonesia. In reality, he only ‘membaur’ (socialises) with
Inclusive Chineseness, Cosmopolitan Islam

the government officials and Muslim elites to establish his business network. He seldom mixes with ‘ordinary people’ like us. By contrast, the modest Chinese ustaz is sincere in his conversion. He has never mentioned ‘pembauran’, but he talks to us and treats us equally. He is still living in a small ‘gang’ (lane) where the residents are mostly Javanese and mixes well with them. He also organises Islamic study sessions in which most followers are indigenous people. It is the real ‘pembauran’, not just lip-serving. (Field note, 26 November 2008)

Another Javanese staff member shared similar opinions. She advised me not to interview most of the rich Chinese businessmen and their followers, because they were neither pious nor sincere Muslims. She said many of them seldom followed the Islamic study sessions and only participated in Friday prayer sessions and other major events attended by Muslim elites and covered by the media. She suggested that I interview Chinese Muslim religious teachers, small shop-owners and other ‘ordinary’ Chinese Muslims. It is important to note that both the Javanese staff members did not ‘racialise’ their boss–staff relationship with Chinese Muslim leaders, but rather pointed to the difference between classes within Chinese Muslims themselves. A couple of poorer Chinese Muslims I met expressed their dissatisfaction with their richer counterparts. A middle-aged Chinese convert from Pontianak who was looking for employment claimed that he had been ignored by the rich Chinese Muslim leaders, who refused to talk to him. He complained that these leaders were keen to help only poor local Muslims, but ignored the plight of poor converts. However, it is unfair to suggest that all Chinese Muslim businessmen and leaders were exclusive and not religious, while religious teachers and preachers were integrative and pious. I observed that there were some Chinese Muslim businessmen practising Islam frequently and mixing well with ordinary Muslims. There were also some religious teachers preaching for money instead of for religious purposes.
In addition to class, gender plays an important role in characterising the interactions in the mosque. Most of the mosque committee members are older businessmen; only a couple of them are female. As compared to their male counterparts, fewer female Chinese have converted to Islam for political and business reasons. Most of them have become Muslim to marry and others for religious purposes. Despite gender segregation during prayers, female and male Muslims in the mosque intermingle with each other rather freely. As a Chinese Muslim leader indicated, mixed-gender sociability is an important element to attract non-Muslims to join the activities of the mosque (field note, 28 November 2008). Moreover, there is no requirement for non-Muslim women to cover themselves when entering the prayer hall of the mosque. Many Chinese Muslim females wear Islamic dress with veiling (*jilbab*) while attending religious functions, yet they do not necessarily wear this outside their religious circle (see Chapter 7 for more discussion about female Chinese converts’ religionsities). More than half of followers of the Islamic study and chanting sessions in the mosque were female, and most of them were non-Chinese.

**The Cheng Hoo Mosque as a discursive cosmopolitan space**

Since its establishment, the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque has been frequently featured in various media and has been visited by many prominent figures. What makes this mosque so exceptional? I would suggest that its significance has to be examined in the larger context from post-1998 Indonesia onwards. After the “anti-Chinese” riots of 1998, post-New Order governments abolished several laws that discriminated against Chinese Indonesians, in an attempt to portray Indonesia as an inclusive nation (Hoon 2008). The *reformasi* period has been marked by violent events, such the Maluku conflicts between Christians and Muslims, the terrorist attacks in Bali and Jakarta, and more recently the attacks against Ahmadiyah followers. At the same time, mainstream Muslim organisations such as Muhammadiyah and NU have continued to promote Islamic
moderation and religious tolerance, despite their own internal factionalism (Hefner 2005; Robinson 2008).

Within such contexts, Cheng Hoo Mosque is welcomed by many Indonesians as a symbolic marker of the acceptance of Chinese culture, as well as a clear statement of the inclusivity of Indonesian Islam. Thus, it is no surprise that such a mosque has gained media attention, whereby it can be seen a form of a discursive cosmopolitanism, deployed to manifest cultural diversity and religious pluralism in contemporary Indonesia. In other words, the inclusivity of Chinese-style mosques is an antidote to the rising puritanism and the conservative turn of Islamic doctrines among some sections of Indonesia’s Muslim society. Indeed, to project the cosmopolitan image of Islam, Chinese Muslim leaders have quoted the Qur’an to show that Islam is a ‘rahmatan lil’al-amin’ (blessing for all) which emphasises ‘hablum minalloohi wa hablum minannaas’ (a good relationship with God and among humankind) (YHMCHI 2008). Now, based on personal interviews and articles, I present the Muslim leaders’ public discourse about the Cheng Hoo Mosque as one that promotes peaceful, vernacular and ‘touristic’ Islam.

First, this is a peaceful mosque. Syafiq Mughni, chairman of the East Java Muhammadiyah branch does not see any problem with the establishment of a mosque which adopts a Chinese design, arguing that the Qur’an does not regulate mosque architecture (interview, Syafiq Mughni, 18 September 2008). He welcomes the Chinese-style Mosque because it reflects the universality of Islam and it helps in preaching Islam to non-Muslim Chinese. He also suggests that the use of Cheng Ho for the name of the mosque is timely, as Indonesian Islam is facing challenges from terrorism abroad and fundamentalism at home. According to him,

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12. Among the many news articles and comments about the Cheng Hoo Mosque are ‘Chinese-style Mosque a symbol of Indonesian Diversity’ (Arifin 2010); ‘Masjid Cheng Hoo, Sarat Pesan Kedamaian’ [Cheng Hoo Mosque, Message of Peace] (Ghufron 2009); ‘Masjid Cheng Hoo, Miniatur Islam Damai’ [Cheng Hoo Mosque, Miniature of Peaceful Islam] (Fauzi 2007) and ‘Pagoda on the roof of Cheng Hoo Mosque’ (Dariyanto 2009).
Indonesian Muslims should learn from the spirit of Cheng Ho, who embodies peace and inclusivity.

Second, it is a vernacular mosque. For Rubaidi, the East Java NU secretary, the Cheng Hoo Mosque is a fine example of the fact that Islam does not hesitate to adopt ethnic cultural symbols, practices and rituals (interview, Rubaidi, 15 November 2008). As a proponent of the ‘indigenisation’ of Islam, he sees this mosque as a form of resistance against the perceived ‘Arabisation’ of mosque architecture. But instead of merely adopting pan-Islamic designs, he supports a diversity of mosque architectural forms, which reflect various local and ethnic manifestations of Islam. He also praises the mosque for preaching Islam through cultural approaches and in a tolerant way.

Third, the Cheng Hoo Mosque is ‘touristic’ mosque. Since its establishment, the mosque has been visited by many prominent national leaders, including Yusuf Kalla, Amien Rais, Abdurrahman Wahid and Wiranto, as well as various local religious, military, business and political personages. The mosque is not only a place of worship, but also a tourist destination, attracting Muslim and non-Muslims visitors from across the country and abroad. Muslim organisations and Islamic schools organise tours to visit this ‘exotic’ mosque in Surabaya. Along with the recently built pan-Islamic-design Al-Akbar Great Mosque and the historical Javanese-style Sunan Ampel Mosque, the Cheng Hoo Mosque has been promoted as a prime religious tourist destination (wisata religi) by the Surabaya Tourism Board. It has also been given an award from Indonesian Museum Record (Museum Rekor Indonesia).

The Cheng Hoo Mosque as a living cosmopolitan space

Having reviewed public discourses of this mosque as a cosmopolitan space, it is now important to look also at the sociological reality of its cosmopolitanism. By illustrating some examples of activities in

the mosque, I argue that it embraces ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’, as ‘ordinary members of different ethno-religious and cultural groupings mix, mingle, intensely interact, and share in values and practices’ (Bayat 2008: 5). It is a place where Chinese and non-Chinese, Muslims and non-Muslims, upper classes and lower classes, males and females converge; it is a space where religious, social and economy activities co-exist. As the former imam of the mosque, Burhadi said, ‘We wish this mosque to be like a supermarket, fulfilling the aspirations of all people’ (Harahap 2007).

The busiest time of the week is on Fridays, when hundreds of men of various ethnic backgrounds come to the mosque for zuhur (afternoon) prayers. Sometimes, conversion testimonies are held after the prayers (see Figure 14). The mosque can only accommodate about 200–300 people, so every Friday a temporary shelter is set up to cater for another 1,000 people. With the exception of a few Chinese Muslim leaders, almost all the Muslims who perform Friday prayers here are non-Chinese who are either working or residing nearby. Instead of travelling all the way to the

Figure 14: A conversion ceremony at the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)
Cheng Hoo Mosque, most Chinese Muslims perform their prayers at their closest mosque. Indeed, location is more important than mosque architecture for them. The busiest time of the year for the Cheng Hoo Mosque is the fasting month, Ramadan, when hundreds of Muslims, mostly non-Chinese, gather here to pray and break their fast. Some come to the mosque because it is close to where they live or work, and because the mosque provides free food, while others visit it for its unique appearance. For the evening taraweh prayer, the mosque accommodates both NU and Muhammadiyah followers, as it organises two versions, one with 23 rakaat and the other with 11 rakaat.

In addition, the mosque committee exercises their inclusivity through collaboration with other socio-religious groups. For instance, PITI organises a mass khitanan (circumcision) at the mosque for poor Muslims in Surabaya in cooperation with Al-Irsyad, an Arab Muslim organisation. PITI also extends their cooperation with non-Muslim organisations in activities such as donating goods for flood victims, for example with the Buddhist organisation, Tsu Chi. Indeed, charity events are frequently held at the mosque. A few Chinese Muslim leaders see themselves as middle-persons, facilitating the distribution of donations from better-off Chinese individuals and organisations to needy Muslims, since some Muslims might worry that donations may not be halal, and since some Chinese organisations lack direct connections with Muslim organisations.

One evening, the noise of a bouncing basketball and the sound of Islamic chanting run through the mosque compound. Inside the mosque, a few Muslims, mostly non-Chinese, recite the Qur’an, led by a Chinese Muslim ustaz. Outside, Muslim and non-Muslim youth play basketball. They stop for a while after the azan, so that Muslims can perform their prayers undisturbed. This illustrates that the mosque fulfils both the religious and social purposes of a

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14. This kind of donation, on the one hand, may demonstrate an ethnic Chinese concern for local Indonesians who are mostly Muslims; on the other hand, it may reinforce the stereotypical dichotomy that Chinese Indonesians are rich and that the pribumi are often left behind in the economic sphere.
place of worship (Mortada, 2003: 87), being a sacred place as well as a social space for the gathering of Muslims and non-Muslims. The mosque compound hosts PITI’s offices, multipurpose rooms, a kindergarten, a canteen, an acupuncture clinic and badminton courts. Mandarin classes, qigong practice and dancing courses are also held in the complex. Like other mosques, the Cheng Hoo Mosque does not lack economic activities. The mosque committee raises money from renting the sports facilities and wedding functions are often held at the mosque. Some Chinese Muslims conduct informal business on the premises, such as selling biscuits, slimming products and Islamic insurance. The mosque thus operates as a business network for Chinese Muslims involved in large-scale industries (banks, factories), as well as small and medium-size enterprises (restaurants, grocery shops).

**Inclusive Chineseness and Islam**

Simple dichotomies cannot capture the dynamic nature of identity formation in the real world. I therefore conclude by discussing three sets of paradoxes in the study of the Cheng Hoo Mosque: transnational imaginations and local configurations; intentional hybridity and everyday hybridity; cultural particularism and grounded cosmopolitanism.

First, through the mosque Chinese Muslim leaders construct their Islamic tradition by adopting a mosque design from China; yet they reconfigure it in local contexts. Their strategic transnational connection with Muslims in China is not a form of longing to return to the mainland, but an effort to manifest their identity and empower their social position in Indonesia. There are efforts to build Chinese-style mosques in other cities, which might contribute to the emergence of a rather new translocal ethno-religious imagination within Indonesia. However, these translocal imaginations have been repeatedly grounded and influenced by surrounding local cultures.

Second, the mosque does not symbolise an existing ethno-religious reality, but rather brings a new reality into being, by reinventing traditions to promote a sense of shared experience that
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can unify Chinese Muslims. The strategic combination of Chinese architectural design and local Islamic traditions can be seen as a form of intentional mixing to emphasise the ‘Chineseness’ of a Muslim house of worship. This fixity of identity through a mosque does not reflect the complexity of cultural interaction and identity adoption of Chinese Muslims. The everyday hybridity of Chinese Muslim identities can only be observed through their daily involvement and activities in the mosque, where they constantly cross boundaries, not only between Muslim and Chinese identities, but also within diversified Islamic and Chinese traditions. The mosque is both a representative place and a contested space, the former promoting the symbolic unity of Chinese Muslims, the latter reflecting the diverse negotiations of their identities.

Third, the establishment of Chinese-style mosques can ‘universalise’ Islam to demonstrate its compatibility with Chinese culture, but at the same time, can also ‘essentialise’ Indonesia’s Chinese within a stereotypical image. Yet this cultural essentialism does not always imply exclusion (Kahn 2006: 166). Indeed, the Cheng Hoo Mosque is a prime example of the celebration of inclusive Chinese cultural expression. Although it was built in a Chinese style and is managed by Chinese Muslims, it is a multi-ethnic religious space allowing both Muslims and non-Muslims from different ethnic groups to interact with each other. In fact, most of the congregation members of the mosque are non-Chinese Muslims, while many Chinese converts attend other mosques close to where they live. We may call it ‘inclusive Chineseness’, in which the practice of Chinese culture is no longer a sign of ethnic exclusivity but rather a common heritage shared by all, whilst one has the freedom to abandon one’s Chineseness without social pressure.

In addition, by appropriating features from both NU and Muhammadiyah traditions, as well as the external design of a Chinese temple and the internal structure of a Romanesque church, the mosque design shows Islam as a cosmopolitan religion that celebrates differences within and between religions. Avoiding the use of loud speakers to broadcast morning *azan* and cooperating with the activities of Chinese organisations show that an assertion of
Islamic identity need not affect relations with non-Muslim counterparts. Islamic cosmopolitanism is found not only in Islamic texts, historical encounters and cultural syncretism with local traditions in Indonesia, but also in the everyday life strategies of minority groups. The Cheng Hoo Mosque can be seen as a ‘cosmopolitan [space] envisaged in marginality’ (Bhabha 1996a: 195) whereby minority Chinese Muslims empower themselves by playing a significant role in promoting ethnic and religious harmony. Its inclusive architectural designs and social activities can be seen as a form of ‘grounded’ vernacular cosmopolitanism, in which there is no necessary contradiction between cosmopolitan sensibilities and identity assertion. Such cosmopolitan practices are ‘rooted’ in the experiences of particular ethno-religious groups (Kahn 2008; also Appiah 1998; Werbner 2008).\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\) For more details of ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’, see Chapter 1. I also discuss further this issue in my concluding chapter.
Chinese Muslim preachers have gained a surprisingly high profile in post-1998 Indonesia. Preachers such as Anton Medan, Koko Liem and Tan Mei Hwa are popular, not only among Chinese converts, but also with non-Chinese Muslim Indonesians. They appear regularly on religious television programs and hold public talks that attract large crowds. There are two things that explain the recent rise in Chinese preachers: the return of Chinese culture to the Indonesian public space since the collapse of the New Order regime, and the popularity of Muslim celebrity preachers in general.

Tapping into the rising consumer culture, many successful preachers in contemporary Indonesia have become media celebrities, who are skilled at tailoring their messages and fashioning their appearance to a media audience. Chinese preachers appear to have a special marketing pull, because of their ethnicity and their status as converts. Their Chinese appearances stand out as exotic trademarks in the crowded preaching market. In addition, most Indonesians are born into the Muslim faith, so the personal biographies of converts arouse curiosity, especially when the converts are Chinese. Some Muslims are concerned with what they see as a process of ‘Christianisation’ in Indonesia, and so they view the conversion to Islam of Chinese Indonesians – a community that is almost forty per cent Christian – as a welcome phenomenon.¹ At the same time, many Muslims think

¹. ‘Christianisation’ is a term that generally refers both to Christian efforts to convert Muslims and to the alleged growing influence of Christianity in Muslim-majority Indonesia. Some Muslim groups use it as a justification for mass mobilisation and vigilante attacks. For more discussion of ‘Christianisation’ in Indonesia,
that having experienced the spiritual journey towards piety, these “converts-turned-preachers” can provide a persuasive role model for non-practising Muslims.

Many Chinese Muslim preachers are aware of their distinctive qualities and, thus, they strategically use their differences to augment their popularity. Yet, Chinese preachers are not a singular entity. Their preaching takes varying forms and they each have different messages, reflecting their varying socio-economic backgrounds, cultural outlooks, conversion experiences and religious education. Some of them utilise their Chineseness to distinguish themselves from other preachers; some emphasise the theological differences between their former religion (in most cases, Christianity) and Islam; some share their experience in their life transformation from being an ‘immoral’ person to a good Muslim; and others discuss the rationality of Islam in public life. It can be argued that Chinese preachers are as diverse as Indonesian Islam itself.

In this chapter, by highlighting five case studies of popular Chinese Muslim preachers and a Chinese nasyid (Islamic music) group, I examine how Chinese culture and Islamic knowledge are ‘learned’ by the preachers, ‘reproduced’ in their preaching, and then ‘consumed’ by the audience. Finally, by positioning Chineseness and Islam as ‘symbolic commodities’ (Bolin 2002; Muzakki 2007), I examine issues related to identity consumption, ethnic interaction and religious pluralism in contemporary Indonesia. As demonstrated by the preaching of some Chinese Muslims, I argue that the commodification of identities has paradoxical outcomes – a diversity of appearances does not always mean a plurality of discourses. Chinese preachers may promote the universality of Islam, yet some of their religious messages can be conservative; they may cross ethnic boundaries, but reinforce ethnic stereotypes at the same time.

Consumption, performance and identity

In recent decades, the increase in consumer culture and the spread of new media have made an enormous impact on consumption practices and identity expressions in Indonesia and elsewhere. Consumption increasingly serves as a venue of identity expression that has both economic and political significance. As argued by Storey (1999), cultural consumption provides us with a script for identity performance, and is perhaps the most visible way we perform our sense of self. Since we manifest our identities through what we consume, ‘consumption is therefore also a form of production’ (Storey: 2003: 78). Friedman (1994) further suggests that, through examining the practice of cultural consumption and production, we can gain some insight into the relations between local structures of desire and identity, as well as the political and economic contexts that enable or constrain such practices.

As Ditchev (2006) has suggested, 21st-century nationalism is different from its earlier incarnations: it is not necessarily linked to solidarity or belonging, but to appearances and emblems. Referring to the trends of nationalism in Bulgaria, he coined the term ‘lifestyle nationalism’ to refer to the growing expression of national identity by using simple and clear-cut emblems in the age of global consumer culture. In many cases, one does not live the identity, but possesses it. The same trends can also be observed in the expression of ethnic and religious identities in contemporary societies. For example, we might use ‘lifestyle Islam’ and ‘lifestyle Chineseness’ to describe the rising of identity consumption in Indonesia today. As reflected in some of the preachers I discuss later, Islamic appearance is more important than substance in the preaching market, while cultural symbols are more important than language ability in the manifestation of their Chinese identities. In other words, identity expression is more or less a performance.

Furthermore, cultural symbols and religious appearances have emblematic exchange values that can generate financial incentives
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(Muzakki 2007). In Indonesia, in the last decade, there has been a growing Islamic consumerism especially among urban middle-class Muslims, as reflected by the mushrooming of various religious-themed products and services, such as Islamic popular culture, banking, tourism, literature and fashion. At the same time, since the collapse of the New Order regime Chineseness has been absorbed into the market and become a part of the urban life style (Budianta 2007: 174). For example, during Chinese New Year, lion dance performances and red lantern decorations are commonly found in most of the major shopping centres in big cities to attract consumers. To a certain extent, both Islam and Chineseness can be seen as ‘symbolic commodities’ (Bolin 2002; Muzakki 2007) that attract the attention of consumers and generate profits for vendors.

Yet, the rise in consumer culture does not necessarily contradict the rise in religious piety. Or in other words, the commodification of religion does not weaken but transforms religious faith and practice. For example, as pointed out by Miller (2004: 7), religious leaders might lose traditional power and authority, yet they gain media celebrity. Meanwhile, Eickelman and Anderson (2003) suggest that new media such as the internet and television have expanded the public sphere of Islam as a marketplace of ideas, identities and discourse. The commodification of Islam in Indonesia is producing a spectrum of Islamic expressions that is diverse and subject to rapid change. As Fealy (2008) has pointed out, given that markets need to appeal to the widest possible buyership by using pluralist messages, Islamic consumerism seems to result in greater pluralism and does not undermine the moderate nature of Indonesian Islam (Fealy 2008). Similarly, referring to the popularity of the Islamic-themed Indonesian film, Ayat-ayat Cinta (The Verses of Love), Heryanto (2010) suggests that ‘pop Islam’ is hybrid in substance and style, and offers an attractive image of Indonesian Islam. Located in these broader contexts, this chapter examines whether Chinese Muslim preachers promote a greater diversity of Islamic expression and discourse in Indonesia.
Converts-turned-preachers: a new force in Indonesian Islamic markets

In contemporary Indonesia, Islamic preaching is not only a medium for transmitting Islamic knowledge to the public, but also a means of accumulating wealth and improving social status (Fealy 2008; Muzakki 2007). Coping with the rise of a consumer culture and the media industry, the popular dai (Muslim preacher) today not only has to manage Islamic knowledge, but also needs to equip him or herself with communication skills and make media-friendly appearances. In other words, besides knowledge and substance, form and appearance determine the growing Islamic preaching market.

This phenomenon of Islamic preaching in Indonesia has been well studied (Abaza 2004; Hoesterey 2008, 2016; Howell 2008; Millie 2008; Muzakki 2007). While there are many writings about born-Muslim and born-again Muslim preachers, such as Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym), Yusuf Mansur, Arifin Ilham and Jefri Al-Buchori (Uje), the recent popularity of converts-turned-preachers has received little scholarly attention. In the past, the minority and mualaf (new-convert) status of Chinese Muslims might have provided obstacles for them to become successful preachers, but today their smaller numbers and recent Islamic conversions are advantages. In the crowded world of celebrity preachers, one needs a unique feature or trademark to attract attention. While preachers of Arab Hadrami descent carry an authenticating stamp of origin, Chinese preachers stand out for their exceptional and exotic outlooks in non-Chinese dominated preaching markets.

Drawing upon the success of other preachers, Chinese Muslim preachers are not ‘passive consumers’ in the Indonesian Islamic market, but creative in carving out a niche by performing their Chinese identity and narrating their personal biographies (from converts to pious Muslims) to win adherents. Many Chinese preachers are aware of their unique positions: as ‘a part of an ethnic minority, but also a part of a majority Muslim ummah’. Some of them use their uniqueness to establish their preaching
careers. For example, Tan Mei Hwa and Koko Liem are two interesting figures, as they use their Chinese names (without any Islamic/Javanese name attached) in their preaching. Koko Liem also wears traditional Chinese clothing when preaching. They use Chinese cultural symbols not only to prove that Chineseness and Islam are compatible, but also as an ‘authentic selling point’ that differentiates them from other preachers, who are non-Chinese and mostly born Muslim. Cognizant that Chinese Muslims are few, they deliberately use their Chinese names and wear Chinese attire to attract the attention of local Muslims who are curious about the stories and experiences of converts.

‘Christianisation’ amongst Muslims has been a major anxiety for some Islamic organisations and leaders, particularly the possibility of non-practising Muslims converting to Christianity through inter-religious marriages and the influence of the Christian education system. Therefore, although most Islamic organisations do not have systematic propagation efforts among Chinese Indonesians, the Islamic conversion of Chinese (especially those who were Christians) is welcomed as a reversal of the widely held fear. The circulation of converts’ stories has constituted an integral part of the preaching agenda. Most of the Islamic magazines, for instance Hidayah and al-Kisah, have a section describing the experiences of converts.

Some Muslim activists view the spiritual journey of Chinese Muslims as a role model for non-practising ‘indigenous’ Muslim Indonesians. This is illustrated in a conversation I had with a Javanese Muslim during my field research.

There are a lot of identity-card Muslims among indigenous Indonesians. They do not go to the mosque for Friday prayer or fast during Ramadan. Yet, our Chinese converts are different. They choose to become Muslim and learn

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2. The expression ‘identity-card Muslims’ or Islam KTP (Kartu Tanda Penduduk) is commonly used to refer to non-practising Muslims in Indonesia. All Indonesian citizens have to state their religion on an identity card, yet not all of those who identify as Muslims practise Islam in daily life, especially in Java.
their religion seriously. We should be ashamed, because we
are born Muslims and learned about our religion for years,
but we do not practise it properly. Therefore, Chinese dai
should play an important role in the dakwah movement.
(Field note, 10 January 2008)

Felix Siauw, an activist in Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), told
me that he is frequently invited to lead Islamic study sessions
(pengajian) organised by HTI in various locations, because the
organisers think that a pious Muslim convert can set a good example
for the born Muslim. Siauw asserts, ‘Although my knowledge of
Islam is probably not as deep as others, many Muslims are more
interested to listen to me than to other Muslims because I am
Chinese and a new convert to HTI’ (interview, Felix Siauw, 10
January 2008). His experience is shared by many other Chinese
ustaz (religious teachers) and dai (preachers), who affirmed that
their Chineseness and their status as converts have contributed to
the popularity of their preaching (Hew forthcoming).

When I first met Felix Siauw in 2008, he was only a part-time
preacher. By 2016, he had become one of the most popular and
controversial preachers in Indonesia (see Figure 15). He attributes
his rising popularity to his extensive use of social media and
visual aesthetics (interview, Felix Siauw, 8 September 2016). As of
early 2017, he has more than four million followers on Facebook
and one million followers on Instagram. He openly states his
hardliner views, for example rejecting democracy, capitalism and
secularism. Yet, such dogmatic notions do not hinder him from
being frequently invited to speak at various locations in Indonesia
and abroad. Claiming himself as an Islamic inspirer Felix Siauw is
also a successful businessman and a prolific writer. Together with
his wife, he runs a business selling female Muslim clothing. He is
the author of many books subtly promoting the ideology of HTI.

In the following sections, I discuss in detail five high-profile
Chinese preachers and a nasyid (Islamic music) group in contem-
porary Indonesia. Two clarifications need to be made in advance.
First, my use of the term ‘marketing’ in this chapter is not intended
as a value judgment on preachers, nor do I seek to downplay the presence of genuine religious or cultural motivations among them. Rather my aim is to examine the relationship between preaching, marketing and identity. Second, I do not overlook the existence of Chinese Muslim preachers in the New Order period, but they were less visible. Many of them downplayed their Chineseness, as
the public expression of Chinese identity was not allowed during the Suharto regime.

*Tan Mei Hwa: singing, dancing, preaching*

Tan Mei Hwa or Ida Astuti, born 1968, is both a preacher and a performer. Her Chinese identity and entertaining preaching style have made her one of the most popular preachers in Surabaya, East Java. She has speaking engagements nearly every day, not only in East Java, but also in other provinces. During Ramadan, she hosted a religious program on the biggest local television station in East Java, JTV. She is known as *Bu Nyai* Tan Mei Hwa, ‘nyai’ being a prestigious title for a female religious scholar in the Javanese tradition.

Always dressed in fashionable and colourful Muslim attire with *jilbab* (headscarf), her easily digested religious messages and down-to-earth preaching style are welcomed by many ordinary Muslims, especially women and girls (see Figure 16). She intersperses her message with singing, plenty of jokes and sometimes

![Figure 16: With plenty of jokes and singing, Tan Mei Hwa speaks during an election campaign in Surabaya in 2008 (photo Hew Wai Weng, 2008)](image-url)
even dancing. As described by a journalist, she conveys her speech in ‘Surabaya’ style, by using lots of Javanese words and speaking in a direct manner: interactive, blunt and entertaining at the same time (Roosilawati 2008). She also makes extensive use of ‘social talk’ (*bahasa gaul*), the slang used by Indonesian youth, to interact with her audiences.

What makes her most striking, however, is her expression of Chineseness. First, although she is not a fluent Mandarin speaker, she often sprinkles a little Mandarin in her talk. Second, she always highlights the role of Chinese Muslims in promoting early Islamisation in Java. Third, she tries to present a positive image of Chinese Indonesians to the Muslim crowd by saying that not all Chinese are rich or exclusive. Fourth, she uses her Chinese name, Tan Mei Hwa, in order to differentiate herself from other preachers who have Islamic or Indonesian names. As she told me, ‘According to Islamic teaching, there is no requirement to adapt certain type of name. Mei Hwa is also my Islamic name, because it has good meaning. It means – beautiful flower’ (interview, Tan Mei Hwa, 23 November 2010).

Trained in law, Tan Mei Hwa worked in multilevel marketing before she became a full-time preacher. Like many Chinese Indonesians around her age in Java, she speaks fluent Indonesian and Javanese, yet has only mastered a few Mandarin and Hokkien phrases. She converted to Islam when she was 18 due to the influence of her Muslim friends and her marriage to a Javanese man from Solo. She learnt about Islam from her husband, Muslim friends and through readings. Her lack of formal Islamic education is not an obstacle for her in the preaching market. She is not only a successful preacher, but also the director of Az Zahra, a religious training and consultation institute. She has an interest in developing MSQ, Management Spiritual Quotient, mimicking the popular Ary Ginanjar’s Emotional-Spiritual Quotient (ESQ). ESQ is an Islamic corporate management and motivational service, focusing on improving one’s general and professional success through spiritual awareness and commitment.

She says excellent communication skills, which she has from her former involvement in multilevel marketing, are crucial to
preaching. In distinction from other preachers who mostly refer to religious texts, she reads a lot of non-religious ones, especially books related to management, leadership and philosophy, so that she can convey Islamic messages connected to everyday practice, such as time management, human interaction and work ethics. As she said, ‘Islam is a not difficult religion. Islam is a practical guide for everyday life.’

To appeal to broader audiences, Tan Mei Hwa avoids theological debates and controversial subjects in her preaching. Although she occasionally employs Arabic citations from Islam’s normative sources, she emphasises the universal values of Islam and how to apply these in everyday life. She rarely talks about her former religion (Chinese traditional beliefs) and her conversion experience. She emphasises that her preaching is also for non-Muslims, stating that ‘Islam is a religion that is a blessing for all (rahmatan lil ‘alamin).’ She does not attempt to convert other Chinese to Islam, because she says religious conversion is a personal choice. Although she has been invited to give talks in support of political campaigns during elections, as in 2008, she has refused to affiliate with any political party or religious organisation. She stresses that as a preacher it is important for her to be neutral so her messages can be accepted by all Muslims. In short, the image of Islam she tries to portray is ‘simple, inclusive and fun.’

Like other celebrity preachers, Tan Mei Hwa is an astute entrepreneur who tailors her preaching style and message to audiences carefully and creatively. I first met her in 2008 at a fast-breaking event during Ramadan in Surabaya. The event was also part of a gubernatorial election campaign, and the candidate for deputy governor of East Java, Saifullah Yusuf, known also as Gus Ipul, was present. Contradicting her claim to be politically neutral, Tan Mei Hwa urged the audience to vote for Gus Ipul and his running mate. Apart from that, she did not talk much about other political issues and focused on themes such as Islamic solidarity and poverty eradication. When I asked one of the organisers why Tan Mei Hwa has been invited, he responded, ‘Because she is popular. Her message is simple and her style entertaining. She can attract a large audience, especially female’ (field note, 24 September 2008).
Indeed, with her singing, flamboyant gestures and sometimes dancing, she can hold her audience’s attention for a full hour and a half of preaching. During the fast-breaking function, she was dressed in fashionable pink. Besides reciting *shalawat* (prayers for the God), she sang the popular ‘*SurgaMu*’ (Your Heaven), a religious-themed pop-rock song by the band UNGU. She asked her audience to sing along and most of them did. She joked too, drawing stories from her ethnicity and personal experience. For example, she said, ‘I am a Chinese. How come my Javanese is more fluent than my Chinese?’; and ‘Although I have slanted eyes (*mata sipit*), I have a broad viewpoint’ (field note, 24 September 2008), and so on. She often repeated similar stylised performances at other public talks. Yet, she also changes her preaching persona and content according to the audience, function and location. When conducting a monthly Islamic study session with Muslim women in a Muhammadiyah mosque near her house, she avoids singing and dancing because some modernist Muslims discourage these activities in their mosques. In the session, she usually gives a brief speech, followed by an interactive question and answer session. She also conducts smaller *zikir* (Islamic mystical chanting) sessions every Sunday at her house and occasionally offers training that combines both the skill of business management and religious spirituality.

She builds up her credentials as a Chinese preacher by referring to religious texts. In a public talk in connection with *halal-bihalal* (a mutual forgiving event) in Surabaya in 2008, she urged the crowd, who were mostly non-Chinese Muslims, to acknowledge and respect difference. She began her talk by stating that she converted to Islam because she was interested in the concept of ‘*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*’ (blessing for all) in Islamic teachings. Later, she recounted a short conversation between two Muslim girls in which one had refused to go to a *pengajian* (Islamic study session) because it was being led by a Chinese preacher. She then cited a Qur’anic verse³ and told her audience:

³ The Qur’anic verse she quoted is from Chapter Al-Hujurat (49: 13). The verse can be translated as ‘People, we created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one
I was born as Tan Mei Hwa. Can I choose to not be Chinese? Is it a sin to be Chinese? There is no Qur’anic text that obliges someone to be ethnic Chinese or not. God creates us in different shapes and colours. Some have slanted eyes, and some have broader eyes. Some have darker skin, and some have fairer skin. We are all brother and sisters. We should respect each other. (Field note, 16 October 2008)

Most of the audience applauded her, in enthusiastic support. She continued her talk by referring to a Hadith (an account of the words of the Prophet Muhammad): ‘The Prophet Muhammad urges us Muslims to seek knowledge even as far as China. Since there are many ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, we are lucky that we can learn from them without travelling to Mainland China’ (field note, 16 October 2008). Such messages help promote a better image of Chinese Indonesians and bolster her credentials as a Chinese preacher. To show that Chinese preaching is not new, she also links back to Cheng Ho and the Walisongo. Quoting the former NU leader, Abdurrahman Wahid, she claims that some of the revered Walisongo were of Chinese descent.

However, Tan Mei Hwa’s preaching is not without controversy. Some Muslims have criticised her for being ‘just an entertainer’ rather than a true preacher. As one of my informants said, ‘She does not have a strong religious education background and the content of her speeches is superficial’ (field note, 24 September 2008). Other Muslims accuse her of being materialistic, profiting from selling the word of God (menjualkan ayat), as there are rumours that she charges up to five million rupiah for a preaching session. She responds by saying that in practice she could not preach without charging a fee. She explains that she is often invited to perform but receives insufficient remuneration to cover her travelling expenses, let alone other costs. She denies charging a fixed fee, maintaining that the fee is negotiable between her and the host, depending on the location and the nature of the event. Besides charging a fee, she

another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware’ (Abdel Haleem, 2005).
has some requirements of her host, such as the quality of the sound system, the size of the auditorium and the seating arrangements, in which females should be seated at the front.

Another controversial aspect of Tan Mei Hwa’s preaching is her singing and dancing. Some ultra-conservative Muslims argue that it is unacceptable for women to sing and perform in public because the female voice is aurat (a part of the body that should be covered in public). She disagrees and argues that such a ‘hardline’ (keras) view is not shared by a majority of Indonesian Muslims. She defends herself by saying that ‘As long as I wear Islamic clothing, practise an Islamic lifestyle and spread the message of Islam, what’s wrong with a female becoming a preacher?’ Furthermore, she continues, ‘most of my audiences are female’. She also explains why she chooses to wear colourful dresses when preaching, ‘I want to portray Islam as a beautiful religion, and an attractive appearance is very important’ (interview, Tan Mei Hwa, 23 November 2008). Yet this does not mean that she is a progressive on gender issues.

As I observed, in an Islamic study session, she once told her female audience that ‘women are not suited to become leaders because they are emotional’ and ‘women should put family first and career second’ (field note, 23 November 2008). Such statements, however, have to be put into context, because she was addressing a more socially conservative crowd in a Muhammadiyah mosque. Furthermore, in 2008, she had been invited to speak at the East Java gubernatorial election campaigns of Soekarwo and Saifullah Yusuf (both males), and one of their challengers was female. This might explain why she told her audience at that time that ‘women are not suited to become leaders’. Ironically, seven years later, in 2015, with the endorsement of the Islamist party PKS (Partai Keadilan

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4. In 2008, there were two pairs of candidates for the second round of the East Java gubernatorial election. The first duo was Soekarwo-Saifullah Yusuf, supported by the Democrat Party (PD) and the National Mandate Party (PAN), while the second pair was Khoifiah Parawansa-Mudjiono, supported by the United Development Party (PPP) and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP). Tan Mei Hwa was invited by the Soekarwo team to speak in their election campaign. Khoifiah is a female leader in NU and was a minister in Abdurrahman Wahid’s cabinet. The Soekarwo team won the gubernatorial election.
Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice Party) and the Prabowo Subianto-led Gerinda party (Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya, Great Indonesia Movement Party), Tan Mei Hwa contested a local election in East Java, aiming to become the deputy regent of Sidoarjo, yet she failed to secure the position.

Koko Liem: Chinese package, Islamic message

An ustaz (religious teacher), but he has narrow eyes, yellow skin and always wears Chinese attire. He is known as Koko Liem. Originating from a Chinese Buddhist family in Dumai, Sumatra, he converted to Islam because he believes that the religion has universal and tolerant teachings.

This is how a young Chinese preacher, Koko Liem, is introduced on television in Indonesia. His Chinese name, Chinese appearance and convert background are the three main characteristics that make Koko Liem stand out. Born in 1979, as Liem Hai Thai, Koko Liem adopted a Muslim name, Muhammad Usman Ansori, when he converted to Islam. This is something many converts do. However, he prefers to be called Koko Liem when he preaches, because it feels more ‘down-to-earth’. It also differentiates him from other preachers. Koko means ‘brother’ in the Hokkien dialect, while Liem is a clan name that is very common among Indonesians of Chinese descent. Like Tan Mei Hwa, it is a name that marks him as indisputably Chinese.

Besides his name, Koko Liem’s other preaching trademark is his traditional Chinese clothing with a Chinese skullcap. He says he wears this outfit because it looks interesting and is different

5. The Chinese clothing which Koko Liem always wears is tangzhuang, or Tang suit. Tangzhuang refers to the Chinese jacket that originated at the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). It evolved from magua, a Manchurian costume, which was, in turn, adopted by the Han Chinese during the Qing Dynasty. Today, tangzhuang is one of the main formal costumes for Chinese men for many occasions. At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Shanghai, China in November 2001, the host presented its silk tangzhuang jacket as the Chinese traditional national costume. Since then, some Chinese overseas have worn tangzhuang, either as a fashion statement or for cultural expression.
from what other preachers wear. As he told me, ‘Preachers don’t have to wear a *jubah* with turban, or a *baju koko* with *peci*. I am a Chinese preacher. That is why I dress in Chinese clothing’ (interview, Koko Liem, 26 April 2008). He explained that it was a preaching strategy to show that Islam is a universal religion and compatible with Chinese cultural traditions. To further illustrate the close relationship between Islam and Chineseness, he added that a *baju koko*, a popular Muslim male attire in Indonesia, has its origin in China and is modified from traditional Chinese costume. He also pointed out that Islamic teachings share many similarities with Confucian values, such as respect for elders, modesty and cooperation.

Like Tan Mei Hwa, Koko Liem’s use of his Chinese name and clothing is a preaching device, and does not reflect his daily cultural practice. He can only speak a little Hokkien, but is very fluent in Arabic and Indonesian. He is married to a Javanese woman. His minimal knowledge of Chinese language and culture has left him with few ways of presenting his Chinese identity in public. He can only capitalise on his name and appearance to authenticate his Chineseness to attract media attention.

In contrast to Tan Mei Hwa, Koko Liem is well trained in Islamic studies. As he told me, his interest in Islam began when his father once told him, ‘you can convert to any religion, but not Islam’, giving no reason. At the same time, he was sceptical of idol worship in the Buddhist temple. Therefore, in order to learn about Islam, he took Islamic classes at his primary school, although he was a Buddhist. He converted to Islam when he was 14. His conversion was rejected by his father, an event that made him choose to leave home and move to Java. In Java, he was trained at an NU *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), and then continued his Islamic studies.

6. *Jubah* is a long flowing robe, identical to Arabic garments. Meanwhile, *peci* is a rimless cap and *baju koko* is a collarless shirt, one of the most common clothing styles of male Indonesian Muslims. Some Indonesians have suggested *baju koko* has Chinese roots. According to the historian J. J. Rizal, such collarless long- or short sleeve shirts are modified from the *tui-khim* shirt, which was commonly worn by male Chinese in Indonesia until the early 20th century (Isnaeni 2010).
Koko Liem incorporates episodes from his biography into his preaching. He blends in his conversion experience and stories about his struggles in learning about Islam with recitations of Quranic texts, as well as doctrine about Islam and other religions. He thinks that a Chinese convert who understands Islam is likely to be respected by local Muslims. Therefore, his sharing of his story and religious experience is a form of dakwah, to remind ordinary Muslims to observe their religion. He told me that the common response from his audiences is, ‘He is a convert, but his religious knowledge is greater than ours. He can lecture on religion. He can memorise the Qur’an. But what can we do?’ (interview, Koko Liem, 26 April 2008).

Like other celebrity preachers, Koko Liem is ‘media-savvy’. Besides his attractive appearance, he has good communication skills and, like Tan Mei Hwa, he engages in ‘social talk’ (bahasa gaul). He was one of the finalists on Mimbar Dai, a reality show on TPI (Television Pendidikan Indonesia or Indonesian Education Television) in which one of the competitors was awarded the title of ‘best preacher’. Since then, his preaching career has become more successful. Now, not only does he host several religious programs on various Indonesian television channels, he is also involved in acting and advertising. He has acted as a ‘kiai’ (religious scholar) in a religious sinetron (serial drama), ‘Kiamat Sudah Dekat 3’ (‘The Judgement Day is Coming 3’).

He is one of the most ‘creative’ Chinese preachers, whose Islamic business career goes beyond public preaching to include umrah and haj pilgrimage travel, a religious SMS service, and a religious school for new converts. He has a personal website (www.kokoliem.com) featuring reports and video clips of his public preaching engagements, as well as stories of new converts, consulting services and Islamic articles. He is affiliated with the UJE Centre, owned by a popular celebrity-preacher, Jefri al-Buchori, best known as Uje. Koko Liem holds monthly Islamic study sessions for new converts and occasionally speaks at the popular ‘I like Monday’ Islamic
study sessions at the UJE Centre. His preaching and marketing strategies are generally in line with his associate, Jefri al-Buchori, who is a multimedia artist and preacher.

In his latest SMS religiously themed service, *Lampion Hati* (A Lantern for the Heart), which offers Islamic-based advice, teaching and ring tones to subscribers, Koko Liem combines Chinese cultural symbols with Islamic messages to attract customers (see Figure 17). Against a red background decorated with pictures of Chinese lanterns and the silhouette of a mosque, Koko Liem is portrayed in a posture of prayer, wearing green (the colour of Islam) traditional Chinese clothing. The advertisement for his SMS service declares his goal to be ‘illuminating your heart and faith
with Islamic advice’ (Terangi hati dan imanmu dengan tausiyah-tausiyah Islami). Also included in his SMS services are guidance for new converts, tips for Islamic family harmony and suggestions for Islamic match-making. This combination of Chinese cultural symbols and Islamic messages gives Koko Liem his uniqueness and makes him especially popular among Muslim Indonesians.

However, his ‘creative’ preaching does not lead him to a progressive or liberal understanding of religious and social issues. Like many other celebrity preachers in contemporary Indonesia, Koko Liem tends to embrace a socially conservative Islam, albeit with a light touch (Howell 2008: 59). For example, he has written an article arguing that Muslim youths should not celebrate Valentine’s Day because Valentine’s Day is a Christian festival, which is not compatible with the Islamic lifestyle, and because it ‘promotes free sex’, which is prohibited in Islamic teaching (Koko Liem 2009).

Irena Handono: from church activist to Islamic preacher

Not all Chinese preachers present a television-friendly face and use their Chineseness. Irena Handono, or Han Hoo Lie, born 1954, a former student at Atmajaya Catholic University in Jakarta, was a church activist and nun before she converted to Islam in 1983 at Al-Falah Mosque in Surabaya. Unlike Tan Mei Hwa and Koko Liem, Irena Handono does not position herself as a ‘Chinese’ preacher. Although some of her Muslim admirers know about her Chinese identity, her distinguishing feature as a preacher is her background as a Catholic nun.

Despite sharing a similar profile to Tan Mei Hwa, as a Chinese female convert-turned-preacher, Irena Handono’s preaching style and content are very different from Tan’s. She eschews much of the entertainment-focused approach, and concentrates instead on smaller-scale preaching tours and Islamic activism. She is active in numerous Islamic organisations, most of which are conservatively inclined, including the Forum for the Anti Pornography and Porno-action Movement (FORGAPP, Forum Gerakan Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi). She has also established the Irena Centre to educate
Muslims and prevent them from apostasy. She is well known in conservative circles; a couple of Chinese Muslims I met described her as a ‘fundamentalist’ preacher.

Whenever she preaches, Irena emphasises her experience of conversion to Islam. She makes lengthy and detailed theological comparisons between Christianity and Islam which always end up demonstrating Islam’s superiority. According to Irena, Islam is the only true religion recognised by God, and the Christian concept of the ‘Trinity’ is false. She gives presentations themed ‘Bongkar Kristian’ (Exposing the Christian), which focus on the ‘weaknesses’ in Christianity. The introduction to her talks says, ‘She was a Christian preacher, and has now turned into an Islamic one. She tries to reveal the weaknesses of Christian teachings, which 99 per cent of Christians do not know because they are concealed by priests.’ Video-clips of her talks were once uploaded on You Tube, but now have been withdrawn. She has also written two books, Menyingkap Fitnah dan Teror [Unveil the Slander and Terror] and Islam Dihujat [Blasphemed Islam], to challenge western stereotypical negative images of Islam and reveal the constant threat of Christian missionaries. To some extent, her *dakwah* is not focusing on converting non-Muslims to Islam, but on preventing Muslims from converting to Christianity.

Like other hardline Muslim preachers, she often criticises non-practising Muslims for not using the Qur’an to guide every aspect of their lives. She supports the implementation of the controversial Anti-Pornography Bill to regulate the morality of Muslim Indonesians and proposes stern action to prevent apostasy among Muslims. She attacks prominent Muslims who have promoted pluralistic ideas, such as the well-known religious scholar Syafii Maarif, who has suggested that not only Muslims but also Christians and Jews have a place in heaven. Her controversial preaching material means she has rarely been invited to host religious programs on TV. Her messages draw criticism from Christians and moderate Muslim leaders. They worry that her efforts to reveal the ‘weaknesses’ of Christianity in the light of ‘Islamic truth’ will worsen inter-religious relationships in Indonesia. Some Chinese Muslim
leaders also disassociate themselves from her and criticise the content of her sermons. For them, conversion is a personal choice, and it is not appropriate for a Muslim convert to publicly criticise his or her former religion.

However, hardline Muslim groups, especially those worried about the threat of Christian missionaries among Muslim Indonesians, welcome her talks. Islamic magazines and newspapers such as *Sabili* and *Republika* interview Irena frequently. In 2009, in a *Republika* interview, she described her conversion experience and religious journey in the following terms:

*When studying at the Institute of Theological Philosophy, Irena took a comparative religion course. After that, she studied Islam. Her lecturer started his class by saying, ‘If you want to learn about Islam, you just need to look at Muslims in Indonesia. Islam is identical with poverty, backwardness, terrorism and all negative things.’ However, Irena did not agree and asserted, ‘We can’t simply judge a religion by looking at its followers, and this can apply to Christians and Catholics. If we refer to the Philippines and Mexico, the robbers, the thieves and the poor are mainly Catholics, not Muslims.’… One day, Irena asked her lecturer for permission to learn Islam from the primary source, the Qur’an. Her lecturer allowed her to read the Qur’an, to find the ‘weaknesses’ of Islam. After reading the Qur’anic texts, Irena was convinced that there was only one God and that the concept of ‘the Holy Trinity’ in Christianity was false. She debated the concept of God with her lecturer. Finally, she concluded that Jesus was not God, but only a person who has been perceived as God … Although faced by many challenges after*

7. Most of the interviews have been uploaded on Irena’s personal blog, irenahandono.blogspot.com. In December 2008, *Sabili* published an interview with Irena, entitled *‘Kenapa Pada Diam’* (‘Why Keep Quiet’), emphasising Irena’s concern with the rise of Christian missionaries in Indonesia and the lack of efforts by Muslim leaders to counter such a trend.
conversion, Irena feels her life is more complete with the guidance of the Qur'an … 8

Chinese ethnicity is not crucial in Irena Handono’s life or preaching career. Her conversion experience and the psycho-religious elements of her religious transformation determine her preaching style and content. To some extent, the next example, Syafii Antonio, shares the same trajectory, in which religious experience is more important than ethnicity as a guide to daily life and preaching.

**Syafii Antonio: promoting an Islamic economy**

Muhammad Syafii Antonio (Nio Gwan Chung), born in 1967, is one of the most respected Chinese Muslim intellectuals and a leading figure in the promotion of an Islamic economy in Indonesia. Since the 1990s, using a Malaysian model, he has been engaged in helping to build an Islamic banking system in Indonesia. Today, he is a member of the expert committee of Bank Indonesia and the Sharia Advisory Council of the Central Bank of Malaysia, as well as a sharia consultant for various banks and financial institutions in Indonesia. He is also one of the leaders in Yayasan Karim Oei (a Chinese convert foundation), as well as a member of the Division of Economy of ICMI and the National Sharia Board of MUI.

Born into a Confucian family, Syafii first converted to Christianity in primary school and later to Islam when he was 17. He emphasised that his conversion was based on rational consideration after studiously comparing the merits of different religions, before determining that Islam was the best for him. After converting to Islam, he studied Arabic in an NU pesantren and also attended Muhammadiyah High School. He undertook his undergraduate studies at the University of Jordan (Islamic law) and his master’s degree of the International Islamic University, Malaysia (Islamic

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8. This interview, entitled ‘Irena Handono: Hidup Kian Indah Dengan Islam’ (‘Life is more beautiful with Islam’) is available on Irena’s blog. See irena-handono.blogspot.com//2009_02_01_archive.html (accessed on 18 August 2010).
economy), before completing his PhD on Islamic economic and banking systems at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

Syafii Antonio started to preach in public when he was studying at his Islamic boarding school. He was asked to replace his religious teacher to talk in at *pengajian* when the teacher fell ill. Since then, he has gained popularity with Muslim audiences through his religious knowledge, convincing public speaking, Chinese look and convert status. Not only is he invited to give public sermons but he has also hosted religious programs on radio and television. However, his *dakwah* approach changed after he completed his postgraduate studies and is now different from other Chinese preachers. He is less active in popular preaching now, and focuses on developing an Islamic economy through business, consultation, seminars, education and writings. As he said, ‘Instead of picking up knives and weapons, my jihad is bringing Islamic values into the market place’ (interview, Syafii Antonio, 11 January 2009).

As of 2010, Syafii Antonio is the chairman of the Tazkia College of Islamic Economy (STEI, Sekolah Tinggi Ekonomi Islam Tazkia) and the founder of the Andalusia Islamic Centre. He has written several books on Islamic economics. He believes that an Islamic economy is the solution to the three problems faced by Indonesian Muslims – poverty, backwardness and low morale. He suggests that Muslims should not confine their faith to religious rituals and practices, but engage in banking, business, insurance and other economic matters. Therefore, with the slogan of ‘shape the future with Islamic economics’, his college offers courses that combine modern language and business skills with Islamic law.

Through his latest books, *Muhammad SAW: The Super Leader, Super Manager* (Antonio 2007) and *Sukses Besar dengan Intervensi Allah* [Huge Success with Allah’s Intervention]: *The Power of Doa with Asmaul Husna for Success in Business & Life* (Antonio 2008), he promotes the idea that Islamic spirituality can lead to economic enhancement and business development, as proved in early Islamic texts. According to Syafii Antonio, the Prophet Muhammad was not only a religious leader, but also a successful businessman. He argues that long before Max Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic*
and the Spirit of Capitalism, the Prophet Muhammad discussed the relationship between business activities and religious values. He claims that many Muslims have overlooked the economic dimension of the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings, driving him to write books about Islam and business. For Antonio, economic achievement is also a form of *dakwah*, giving a good image of Islam. Referring to his personal experience:

My parents, like many other Chinese Indonesians, held negative perceptions of Islam. For them, Islam was associated with backwardness and poverty. That is why when I converted to Islam they rejected me and I had to leave home. However, after I finished my doctoral degree and launched a successful career, my family members finally accepted my decision. Now, even my brother is consulting me about business skills. Although they have not converted, they have a better perception of Islam (interview, Syafii Antonio, 11 January 2009).

Syafii Antonio’s strong religious education, high academic achievement and remarkable business success make him well respected among both Chinese and non-Chinese Muslims. He has been approached by several Islamic parties (including PKS, Prosperous Justice Party) to contest in the national elections. However, he refuses to affiliate himself with any party or religious organisation, saying, ‘I don’t want to put myself in a box, and Islam should not be divided into boxes’ (interview, Syafii Antonio, 11 January 2009). His openness to all religious groups in Indonesia not only reflects his sophisticated religious background, but is also an attempt to maximise his efforts in promoting an Islamic economy. For him, an Islamic economy is not exclusively for Muslims, because non-Muslims can also invest in an Islamic market or consume Islamic products. However, this inclusiveness does not mean he is completely liberal. As he said,

I agree with the MUI fatwa that Muslims should not wish ‘Merry Christmas’ to Christians. This does not mean I am
exclusive or anti-Christian. I have a lot of non-Muslim friends. I just want to protect my faith. If I say ‘Merry Christmas’, it means I accept the birth of Jesus as the son of God or the Trinity concept in Christianity. This contradicts my belief in tauhid (the oneness of God). (Interview, Syafii Antonio, 11 January 2009)

Married to a woman from Padang, Syafii Antonio does not speak any Chinese dialect or observe Chinese culture in his daily life. Focusing on the rationality of Islamic teaching, he hardly uses any cultural symbols in his preaching. Instead of a Chinese architectural design, he adopted a Moorish style for the mosque in his Andalusia Islamic Centre. Some of his friends did not even know that he was Chinese, until he used his Chinese name in his latest books. He explained, ‘Ali Karim (the Chairman of Karim Oei Foundation) told me that I should put my Chinese name on my books, not only to show that being Muslim and Chinese are not incompatible, but also to acknowledge that my Chinese identity has helped me in my religious career (interview, Syafii Antonio, 11 January 2009).

Like other Chinese preachers, he acknowledges that being Chinese is a ‘surplus marketing point’, which contributed to his popularity at an early stage. However, he suggests that Chinese Muslim preachers should go beyond the performance of their Chineseeness and gain more substance, because people will get bored listening to the same conversion stories. According to him, Islamic preaching should not only be a ‘spiritual meal’ for Muslim audiences, but should also serve to improve socio-economic conditions for Indonesian Muslims.

Anton Medan: from gangster to preacher

Anton Medan or Tan Kok Liong, born in 1957, is a popular dawah figure. He is also a controversial character, not because he is Chinese, but because in an earlier life he was a preman, or gangster. His involvement in robbery, drugs and illegal gambling led
him to spend 18 years in prison. He has also been accused of helping to create chaos in Jakarta in 1998, a charge he strongly denies. After converting to Islam in 1992 and adopting an Islamic name, Muhammad Ramadan Effendi, he started his preaching career among prisoners and prostitutes, before becoming popular with a wider public and on television. In 2012, he was selected as the chairperson for PITI. His personal transformation from immoral hoodlum to pious preacher is his preaching hallmark.

Since 1996, he has been conducting workshops training former prisoners and gangsters to become skilled workers with religious knowledge. In 2005, he established an Islamic boarding school, Pondok Pesantren Terpadu At-Taibin in Bogor, which promotes entrepreneurship alongside religious education, and where Chinese language and business skills are compulsory subjects. Occupational training is included; male students learn woodworking and female students learn tailoring. Some of their products are sold and the revenue used to support the operational costs of the school.

In the compound of the boarding school there is a Chinese-style mosque, Masjid Tan Kok Liong, which resembles the architectural design of a traditional Chinese palace. Anton Medan says that this building is part of an effort to preach Islam to Chinese Indonesians, and to promote pembauran (blending) between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians. He does not see a contradiction between being a Muslim and Chinese, and claims that he has the strength of both, or as he puts it, ‘Akal Cina, Hati Muslim’; ‘Chinese mind’, by which he means having a business orientation, and ‘Muslim heart’, which refers to an emphasis on spirituality and morality. He explains, ‘A good Muslim is a Muslim who can not only open the holy text, but is also able to conduct business (bukan hanya bisa membuka kitab tetapi juga bisa membuka cek).

Contrasting himself with other Chinese preachers, such as Koko Liem, he says, ‘I do not preach for money. I do not rely on preaching to make ends meet and I am free to say anything in my mind.’ Indeed, preaching is not the main source of Anton’s income, as he also runs various business ventures from garment manufacturing to banner printing. For Anton, the demonstration
of his economic achievements and success are important elements of his *dakwah*. First, with sufficient funds, he can build religious schools and give free preaching to marginalised groups, such as prisoners and prostitutes. Second, he can prove to non-Muslims that ‘the backwardness of Indonesian Muslims is not because of Islam’ (interview, Anton Medan, 7 November 2008).

He speaks fluent Hokkien and a little Mandarin, and maintains good relationships with many non-Muslim Chinese. He sees himself as a bridge between ethnic Chinese and Muslim Indonesians. He occasionally is involved in inter-faith activities and helps some non-Muslim Chinese solve their conflicts with Islamic leaders. Indeed, during my visit to his boarding school, a couple of Chinese women from Medan, Sumatra, were asking for his help in dealing with some Muslim leaders who were opposing the building of a Chinese temple in Medan (field note, 9 January 2009). He even told me that he supports the idea of having a casino in Indonesia, with strict conditions that it is only for non-Muslims, for two reasons – to reduce illegal gambling, and to boost the Indonesian economy by avoiding going to Malaysia or Singapore to gamble.

However, such viewpoints do not mean he is a Muslim with a liberal bent and a critical mindset. The media are inclined to highlight his conservative side. For example, his visits to the families of the convicted Bali bombers Amrozi and Samudra before the two men were executed for terrorism were widely reported in the national press. I had the opportunity of following him to Amrozi’s family in Lamongan, East Java (see Figure 18). Despite the short stay, he was warmly welcomed by Amrozi’s family members and friends. He told me that he had met Amrozi and Samudra when he preached in their jails. He said, ‘Many Muslim leaders are afraid of visiting their families. But as Muslims, what is wrong with sending condolences? This does not mean I support their terror attacks’ (interview, Anton Medan, 7 November 2008).

As in 2008, Anton claimed to be an adviser to the Islamic Defenders’ Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam), a hardline organisation. He has expressed regret that the FPI Chief, Rizieq Shihab, was sentenced for two years imprisonment for his involvement in the...
MONAS incident, which involved a clash between the FPI and an alliance of organisations that support religious freedom. In 2008, in an Islamic study session in Cirebon to celebrate the Islamic New Year, Anton openly criticised the well-known liberal-minded NU leader, K. H. Maman Imanulhaq, who was a speaker at the same event. He deprecated Imanulhaq for supporting religious freedom and urged him to repent (‘tobat’). He suggested that the audience should disperse and boycott Imanulhaq (Wahid Institute 2009: 1). During the 2009 elections, he endorsed efforts to build an Islamic state and associated himself with the Crescent Star Party (PBB, Partai Bulan Bintang), an Islamic party. However, since 2012, his

9. The MONAS incident was an FPI attack on members of the National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Faith (AKKBB, Aliansi Kebangsaan Untuk Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan), who rallied at the National Monument, MONAS, in June 2008. AKKBB is a progressive social and religious coalition that promotes religious freedom and sympathises with the Ahmadiyah, a controversial Muslim sect. FPI urged the Indonesian government to crack down Ahmadiyah activities, which FPI considered deviant.
relations with FPI and PBB have deteriorated due to different political opinions. During the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017, Anton Medan is a staunch supporter of the former Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), who is a Chinese Christian.

It can be argued that, as a reformed criminal with little religious education, his former affiliation with conservative Islamic organisations was a way of legitimising his Islamic identity among the broader Muslim community. By endorsing conservative Islamic viewpoints and denigrating progressive Muslims, he was trying to prove his sincerity as a pious Muslim and demonstrate his credentials as a preacher. But, as is reflected in his involvement in inter-faith activities, Anton Medan also has his inclusive and tolerant side. He is involved in inter-faith activities and supports the establishment of a casino in Indonesia to reduce illegal gambling. His complex and situational religious attitude is not an exceptional case, but is shared by many Muslims, especially Chinese converts. As I argue in Chapter 7, the inconsistent religiosity of converts need not imply hypocrisy, but can reflect a flexible piety, in which converts can manifest different aspects of their religiosities when dealing with different situations and interacting with different audiences.

**Lampion: The sound of Chinese Muslims**

The preaching of Chinese Muslims goes beyond public presentations and television shows to the use of singing. Lampion, literally meaning Chinese lantern, is the first and only Chinese Muslim *nasyid* (Islamic music) group in Indonesia.¹⁰ Like other *nasyid* groups in Southeast Asia, Lampion adapts global trends in popular music and uses new technology, media, and marketing strategies, while engaging with Islamic identities through musical

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¹⁰. The term *nasyid* originates from the Arabic word *nashada*, meaning ‘to recite, to sing.’ Today, *nasyid* refers to a type of Islamic devotional song with texts praising the glory of Allah, preaching the teachings of the Prophet, and incorporating other religious themes, such as universal love, morality or brotherhood in Islam. For more discussion of *nasyid* in Indonesia and Malaysia, see Barendregt (2008), Kahn (2003) and Tan (2007).
texts, musical elements, video imagery, and costumes (Tan 2007). Mimicking the successful Malaysian nasyid group, Raihan, some of Lampion’s songs also feature Malay frame drums such as rebana, which are traditionally used to accompany some Islamic genres of music. What makes Lampion different is its use of Chinese cultural elements in its name, appearance and lyrics. If pop nasyid is for younger Muslims to reconcile their religious beliefs with modernity and pop music (Tan 2007), Lampion uses it to show that Islamic religiosity and Chinese ethnicity are not mutually exclusive.

Lampion was established in 1997 by a group of young males in Lautze Mosque and consisted of eleven members. The majority of them were Chinese Muslims. Lampion set up independently from Lautze Mosque in 2000 and launched their first album, Baiknya Tuhan (The Goodness of God) in 2005. Members of Lampion have changed over time. Three siblings born into a Chinese convert’s family formed the backbone of the group: Adrian Agatha, Andrew Irfan and Kelvin Ikhwan. Their father, Syarif Tanudjaja was a prominent leader of MUSTIKA and PITI in Jakarta. The eldest brother, Adrian Agatha, died in 2007. His younger brothers kept Lampion alive and in 2010 there were 5 members in the group.

According to Kelvin Ikhwan, born 1979, the key figure in the group, Lampion seeks to insert a new variant into Indonesian Islamic arts and culture, through its Chineseness. As Kelvin put it, ‘We chose Lampion or Chinese lantern as our group’s name to manifest our Chinese identity. Furthermore, we hope our songs can play the role of a lantern, guiding the path to Allah. Through nasyid, we hope we can bring our audiences closer to the God’ (interview, Kelvin Ikhwan, 9 June 2008). Kelvin added that this did not mean Lampion was exclusive, because it has non-Chinese members and many of its audiences are non-Chinese Muslim Indonesians.

Lampion expresses its Chinese identity through other means. On the cover of Lampion’s first album Baiknya Tuhan (2005 edition), against a background of an old pagoda-like mosque in Mainland China, its members (including the non-Chinese) are wearing traditional Chinese dress with Chinese skullcaps (see Figure 19 for the cover of its 2010 edition). One of Lampion’s
video clips portrays the image of the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya. Although none of its members speaks Mandarin, there are two Mandarin songs in the album, *Islam Te Chin Can* (Islam is growing) and *Yong Ai* (Great Love). The other songs are sung in Indonesian. Kelvin told me that the idea of singing Mandarin songs was inspired by Raihan.\footnote{Raihan is a popular Malay-Muslim nasyid group in Malaysia. Raihan’s 2003 album *Gema Alam* (Echoes for the World) included a Mandarin song, *Ching Ai* (Love for God). According to Raihan, it has supporters among Muslims in China and Chinese converts in Malaysia (Hew 2014).} He said, ‘We could not understand or speak Mandarin. We asked our friend to translate the lyrics from Indonesian into Mandarin. We sing the songs based on

\footnote{Raihan is a popular Malay-Muslim nasyid group in Malaysia. Raihan’s 2003 album *Gema Alam* (Echoes for the World) included a Mandarin song, *Ching Ai* (Love for God). According to Raihan, it has supporters among Muslims in China and Chinese converts in Malaysia (Hew 2014).}
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pinyin (Romanised Chinese pronunciation). Like Koko Liem and Tan Mei Hwa, the Chineseness of Lampion is largely symbolic: it is not an everyday practice, but realised in public performance.

Compared to their symbolic Chineseness, for the members of Lampion Islamic practices are part of their daily life and Islamic piety is the ultimate aim. Recently rebranded as ‘Chinese Muslim edutainment’, Lampion likes to emphasise its difference from other popular singers and musical groups in contemporary Indonesia who have recorded Islamic-themed albums, such as UNGU and Opick. As Kelvin put it,

We position ourselves as preachers, not celebrities. Some people use Islam to seek popularity and material gain. But we use music to spread Islamic messages. Through music, we bring our audiences and ourselves closer to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. We also want to show that Islam is Chinese-friendly. We cooperate with Chinese Muslim organisations such as PITI to preach Islam among Chinese Indonesians. (Interview, Kelvin Ikhwan, 9 June 2008)

Besides being involved in Lampion, Kelvin is also a freelance designer and illustrator for a few Islamic children’s magazines. Meanwhile his brother, Andrew, runs a restaurant that serves halal Chinese food. Both of them are activists in Al-Arqam and most of Lampion’s musical texts are derived from the writings or speeches of the founder of Al-Arqam, Ashaari Muhammad. For Lampion, Islamic preaching is the priority, while Chineseness is the public

12. The Chinese pronunciation of Lampion is not clear, and as a Mandarin speaker I have difficulty understanding what they are singing in Mandarin. I find myself more comfortable listening to their Indonesian songs.

13. Al-Arqam is an Islamic religious movement, originating in Malaysia. The movement was banned by the Malaysian federal government on 1994 and its leader Ashaari Muhammad was arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Al-Arqam has been renamed Rifaq and then Global Ikhwan. It has a school and activity complex in Sentul, in the outskirts of Jakarta. Its founder Ashaari Muhammad passed away in May 2010. According to Nagata (2004), Al-Arqam was inspired by a rare mix of global Sufi and strict sharia traditions, many of whose members were organized into residential communes and institutions promoting economic independence, mutual support, social service and extensive mission.
image and the music is the medium of their *dakwah*. These subtle forms of *dakwah* are called ‘cultural approaches’ (*pendekatan budaya*) by Lampion.

Despite rejecting fame as celebrities, Lampion is a popular *nasyid* group in contemporary Indonesia. They perform, all over Indonesia. They are frequently invited to sing at events such as wedding ceremonies, Islamic celebrations, musical concerts, television programs and public seminars. When they perform, they wear either Chinese traditional clothing with the Chinese skullcap or the *koko* shirt with *peci*. Paradoxically, although Lampion aims to spread the Islamic message to Chinese Indonesians, most of its audience are non-Chinese Muslims.

**From taboo to commodity: celebrating inclusive Chineseness?**

During the long years of Suharto’s New Order regime, Chinese culture was taboo. The government even banned the Mandarin translation of the Qur’an. However, in contemporary democratising Indonesia, Chinese culture has become a marketable commodity, as the country faces both globalisation and demands for internal cultural diversity (Budianta 2007). Chinese lion and dragon dances have become fashionable entertainment, oriental appearance is desirable in TV serial dramas, and Mandarin courses have sprung up, reflecting the re-emergence of Chinese culture in Indonesia. Chineseness is not only consumed by ethnic Chinese themselves, but also by non-Chinese Indonesians. For example, about eighty per cent of the members of lion dance groups in Surabaya are either Javanese or Madurese (field note, 12 September 2008), and Taiwanese popular culture (such as the popular TV serial *Meteor Garden*) has become faddish among non-Chinese youth (Ida 2008).

The popularity of Chinese preachers among non-Chinese Muslims is a further illustration of this appeal. Today, Chinese Muslim preachers are desirable and recognised by many non-Chinese Muslims. In fact, most of the congregation of Chinese Muslim preachers are non-Chinese Muslims, given the small number of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. The non-Chinese
Muslims are not only receiving religious messages and spiritual advice, but also ‘consuming’ the preachers’ Chinese appearance and cultural symbols, stories of conversion, and entertaining preaching styles. During the New Order period, to some Chinese Indonesians, Chineseness represented a ‘curse’ rather than a ‘blessing’ (Thung, 2000: 183). Today, for some Chinese preachers, their Chineseness is a ‘blessing’, not a ‘burden of identity’ or a ‘curse’.

The new celebrity status of Chinese preachers may help to improve the image of Chinese Indonesians among the broader Indonesian population. It may demonstrate that Chinese and Muslim Indonesians need not be mutually exclusive. When hundreds of Javanese Muslims listen to the sermon of a Chinese preacher, they are crossing ethnic boundaries. At the same time, Chinese identity is given a more complex representation: Chinese Indonesians are not just ‘economic animals’, but can also be religious teachers.

Chinese Indonesians are often accused of being ‘exclusive’ and of refusing to mix. These feelings have traditionally been strongest in devout Muslim circles, and in Muslim organisations, right back to the early years of the twentieth century when Indonesia’s first truly mass organisation, Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union), was set up to campaign against the influence of Chinese businesses (Arya 1994; Mackie 2008: 191). Today not only moderate Muslim organisations (such as NU and Muhammadiyah) but also conservative groups (like the Islamic Defenders’ Front, FPI, and the Prosperous Justice Party, PKS) are enthusiastic about recruiting Chinese Muslims, both as members and leaders. They do so to prove that they endorse ‘multiculturalism’, and to put the Chinese converts on pedestal as models of devout behaviour for non-practising Muslims.

However, as Hoon (2009) has observed, the increase in consumption of Chinese culture by non-Chinese should not be naively read as a full acceptance of ethnic Chinese. It would be too simplistic to suggest that the popularity of Chinese preachers among non-Chinese Muslims can lead to the erosion of ethnic boundaries and suspicions. On the contrary, the use of Chinese cultural symbols in Chinese Muslims’ preaching may reinforce ethnic stereotyping and reinforce the distinction between
‘Chinese’ and ‘indigenous’ Indonesians as something that cannot be totally erased.

As indicated by Heryanto (2004, 2008), the symbolic celebration of Chineseness in post-1998 Indonesia carries a strong tendency to ‘essentialize’ Chineseness as a set of fixed characteristics and traditions which does not reflect the complex realities of life for many Chinese Indonesians. Indeed, many of the Chinese preachers I have described have little or no Chinese language ability and do not practise Chinese culture in daily life. Yet, they use visible markers of Chinese identity to attract media attention. This takes the form of wearing certain types of dress, using Chinese names, emphasising the role of Cheng Ho and so on. These acts then become the markers by which Chineseness is reified among non-Chinese audiences. In doing so, I argue that a Chinese stereotype, albeit not necessarily a negative one, is re-consolidated.

Yet, cultural essentialism does not always necessarily imply social exclusivity (Kahn 2006: 166). Indeed, together with the recognition of Chinese-style mosques, such as the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, the popularity of Chinese preachers suggests that the celebration of Chinese cultural expression does not equal the promotion of social exclusivity. Although the Surabaya mosque was built in a Chinese style and is managed by Chinese Muslims, it is a cosmopolitan socio-religious space where both Muslims and non-Muslims, from different ethnic groups can get together. We may call it ‘inclusive Chineseness’, in which the expression of Chinese culture is no longer a sign of ethnic exclusivity but rather a common heritage shared by all Indonesians, as well as a part of the ‘pop Islam’ industry that many Muslims consume.

Besides, not all Chinese Muslim preachers utilise Chinese cultural symbols for their preaching. For Irena Handono and Syafii Antonio, who respectively focus on Islam–Christianity religious comparisons and an Islamic economy, their Chinese identities do not constitute a crucial element in their religious careers. In addition, the popularity of Chinese Muslim preachers is not by any means a new phenomenon in Indonesia. Some have traced the existence of Chinese preachers back to the early period of
Java’s Islamisation, and claim some of the Walisongo had Chinese
descent. Even during the New Order regime, although not using
Chinese cultural symbols in preaching, a few Chinese Muslim
preachers became popular (Syukur 1996) because of their status
as new converts.

**From mualaf to mubaligh: pluralising the Islamic market?**

During the fasting month, topics such as ‘Why I chose Islam’ be-
come popular. Stories of religious conversion are staples for Chinese
Muslim preachers. As *dakwah* activities tend to be dominated by
preachers of indigenous or Arab descent, it can be argued that
Chinese Muslim preachers add an element of variety and plurality
to the Indonesian Islamic market. There is added diversity because
the ethnic identity of the preachers makes them distinctive. In
addition, Chinese Muslim preachers can appeal to Chinese who
are not yet Muslims. Thus *dakwah*, for Chinese Muslim preach-
ers, has two aims. Internally, it aims to make a nominal Muslim
a better Muslim. Externally, it tries to spread Islamic messages to
non-Muslims with the hope that they will convert to Islam.

For many Chinese Muslim preachers, propagating Islam to
non-Muslim Chinese is not an easy task. Most of them focus on
‘preaching through example’ to lessen negative perceptions of
ethnic Chinese towards Islam. Their performances of Chinese
identities are to show that Islamic teaching does not contradict
Chinese culture. At the same time, their achievement in religious
business proves that Islam is not identical with backwardness. As
some Chinese preachers put it, ‘blame the followers, not Islam.’
Their messages to non-Muslim Chinese are clear and simple: ‘Islam
is universal, rather than a religion for native Indonesians. Islam is a
modern and tolerant religion, not a backward and radical religion.’

Chinese Muslim preachers are living testimony to the univer-
sality of Islam’s message. They aim to offer an attractive, alternative
image of Islam in Indonesia. They use not only Arabic names and
Indonesian names, but also Chinese names. They wear not only
*peci* with *baju koko*, or a long robe with a turban, but also Chinese
clothing with the Chinese skullcap. This hybrid form of Islamic expression is an antidote to an increasing puritanism that is hostile to local cultural traditions. It also shows that a rising Islamic religiosity does not necessarily undermine cultural and ethnic diversity in Indonesia.

Most Chinese Muslim preachers are influenced by the Islamic culture of the broader Indonesian Muslim society. Conversion experience, religious education, social participation and local settings vary the impact of such Islamic influence. However, most preachers play down their affiliation to any particular Islamic group in their preaching, so that they can reach out the widest audience. For example, Anton Medan argues that he tries to combine the characteristics of different religious groups in order to be a better Muslim. He put it this way, ‘I will get lessons on interpersonal relationships from NU, structural organisation skills from Muhammadiyah and the purer understanding of Islam from Persis (Persatuan Islam, Islamic Association)’ (interview, Anton Medan, 7 November 2008).

Yet, the using of cultural symbols and the attempt to approach broader audiences do not lead Chinese preachers to contribute to a greater diversity in Islamic discourses. As shown in the previous case studies, the preaching of Chinese Muslims takes varying forms and has different audiences and messages, but these plural forms of preaching strategies do not necessarily contribute to a critical understanding of Islam. Instead of challenging conservative viewpoints, many preachers choose to conform to them to avoid controversy.

Many Chinese Muslim preachers are conservative in religious and social matters, especially when preaching in public.14

14. I am aware that a convenient dichotomy between conservative and progressive Muslim is problematic and inadequate to capture the complexity of Muslim religiosity in contemporary societies. I use such terms here not to judge the religiosity of the preachers, but to describe their attitudes on certain social and religious issues. It is also important to note that while I mention that a preacher holds certain ‘conservative’ viewpoint, it does not mean that I see him or her as a ‘conservative’ preacher. A preacher can have a ‘conservative’ view on one issue, but a ‘progressive’ one on another matter.
Irena Handono is one extreme case. Her constant criticism of Christianity not only alarms non-Muslims, but also alienates her from moderate Muslims. Anton Medan has given his support for the implementation of sharia in Indonesia. Other Chinese Muslim preachers avoid controversial issues, and focus on how best to apply Islamic ‘values’ in daily life. They are moderate and tolerant in their preaching, yet usually restrict themselves to orthodox interpretations of Islamic teaching. Like other celebrity preachers in contemporary Indonesia, many Chinese preachers tend to embrace ‘a socially conservative Islam, albeit with a light touch’ and do not ‘provide the tools for critical thinking and nuanced religious interpretation’ (Howell 2008: 59). For example, Syafii Antonio, Tan Mei Hwa and Koko Liem respectively once told their audiences that ‘Muslims should avoid wishing “Merry Christmas” to their Christian friends’; that ‘women are not suited to become leaders’; and that ‘Muslims cannot celebrate Valentine’s Day’. For converts, subscribing to a conservative understanding of Islam is not surprising, as this is a way of proving the sincerity of one’s conversion, and demonstrating one’s credentials as a pious preacher.

The paradox of hybrid performance

The diverse styles and content of preaching among Chinese Muslim preachers make comprehensive analysis difficult. But with no intention of simplifying such complex realities, I end this chapter with remarks regarding the identity consumption and performance of Chinese preachers in Indonesia today. It is quite clear that there is little correlation between their ‘commodified’ identity performances in public and their everyday practised identities: they may sell Chineseness, but do not live Chineseness. Three of the five preachers discussed in this chapter, Tan Mei Hwa, Koko Liem and Anton Medan, consciously use both their Chineseness and their Islamic identity to attract audiences. The combination of Chinese and Islamic elements as preaching and marketing strategies can be seen as a form of ‘hybrid performance’. But such
intentional mixing does not necessarily reflect the everyday living identities of Chinese preachers.\(^\text{15}\)

In order to establish their preaching credentials, some Chinese preachers choose to present themselves as ‘more Muslim than other Muslim Indonesians,’ and ‘more Chinese than non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians.’ Instead of performing who they are, they perform to create a public persona. For example, Koko Liem, who does not observe Chinese culture in his daily life, wears Chinese traditional attire to signal his Chineseness. Likewise, Tan Mei Hwa, who did not usually wear Islamic attire, put on an Islamic headscarf after she started preaching. Chinese clothing authenticates Koko Liem’s Chinese identity and Islamic dress gives Tan Mei Hwa religious credibility; they are performing to appear as ‘authentic Chinese’ and ‘pious Muslim.’ This search for authenticity often leads to an essentialisation of Chinese cultural identity and subscription to an uncritical understanding of Islam.

The hybrid, creative performances of Chinese Muslim preachers bring perceived incompatible elements (Islam and Chineseness) together and makes Islam appear more colourful. But, at the same time, they are shot through with ethnic stereotype and religious conservatism. The popularity of Chinese preachers reflects a paradox of the commodification of Chineseness and Islam in contemporary Indonesia. Diversity of style is not accompanied by plurality of discourse. While the appearance of a Chinese preacher in Chinese traditional costume on a television religious program may help to improve the image of ethnic Chinese in the eyes of the non-Chinese audience and diversify the cultural expression of Islam, it does not necessary break down ethnic stereotypes and pluralise the substance of religious discourse.

\(^{15}\) I understand that I should not overstate the differences between public identity performances and everyday living identities, as they are sometimes overlapping and mutual influencing. We need more detailed and lengthy research to observe how significant are the influences of the performances of Chinese Muslim preachers on their everyday lives.
Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are ‘linked’ to PITI or the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia). For many Indonesians, PITI is synonymous with ‘Chinese Muslim’. Although only a minority Chinese Muslims are members of PITI, many Indonesians assume PITI represents the majority of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. Many studies of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia have focused on PITI and its leaders (Dickson 2008; Muzakki 2009; Perdana 2008; Rubaidi 1999), but the voices of Chinese Muslims outside PITI have been overlooked. Like most ethnic and religious groups, ‘Chinese Muslim’ is not a homogeneous, bounded entity. In order to provide a more balanced view, the study of Chinese Muslim identities should go beyond PITI and give attention to the strategic solidarity, internal dynamics and diverse social participation of Chinese Muslims.

This chapter examines Chinese Muslims’ diverse social and political involvement. It begins with a brief discussion of the democratisation and the political opportunities for various identity groups that emerged in post-New Order Indonesia. The resurgence of both Islamic and Chinese identities gave some Chinese Muslims the opportunity to organise and mobilise their hybrid identities. I then discuss the histories, objectives, activities and memberships of four Chinese Muslim associations to explore their identity formation and contestation: the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (PITI); the Karim Oei Foundation (Yayasan Karim Oei); the Chinese Muslim and Families (MUSTIKA, Muslim Tionghoa dan Keluarga); the Cheng Hoo Foundation (YMCHI, Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia).
Despite their focus on Chinese Muslims, none of these organisations is exclusive in terms of their membership and activities. While the leaders of these organisations share the aim of shaping a unique of Chinese Muslim identity, they do so for different reasons and in different ways. Some of them focus on preaching (*dakwah*-oriented);¹ some emphasise empowering ethnic Chinese through social intermingling (*pembauran*-oriented);² others pursue their personal political or economic interests. In spite of these diverse motivations, I argue that the dominant discourse among Chinese Muslim leaders today is ‘spreading Islam by using cultural approaches’ (*dakwah pendekatan budaya*). This is a significant change from the ‘assimilation of ethnic Chinese through Islam’ (*asimilasi lewat Islam*) that prevailed during the New Order period.

Leaders of these Chinese Muslim associations pronounce on behalf of all Chinese Muslims in public; however, they do not represent the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their larger communities. Indeed, not all Chinese Muslims identify themselves with these specific organisations. Therefore, in the third part of this chapter, I discuss their activism beyond Chinese–Muslim realms. Through various case studies, I explore the dialectical interaction between identity formation and social participation among Chinese Muslims. On the one hand, the identity of an individual Chinese Muslim influences his or her religious and social participation; on the other hand, social involvement can change the identification of a Chinese Muslim. Lastly, I examine the engagements of some

¹. *Dakwah* is an Arabic term, literally meaning ‘call’ or ‘invitation.’ It has a broader meaning than proselytizing. *Dakwah* can aim at both Muslims and non-Muslims; it can involve consolidating the faith of Muslims, as well as inviting non-Muslims to Islam. For many Chinese Muslim organisations, their *dakwah* is preaching the Islamic message to non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians and strengthening the Islamic commitment of converts.

². *Pembauran* is an Indonesian term. In general, it means intermingling or blending. In the context of Chinese Indonesians, it means their mixing with other local ethnic groups. During the New Order, *pembauran* implied the assimilation of the ethnic Chinese into local communities. In post-New Order Indonesia, *pembauran* is still used by some Chinese Muslims, but in different way. As one of my informants said, one can *membaur* or blend well with the local community without losing one’s own Chinese cultural identity.
Chinese Muslims in electoral politics in post-1998 Indonesia, which are mainly influenced by their religious affiliations and understandings, as well as by the dynamics of local Muslim politics.

**Identity, politics and groups**

Identity politics generates debates in academic circles between its defenders and its critics (Calhoun 1994; Eriksen 2002; Fraser 2000; MacDonald 2004). The former see the political mobilisation of ethnic, cultural and religious identities as a form of empowerment for the weak and powerless while the latter view it as a form of exclusivity and a possible suppression of internal differences. Instead of seeing identity politics as good or bad political action, scholars have recently explored how and in what conditions identity politics can co-exist with democratic participation and social inclusivity (Gutmann 2003). According to Castells (1997), there are three different forms of identity building: legitimising identity, resistance identity and project identity; and no identity is, *per se*, progressive or regressive outside its historical and political contexts. Therefore, I would suggest that the critics of identity politics should take greater account into the historical context and local conditions in which identity claims take place; while the proponents of identity movements should acknowledge the importance of providing space for appreciating the multiple and flexible meanings of such identities.

As Bhabha (1994, 1996b) points out, identity affiliation is ambivalent; solidarity is strategic; and commonality is often negotiated through the ‘contingency’ of social interests and political claims. Indeed, identity groupings are a product of contingency, rather than a long-term destiny. Furthermore, it is not only identity awareness that creates identity-based movements, but the movement itself creates identity consciousness. By reifying groups and treating them as substantial entities, ethno-political entrepreneurs can, as Bourdieu notes, ‘contribute to producing what they apparently describe or designate’ (Bourdieu 1991: 220). Many of these grouping projects also promote identity solidarity that
‘disguises their composite multiplicity under a semblance of unity ... [in order to] transcend internal cultural, political and gendered differences’ (Werbner 1997b: 238).

Meanwhile, Brubaker (2004, 2009) suggests that we study how ethnicity works in political and social life without automatically taking the ethnic group as the unit of analysis. He proposes that the study of ethnicity should go beyond ‘groupism’ and shift towards a focus on ‘practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, common-sense knowledge, organisational routines and resources, discursive frames, institutionalised forms, political projects, contingent events and variable groupness’ (Brubaker 2004: 27). Inspired by Brubaker’s approach, this chapter examines how identity works in Chinese Muslims’ political and social lives, by exploring their contingent solidarity, organisational dynamics and different forms of social participation.

The emergence of ‘new’ ethno-religious groups in democratising Indonesia

The broadening of the democratic space after the fall of President Suharto allowed various ethnic, religious, gender and cultural groups to have much more freedom to express their identities in the public domain. These emergences of identity politics, on the one hand are celebrated as a reflection of political openness in democratising Indonesia and as an empowerment for marginalised groups, but on the other hand are criticised for promoting social exclusivity and generating political tension. Central to my research are the phenomena of ‘Chinese euphoria’ and ‘Islamic resurgence’, which refer to the rising of Chinese and Islamic identities in Indonesia today. Both the Chinese and the Muslims have used the political openness of the post-Suharto period to express their identity through various political parties and social organisations.

3. Among social organisations which promote the rights of minorities are women’s organisations (see Budianta 2003) and gay activist groups (see Oetomo 2001).

Ethnic Chinese have formed various organisations, to promote Chinese culture and to liberate their long-suppressed identity, and to fight against discrimination (Budianta 2007; Giblin 2003; Hoon 2008; Suryadinata 2001). The Indonesian Chinese Clan Association (PSMTI, Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia) and the Chinese Indonesian Association (INTI, Perhimpunan Indonesia Keturunan Tionghoa) are the two biggest Chinese organisations established in the post-Suharto period. They are dominated by older Chinese businessmen, who aim to promote Chinese cultural identity and solidarity between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians. Younger Chinese Indonesians have involved themselves in more politically inclined organisations to fight against discrimination. These organisations are mostly non-ethnic and integrated into broader Indonesia reform activities, and include the Indonesian Anti-Discrimination Movement (GANDI, Gerakan Perjuangan Anti Diskriminasi Indonesia) and the Solidarity for Nation (SNB, Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa). The unity of ethnic Chinese under PSMTI and INTI is also challenged by various kinds of smaller Chinese organisations that represent different localities, religious affiliations and dialects.

Concurrently, Muslims have formed Islamic parties and NGOs to promote different variants of Islam, from liberal to radical; and in certain regions, local political authorities have implemented sharia-influenced by-laws and regulations (Bruinessen 2002; Bubalo & Fealy 2005; Fox 2004; Hefner 2005). After the downfall of the Suharto regime in 1998, many Islamic parties of both Islamist and non-Islamist persuasion were formed and contested the 1999 general elections. The major non-Islamist Islamic parties were the National Revival Party (PKB, Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa) and the National Mandate Party (PAN, Partai Amanat Nasional). Meanwhile, the major Islamist party, committed to a greater implementation of sharia law, was the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera). With regard to social organisations,

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5. Islamism is used to describe a variety of movements that conceive Islam as an ideology. It mostly refers to political Islam, in which political activism is informed by Islamic principles. In Indonesia, many Islamists are inspired by the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. In general, they aim to achieve a greater implementation of
while Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah continued as mass organisations that respectively represented traditionalist and modernist Muslims, many smaller groups were established to promote different interpretations of Islam. Some of these Muslim groups are considered by many to be ‘radical-conservative’, such as the Islamic Defenders’ Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam) and Laskar Jihad (Jihad Fighters), while some are considered to be a ‘liberal-progressive’, such as the Liberal Islam Network (JIL, Jaringan Islam Liberal) and the Muhammadiyah Young Intellectual Network (JIMM, Jaringan Intelektual Muhammadiyah Muda).

In addition to ethnic and religious groupings, there are also intersecting identity groupings. These intersecting identities can be a combination of ethnic, religious, gender, sexual, class and ideological identities, such as Chinese Muslim, Dayak Islam, liberal Islam, leftish Islam and feminist Muslim groups. These intersecting groupings always consist of two sets of identities that are conventionally viewed as incompatible and thus aim to challenge those notions. For example, feminist Muslim groups, such as RAHIMA, challenge the notion that Islamic piety is incompatible with gender equality, and promote women rights within an Islamic framework (Robinson 2008). In relation to Chinese Muslims, let me contrast two quotes to illustrate the re-emergence of their identity grouping in post-1998 Indonesia.

I am a Muslim, an Indonesian, and of Chinese descent. But a person of Chinese descent and a Muslim born in Indonesia is an Indonesian. The Muslim community of Chinese descent would ultimately become just a ‘Muslim community’, and not a separate Chinese community with a mosque. (Junus Jahja, cited in The 1986: 67)

Some Chinese Muslims do not regard themselves as ‘Chinese’ after conversion. But I am different, I publicly say that I am a Chinese and I am a Muslim. By asserting my Chinese identity, I have the capacity to resolve the ‘Chinese

sharia law in Indonesian society. For more discussion of Islamism in Indonesia, see Bubalo and Fealy (2005: 74–79).
problem’, by playing a role as a bridge between indigenous Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians. As I share the same religion with the majority Muslim population, I can convey and fight for the interest of ethnic Chinese more effectively. (Interview, Budi Setyagraha, 12 February 2009)

Junus Jahja is a founder of the Karim Oei Foundation and a board member of ICMI. During the New Order period, he was a proponent of the idea of ‘assimilation through Islam’. He was convinced that the best way to resolve the so-called ‘Chinese Problem’ was by embracing the religion of the majority of the Indonesian population, and that by such actions the differences between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians would diminish. In his view, Chinese Muslims should ultimately assimilate into the larger Indonesian Muslim population. Meanwhile, Budi Setyagraha is a Chinese Muslim businessman, a former chairperson of the PITI Yogyakarta’s division and a former PAN representative member in the Yogyakarta Provincial Legislative Assembly (DPRD, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah). In my interview with him, he echoed Junus Jahja’s view that conversion to Islam provided a solution to the ‘Chinese Problem’. But he rejected the notion of ‘total assimilation’ and suggested that Chinese Muslims should maintain their ‘Chineseness’, so that they could become ‘middle persons’ between non-Chinese and Chinese Indonesians. For him, after conversion to Islam, a Chinese became ‘more Indonesian, but no less Chinese’.

Individual socio-economic backgrounds may shape these different viewpoints, but the collapse of the New Order regime and the openness of post-1998 governments towards the expression of Chineseness have been the major political changes switching the discourse from one of ‘assimilation’ to one of ‘integration’ among Chinese Muslims in particular, but also among Chinese Indonesians in general. Some Chinese Muslim leaders used this

6. After Indonesian independence, there were two major approaches among Chinese Indonesians for dealing with their citizenship and status in Indonesia. The integrationists advocated that the Chinese minority should retain their cultural traditions, and that Indonesia should be a multicultural society in which the human rights of Chinese Indonesians should be protected. In contrast, the
political openness to revive PITI, which had been stripped of its Chinese characteristics during the Suharto period. They renamed the organisation, took key executive positions and established new branches across Indonesia.

This change of identity expression is not peculiar to Chinese Muslims, but has also been found in other minority Muslim communities in Indonesia. For example, before 1998, in West Kalimantan, ethnic ‘Dayak’ (mostly animist or Christian) who converted to Islam always self-identified themselves and were considered by others as ethnic ‘Malay’. However, after the downfall of Suharto, the implementation of regional autonomy empowered Dayak political identity. As a result, more and more Dayaks who are Muslims identify themselves ‘Dayak Muslims’, rather than ‘Malay’ (Pasti 2003). In 1998, some Dayak Muslim leaders established the Union of Dayak Muslim Families (IKDI, Ikatan Keluarga Dayak Islam) to promote Dayak Muslim identity and challenge the perception that ‘a Dayak will turn into a Malay after converting to Islam’. As one of the Dayak Muslim leaders put it, ‘Changing a religion does not change your ethnicity, as Dayak blood still exists in your body.’

Strategic solidarity: Chinese Muslim organisations and identity formation

‘Chinese Muslim’ is not a fixed ethno-religious group. Some within this ‘group’ do not even see themselves as ‘Chinese Muslim’, while many others intermarry with non-Chinese and lose their Chinese identity after more than one generation. Chinese Muslim organisations, therefore, play an important role in ‘stabilising’ this unstable identity category, for different reasons. Here, I will discuss briefly the histories, objectives, activities and membership of four Chinese Muslim associations in Indonesia today. They are the

assimilationists proposed that Chinese Indonesians give up their ethnic identity and completely assimilate to the local majority. During the New Order period, ‘assimilation’ became the dominant approach; while today, ‘integration’ or ‘multiculturalism’ is the more favoured discourse. For further discussion about assimilation and integration debates among Chinese Indonesians, see Purdey (2003).
Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (PITI), the Karim Oei Foundation, the Chinese Muslim and Families (MUSTIKA) and the Cheng Hoo Foundation (YMHCHI).

**Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia (PITI)**

PITI was established in Jakarta on 14 April 1961, co-founded by Abdul Karim Oei, Abdusomad Yap A Siong and Kho Goan Tjin. PITI was probably the first nationwide association of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. Its establishment was supported by the then Muhammadiyah chairman Ibrahim, because according to him, ‘the preaching of Islam among ethnic Chinese should be done by Chinese Muslims themselves’ (Tanudjaja 2008). According to an introductory article about PITI written by Syarif Tanudjaja, the Chairman of Jakarta PITI (2008–2013), the organisation's vision is to promote Islam as a religion that blesses all (*rahmatan lil alamin*), in accordance with its effort to diminish negative perceptions among Chinese Indonesians that ‘Islam is identical with backwardness, laziness, stupidity, dirtiness, intolerance and violence’ (Tanudjaja 2008). PITI’s mission is ambitious, as it not only aims to unite Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, but also to bridge the divide between Chinese and Muslim Indonesians. PITI asserts that a person can be Indonesian, Muslim and Chinese at the same time; and sees itself as playing a role in promoting national unity in Indonesia. PITI is also a social-religious preaching organisation, whose program is to preach Islam to the ethnic Chinese, as well as to provide religious guidance and social support to new converts.

PITI underwent a ‘dark period’ during the New Order, because of the regime’s intervention in its leadership and pressure to downplay its Chineseness. In 1972, the government prohibited the use of ‘*Tionghoa*’ (Chinese) in the name of the PITI, as it could be perceived as a marker of ‘exclusivity’. The organisation changed its name to Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam (Islamic Faith Cultivator Association, the acronym remaining PITI). At the same time, the request by some PITI leaders for the publication and distribution of the Qur’an in Mandarin was not approved. PITI was forced to have
ethnically mixed leadership and was dominated by non-Chinese Muslim military officers. However, some PITI branches outside Jakarta, such as those in Yogyakarta and Surabaya, experienced less interference and operated relatively freely, especially during the late New Order period.

The collapse of the Suharto regime broadened the democratic space for various Chinese organisations to re-emerge. Chinese Muslim leaders in Jakarta regained control of PITI’s leadership from New Order military leaders, reclaimed its Chinese identity and revived its branches throughout the archipelago. Yet, there were some debates around its name in the Indonesian language: whether PITI should revert to ‘Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia’ or remain ‘Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam’. Some objected to the usage of ‘Tionghoa’ as implying exclusivity; others preferred keeping ‘Tionghoa’ as reflecting PITI’s unique identity. As one said, ‘We do not need to be ashamed (malu-malu) and should be proud of our unique Chinese Muslim identity’ (field note, 16 July 2008).

At its national meeting in 2005, the PITI leadership came to a compromise decision by accommodating both names: ‘Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam d/h [formerly] Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia’.

Some Chinese Muslim leaders have tried to reconcile these divergent views, maintaining that asserting ‘Chineseness’ is a preaching strategy and does not necessarily imply exclusivity. Syarif Tanudjaja, for example, insists that the membership and leadership of PITI was never intended to be exclusively Chinese Muslim, but rather a mixture including non-Chinese Muslims. He uses the metaphor of a human body for PITI, which has a ‘face that is a Chinese Muslim, and other parts that are Muslim Indonesian’ (Tanudjaja 2008). He suggests however, that the main leaders of PITI should be ethnic Chinese to build a connecting point (‘benang merah’) with non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians. In fact, many leaders from Muslim organisations are in favour of PITI being led by Chinese Muslims. According to them, it is more effective for Chinese Muslims to preach Islam among ethnic Chinese, as they share similar cultural backgrounds and religious experiences (interview, Rubaidi, 15 November 2008; Syafiq Mughni, 18 September 2008). Nowadays,
most of the top-ranking leaders of PITI are older Chinese businessmen, with some mid-ranked leaders who are Chinese preachers, religious teachers and activists. Very few younger, female and lower-class Chinese Muslims are involved in the leadership of PITI.

Although identifying itself as a preaching organisation, PITI is in fact more than a religious association. It also offers opportunities for social integration, ethnic empowerment, political advancement, business networking and even matchmaking. Since Chinese Muslims share their religion with most Indonesians, PITI views itself as having an extra capacity to promote social integration and unity between ethnic Chinese and Muslim Indonesians. It is known that some PITI leaders converted to Islam and used their religious affiliation to fight discrimination and prejudice towards ethnic Chinese. Although PITI does not align itself with any political party, some of its leaders are actively involved in politics. Also, many suspect that some Chinese businessmen became Muslims and joined PITI for economic reasons, such as establishing closer relationships with government officials for licenses, building business networks with Islamic organisations and ensuring the security of their properties. Nevertheless, Syarif Tanudjaja, the current Chairman of PITI Jakarta does not see these diverse reasons for joining PITI as a major problem. He says, ‘It is normal for people to join PITI for certain purposes. Yet, the important thing is after he or she becomes a PITI member, his or her intention should be corrected with Islamic education (diluruskan dengan Tarbiya)’ (interview, Syarif Tanudjaja, 9 June 2008).

As of 2010, PITI had branches in at least 17 provinces in Indonesia, from North Sumatra to South Sulawesi. Although PITI is a nationwide association, its leadership and activities are localised and personalised. Some branches are active; others exist in name only; most depend on the initiative of leaders who are often

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7. Except in Surabaya, there is no formal figure for the membership numbers of PITI. As estimated by informants, there are about 100 members in Yogyakarta, 200 in Palembang, 300 in Jakarta and 600 in Surabaya. Not all PITI members are Chinese Muslims. For example, about one third of PITI members in Surabaya are non-Chinese.
a combination of local Chinese Muslim businessmen (sometimes politicians too) and religious teachers. Unlike other Muslim organisations such as NU and Muhammadiyah in which religious scholars constitute the key leadership, in most PITI branches, businessmen occupy higher positions than religious teachers. In terms of activities, besides holding weekly or monthly Islamic study sessions and celebrating Islamic events, many PITI branches are also involved in charity. Some local PITI offices, such as those in Surabaya and Yogyakarta, hold Chinese New Year celebrations.

Despite focusing on Chinese Muslims, PITI has close relationships with many other Muslim associations through organisational and individual connections, including NU, Muhammadiyah, ICMI, MUI and various Islamic political parties. As I observed, PITI always has close affiliations with influential local Muslim organisations. It is not surprising that PITI leaders in Semarang and Surabaya are close to NU, while those in Yogyakarta are close to Muhammadiyah. In addition, many PITI branches also interact with Chinese organisations, such as INTI, PSMTI and various local Chinese associations. In terms of political affiliation, PITI chooses to be neutral. As one leader says, ‘PITI should be in everywhere, yet PITI should not affiliate itself to any particular group [PITI harus berada di mana-mana, PITI jangan diajak ke mana-mana]’ (interview, Abdul Chalim, 3 October 2008). The line is that PITI should have good relationships with various social organisations and political parties, but not directly involve itself in politics. Nevertheless, PITI members and leaders are able to become involved in political parties on their own. Indeed, quite a few PITI leaders have contested elections for different political parties.

**Yayasan Karim Oei**

Yayasan Karim Oei or the Karim Oei Foundation was established in Jakarta in 1991 by Junus Jahya and other Chinese Muslim leaders, with the support of various Muslim organisations and leaders. The foundation honours the memory of Abdul Karim Oei, who was a model Chinese convert and described by Jahja (2005) as a ‘3 in 1’
figure – ‘Indonesian Nationalist, Faithful Muslim and Successful Entrepreneur’ (Nasionalist Indonesia, Muslim Taat dan Pengusaha Sukses). He was a successful businessman, a Muhammadiyah leader, a Masyumi Member of Parliament and a co-founder of PITI.

The Karim Oei Foundation has three ‘mission statements’, two of which are derived from Qur’anic verses, the third one based on a statement by Karim Oei. The Qur’anic verses promote interaction between ethnic groups and brotherhood among Muslims, while Karim Oei’s words are ‘True Muslims should love their motherland and native people’ (Orang yang benar-benar Muslim harus cinta tanah air dan cinta pribumi). These aims are in line with Junus Jahya’s view that converting to Islam was a way of intermingling and promoting better relations with indigenous Indonesians during the New Order period. However, there is a reverse trend today, whereby some Chinese Muslim activists in the Karim Oei Foundation use ‘cultural approaches’ (i.e. Chinese cultural practices and symbols) to preach Islam among Chinese Indonesians.

Although its key leaders are Chinese, the leadership of the Karim Oei Foundation is ethnically mixed. While the foundation focuses on assisting ethnic Chinese to gather information on Islam, its activities are open to all Muslims. The foundation also identifies itself as an Islamic centre for ethnic Chinese that facilitates conversion ceremonies, organises religious classes and provides social support for converts. Although it has branches in other cities such as Bandung and Surabaya, Jakarta remains the most active. Its mosque, Lautze Mosque, despite being small in size, has always been referred to as home for Chinese Muslims in Jakarta. The open social space of the mosque and the less hierarchical structure of the foundation have made its activities more attractive to Chinese converts in Jakarta, compared to PITI Jakarta.

8. The verses are ‘People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware’ (Chapter Al-Hujurat verse 13); and ‘The believers are brothers, so make peace between two brothers and be mindful of God, so that you may be given mercy’ (Chapter Al-Hujurat verse 10). This translation is based on Abdel Haleem (2005).
The busiest days in the Lautze Mosque are every Friday and Sunday. Hundreds of Muslims who work in the centre of town come to the mosque to perform Friday prayer sessions, yet very few of them are Chinese Muslims, because most Chinese Muslims associated with the foundation live and work outside of central Jakarta. Most of the preachers or religious teachers who lead Friday prayers and give sermons are non-Chinese Muslims from various Islamic affiliations; only a few are Chinese Muslims. Many Chinese Muslims come to the mosque on Sunday for religious classes and social gatherings. During my fieldwork, on most Sunday mornings there were Qur’anic study sessions led by Chinese Muslim ustaz and mostly attended by non-Chinese Muslim women living nearby. After lunch, there were religious guidance classes for new converts, facilitated by a Javanese Muslim who was then also a PKS activist. Sometimes, conversion and wedding ceremonies are also held. In addition, there are informal discussions among Chinese converts on religious interpretation, Islamic practice and current affairs. It provides an opportunity for converts to share their experiences and family problems, as well as seek religious guidance and social support. The Lautze Mosque is also a place for matchmaking, where a Chinese Muslim can go to find a partner who shares the same religion and ethnicity.

Although the main leaders of the foundation are Muhammadiyah members and some are PKS sympathisers, the foundation remains neutral and maintains good relationships with all other major Muslim organisations. The chairman of the foundation, Ali Kaream Oei claimed that their mosque is one of the few ‘neutral’ (neither affiliated to NU nor Muhammadiyah) mosques in Jakarta. He said, ‘This has been acknowledged by the visit of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2006 to resolve a conflict between different Muslim organisations in Jakarta’ (interview, Ali Karim Oei, 22 December 2008). Nevertheless, despite its professed neutrality, the mosque is a space of contestation of Islamic interpretations. Compared to PITI, Chinese converts in the Lautze Mosque are more evenly distributed in terms of gender, age and social class. Their religiosities are extremely
d diverse, ranging from NU, Muhammadiyah, PKS, Jemaah Tabligh and Salafist followers.\(^9\) The only commonality that bonds them together is their Chinese heritage.

**Muslim Tionghoa dan Keluarga (MUSTIKA)**

Muslim Tionghoa dan Keluarga (MUSTIKA, Chinese Muslim and Families) was established in 1997 by Syarif Tanudjaja’s family and other Chinese Muslims. Its activities are mostly based in Jakarta and surroundings. Syarif Tanudjaja is a notary and a Chinese Muslim activist. His religious background is impressive in its breadth; he is a follower of NU traditions, a Muhammadiyah member, a former Justice Party (PK, Partai Keadilan) election candidate, a former leader of the Karim Oei Foundation, and also the chairman of PITI Jakarta (as in 2010), while his sons are activists in Al-Arqam.

As stated on its website, MUSTIKA is an education and friendship space (**wadah pendidikan dan silaturahim**) for Chinese Muslims and their family members. Its website header proclaims, ‘Islam is beautiful and easy, I am proud to be a Muslim’ (**Islam itu indah dan mudah, aku bangga menjadi Muslim**).\(^{10}\) According to Syarif Tanudjaja, MUSTIKA is more like a religious gathering and study group (**majelis taklim**), rather than a formal organisation. Thus, ‘MUSTIKA does not overlap, but supplements the role of PITI’ (interview, Syarif Tanudjaja, 9 June 2008). As he explains, MUSTIKA is a more relaxed space for ordinary Chinese Muslims than the more formal PITI.\(^{11}\)

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9. Like other Islamic movements and schools of thought, Salafism is a diverse current. In general, it preaches a return to the practices of the Prophet and his companions (**salaf** means ancestor in Arabic). In Indonesia, Salafists use the Qur’an and Hadith to justify their rejection of many traditionalist Muslim practices associated with localised Muslim cultures, and with supposedly corrupting modern Western influences. For details about Salafist groups in Indonesia, see Bubalo and Fealy (2005: 74–79).

10. See www.muslimtionghoa.com (accessed on 15 September 2010).

11. As I observed, one of the reasons why Syarif Tanudjaja established MUSTIKA was his dissatisfaction with the PITI leaders in Jakarta, who were mostly businessmen and had less enthusiasm to run religious activities and Islamic study groups. In 2008, Syarif Tanudjaja was elected as the chairman of PITI Jakarta and
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Compared to PITI and the Karim Oei Foundation, MUSTIKA's mission is less ambitious and more focused on social support and religious education for Chinese Muslims. MUSTIKA provides a consultation space for new converts and their non-Muslim families, as well as guidance in the cultivation of Islamic knowledge among converts. It is also a place where Chinese converts can share their family disputes, workplace problems and religious challenges. MUSTIKA activities include a weekly Islamic study group, MUSTIKA KIDS (playgroup and Islamic studies for the children of Chinese Muslims), a spiritual retreat (wisata rohani) and Islamic consultations.

According to Syarif Tanudjaja, the use of the term ‘Chinese Muslim’ by members of the foundation is to facilitate its communication with ethnic Chinese. Many Chinese Muslims involved in MUSTIKA are intermarried and have mixed-ethnic children. Although not against intermarriage, he prefers his own sons to marry Chinese Muslims and build a Chinese Muslim family, to sustain their identity, and to demonstrate that Chineseness and Islam can co-exist harmoniously (interview, Syarif Tanudjaja, 9 June 2008). Syarif Tanudjaja’s other outreach tactics are establishing the Chinese halal restaurant, called Lezat, and the Chinese nasyid group, called Lampion. Syarif Tanudjaja’s family do not speak Mandarin or any other Chinese dialect in their everyday lives. They mix well with the broader Muslim community. It can be argued that the cultivation of the Islamic faith is the essence of MUSTIKA, while the expression of Chinese cultural identity is more a symbolic strategy to ease the spread of Islam among Chinese Indonesians.

Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia (YHMCHI)

Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia (YHMCHI, Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation) was established in 1995 by Bambang Sujanto, with other Chinese Muslim leaders, who were since then he has put a lot of effort into reviving PITI Jakarta. Syarif Tanudjaja is arguably the most prominent Chinese Muslim activist in Jakarta concerned with cultivating Islamic religiosity among new converts. He is often interviewed by various media regarding issues of Chinese Muslims.
mostly businessmen, and some preachers. Its major purpose is to collect funds to support PITI activities, especially in East Java. Bambang Sujanto is a prominent Chinese Muslim businessman and PITI leader in Surabaya. YHMCHI played a crucial role in the establishment of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque, through the sales of *Juz Amma* (convert guidance, containing the most commonly referred to sections of the Qur’an), personal contributions of Chinese Muslim leaders and public donations. More than half the funding came from non-Muslim Chinese businessmen, as they believe that their contribution will guarantee better security. YHMCHI also earns money through renting space in the mosque compound for sports and weddings. Apart from coordinating its activities and fund raising, the foundation leaves most of its operational activities in the Cheng Hoo Mosque to its committee and PITI Surabaya.

There are 85 committee members of YHMCHI, according to a booklet about the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque (YHMCHI 2008). Most members are listed by their Indonesian or Muslim names, followed by their Chinese names, to indicate their Chinese ethnicity. In addition, a few prominent Muslim leaders (such as the chairman of NU and Muhammadiyah in East Java) and non-Muslim Chinese businessmen are listed as advisers. The foundation is well connected to local Chinese social organisations, religious scholars, military leaders and government officials.

Bambang Sujanto, one of the founders of YHMCHI, rejects hearsay that he converted to Islam for economic reasons, though he concedes that his Muslim identity has helped his business. He claims that his involvement in the foundation and PITI is ‘99 per cent for Allah and one per cent for the ethnic Chinese’ (interview, Bambang Sujanto, 27 November 2008); yet in reality, he and fellow YHMCHI businessmen seem to spend more time on achieving of the ‘one per cent’ target than on the preaching. Various efforts have been made by YHMCHI to promote the role of the Chinese in the Islamisation of Indonesia, such as publishing books, organising conferences and sponsoring local Muslim leaders to visit Muslim communities in Mainland China. Some YHMCHI leaders are
‘nominal’ converts, meaning that they do not practice Islam every day, but only attend Friday prayers in the mosque. It can be argued that, in contrast to MUSTIKA, a group that focuses on Islamic faith cultivation, YHMCHI concerns itself with improving the lives of Chinese Indonesians, while their Islamic conversion is a strategy to get further recognition from Indonesian Muslims.

**Internal dynamics: Chinese Muslim organisations and identity contestation**

What are the contestations within and between the Chinese Muslim organisations that I have discussed? As indicated earlier, such organisations share commonality in manifesting Chinese Muslim identities in Indonesia, yet they do it for different reasons and in different ways. The two main concerns of such organisations are *dakwah* (Islamic preaching) and *pembauran* (ethnic intermingling). It is quite clear that MUSTIKA in Jakarta is more ‘*dakwah*-oriented’ and the YHMCHI based in Surabaya is more ‘*pembauran*-oriented’. Generally speaking, PITI and the Karim Oei Foundation see both Islamic preaching and ethnic intermingling as equally important and not mutually exclusive; though the priority might vary depending on the location, historical period and individuals. PITI and the Karim Oei Foundation are also more dynamic and complex because of their larger membership and longer history. Based on fieldwork in Jakarta and Surabaya, I now compare these two major Chinese Muslim organisations.

**Businessmen and preachers: united identities, diverse intentions**

Chinese Muslim organisations such as PITI help in forging a united identity, but this solidarity is contingent and there are competing interests and internal diversity among those who participate in the organisations. Businessmen and preachers lead many branches of PITI; businessmen tend to more be ‘*pembauran*-oriented’, while preachers tend to be more ‘*dakwah*-oriented’. Yet, this simplified dichotomy excludes some businessmen who are also pious Muslim
and some preachers who preach for financial not spiritual reasons. While many Chinese Muslims see no contradiction between pembauran and dakwah, there are always debates between those who want PITI to focus on Islamic education and those who wish ethnic intermingling emphasised.

Some preachers disparage some businessmen for their lack of religious commitment, while some businessmen upbraid some religious teachers for their perceived conservative outlooks. Nevertheless, such differences of opinion do not generate major tensions between them. In fact, in terms of the overall effect, they complement each other – preachers need money to run their activities, while businessmen need preachers to provide religious credentials for PITI. Meanwhile, many ordinary Chinese Muslims in PITI see it as a space where they can meet converts who can share similar religious experiences, cultural backgrounds and social problems. For some younger converts, it is a place for matchmaking, and some lower-class converts come to PITI for financial support.

From pembauran to dakwah: preaching Islam through cultural approaches

Chinese Muslim organisations’ dominant discourse during the New Order era was ‘intermingling’ (pembauran) with the local majority. After Suharto’s demise, however, the focus of these organisations shifted from ‘pembauran’ to ‘dakwah’. This change is obvious in the Karim Oei Foundation in Jakarta. During the Suharto regime, when Junus Jahya formed the foundation, he put more effort into promoting assimilation through Islam, rather than increasing religiosity among converts. One informant told me that Junus Jahya even discouraged female converts from wearing the Islamic headscarf. He said that Junus Jahya had contributed to a better relationship between Chinese and Muslim Indonesians, but not cultivating Islamic piety among converts (field note, 9 June 2008). But recent fieldwork observations reveal a change: most activists in the foundation are little concerned with ‘assimilation’
because most of the younger converts have already been more or less ‘integrated’ if not ‘assimilated’ into larger Indonesian society.

In contrast, in parallel with the rising present-day religiosity of Indonesian Muslims, many Chinese Muslim activists in the Karim Oei Foundation now concentrate on strengthening the Islamic commitment of new converts. Some of them also use Chinese cultural symbols as a means to convey the Islamic message. Such approaches, however, as I discuss in the next chapter are not without controversy; a few of the more puritanical converts maintain that practising Chinese traditions is violating Islamic teaching. But generally speaking, the dominating discourse among most Chinese Muslim activists has changed from ‘assimilation through Islam’ (asimilasi lewat Islam) to ‘preaching Islam through cultural approaches’ (dakwah pendekatan budaya). During the New Order period, conversion to Islam was a way for some Chinese to assimilate into the wider Indonesian community while in contemporary Indonesia the usage of Chineseness is a strategy to preach Islam among the ethnic Chinese.

Comparing Jakarta with Surabaya: translocal connections, local dynamics

Although Chinese Muslim organisations, especially PITI, are spread nationwide, having branches throughout the archipelago, their leadership and activities are localised. The translocal connection is seen in the efforts of various PITI branches to replicate Cheng Hoo Mosque in other cities. We can examine the localised dynamics of PITI through its organisational focus, activities and interactions with other organisations. PITI in Surabaya and Jakarta make an interesting comparison. PITI in Jakarta is less active, as it was burdened by the interference of the Suharto regime. It also suffered from conflicting opinions among its leaders, ranging from religious interpretations, to political affiliations, ethnic identifications and personal interests.

In contrast, East Java PITI is a more active branch, followed by PITI Yogyakarta and Palembang. East Java PITI’s office is located in Surabaya and has been active since its establishment in the 1980s
under the leadership of a few Chinese Muslim businessmen who were willing to contribute financial support. Among the reasons that contribute to the success of PITI East Java are: its distance from Jakarta, which meant that it was less under the control of the state, especially during the New Order regime; its location in a smaller city making communication easier; its close relationship with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), favouring the preservation of Chinese cultural traditions; and its Chinese-speaking leaders who prefer keeping Chinese identities. The Chinese-cultured and NU-inclined background of its leadership explains why the first Chinese-style mosque in Indonesia was established in Surabaya, and not Jakarta.

**Becoming a Chinese Muslim and having multiple affiliations**

It is not only that identity awareness leads to identity grouping, but social involvement itself leads to identity consciousness. Indeed, for some Chinese Muslims, it is not their sense of ethnic belonging that draws them to PITI, but their participation in PITI that makes them feel ethnic Chinese. For example, a Chinese ustaz told me that despite his Chinese appearance he did not practise Chinese culture or speak any Chinese language. He had joined PITI as a way of preaching Islam. After joining PITI, though, he had begun to incorporate some Chinese words and philosophical texts into his preaching. He was in fact learning to be an ethnic Chinese after conversion to Islam (interview, Sholihin Sani, 11 January 2009). This case shows not only that the identity of an individual Chinese Muslim can determine his or her social participation, but also that social involvement can shift ethnic identification. Such changes in identifications are not uncommon and not limited to ethnicity. Another example is a female convert who previously did not wear a headscarf, but began to don one after she joined PITI religious study sessions (field note, 16 November 2008).

In any case, many Chinese Muslims have multiple social and religious affiliations. For example, a PITI leader can be a Muhammadiyah member and a PKS supporter at the same time. In the Karim Oei foundation, followers have a variety of religious
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affiliations, ranging from NU, to Muhammadiyah, PKS, Jemaah Tabligh and FPI. Some of them have their commitment to one Islamic group and their involvement in Chinese Muslim organisations is to preach their religious understanding among new converts. This illustrates that the solidarity of Chinese Muslims in PITI and the Karim Oei Foundation is rather contingent and strategic.

Beyond PITI: diverse social and religious participation

Having reviewed the contingent solidarity and internal dynamics of Chinese Muslim organisations, now I turn to look at the social and religious participation of Chinese Muslims beyond such organisations. Many Chinese Muslims engage with broader Chinese and Islamic groups. Some prefer non-identity-based activities; others do not relate themselves to any organisation. In the next part of this chapter, I categorise their social participation into Chinese organisations; Islamic activism; affiliations beyond those groups. By exploring a few cases, I discuss the interaction between their ethnic identification, religious orientation, cultural experience, personal interest and social involvement.

Involvement in Chinese organisations

After the collapse of the New Order regime, together with their non-Muslim counterparts some prominent Chinese Muslims took part in the restructuring of Chinese identity politics in Indonesia. A few of them became committee members of nationwide Chinese organisations, such as INTI and PSMTI, while others joined various local Chinese organisations, such as Paguyuban Bhakti Putra (Putra Charity Association) in Yogyakarta, Paguyuban Tionghoa Surabaya (Surabaya Chinese Association), and Perkumpulan Masayarakat Surakarta (Surakarta Social Assembly). Most of the Chinese Muslims who are active in Chinese organisations are older businessmen who can speak Mandarin, as well as ‘pembauran-oriented’ PITI leaders who see their Islamic identity as a way of promoting
the interests of Chinese Indonesians. The involvement of younger and female Chinese Muslims in Chinese-related associations is limited.

One of the prominent Chinese Muslims who is involved in Chinese organisations is Jos Soetomo, the owner of the Sumber Mas Group that runs businesses related to timber and hotels in Kalimantan and Java. Born into a Chinese Buddhist family in East Kalimantan in 1945, Jos Soetomo converted to Islam in 1972. He is a multilingual speaker, as he can converse in Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Indonesian, Javanese and Banjar. He was the chairman of PITI and the co-founder of Yayasan Cheng Hoo Surabaya. He was also the co-founder of PSMTI and the chairman of the organisation’s branch in East Java. He claims that his involvement in Chinese organisations is not a form of social exclusivity, but a means of showing his commitment to Indonesian nationalism. Through Chinese organisations, he believes he can promote better ethnic relationships, and encourage more Chinese Indonesians to contribute to Indonesian development beyond simply providing financial support.

In 2008, Jos Soetomo built a library that contains collections of artefacts and books about Admiral Cheng Ho. This Cheng Ho Library is located in the Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park at the compound of TMII (Beautiful Indonesia Miniature Park) in Jakarta. He supported the establishment of a Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park, saying, ‘Unlike other ethnic groups such as Javanese and Madurese, there is no special locality for the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Therefore, we need to build an “island” for Chinese Indonesians in TTMI to show that we are one of the recognised ethnic groups in Indonesia’ (interview, Jos Soetomo, 24 October 2008). He claims to be a follower of the spirit of Cheng Ho, who emphasises tolerance and inclusivity. He has not forced his children to convert to Islam but has given them the freedom to choose their religion. Only four of his twelve children are Muslims. It is quite fair to say that promoting Chinese interests is more important to him than spreading Islam.
Involvement in Muslim activism

While ‘pembauran-oriented’ Chinese Muslim leaders tend to have close relations with Chinese organisations, many ‘religious-focused’ Chinese Muslims involve themselves in broader Muslim circles. Some of them share the agenda of certain religious groups, while many others join Islamic organisations to search for a sense of belonging because they have been side-lined by their families and friends since conversion. At the same time, many Muslim organisations are enthusiastic about recruiting Chinese Muslims, both as members and leaders. These organisations wish to demonstrate their commitment to cultural diversity, and to hold up Chinese converts as models of devout behaviour to non-practising Muslims.

Locality and conversion experience alongside social encounters determine Chinese Muslims’ affiliation to Muslim organisations. Many Chinese Muslims in Jakarta and Yogyakarta join Muhammadiyah, and those in Surabaya and Semarang join NU. But Chinese Muslim involvement in Islamic organisations goes beyond the mainstream NU and Muhammadiyah. During fieldwork, I encountered Chinese Muslims who are members or supporters of FPI, HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia), Persis (Persatuan Islam, Islamic Association), Al-Arqam, Jemaah Tabligh and also JIL. In addition to these diverse religious affiliations, some Chinese Muslim preachers or religious teachers have established their own smaller Islamic institutions, for example, Anton Medan Center (Anton Medani), Irena Center (Irena Handono), Tazkia Islamic School (Syafii Antonio) and Az Zahra Islamic Chanting Group (Tan Mei Hwa).

Here, I illustrate the participation of two Chinese Muslims, Abdul Chalim Lee of NU and Sholihin Sani of FPI. Abdul Chalim Lee (1946–2010) was born into a Chinese Confucian family in Surabaya and converted to Islam at the age of 28. He was a businessman, a champion wrestler, a PITI leader and a PKB election candidate. He spoke Mandarin, Indonesian and Javanese. After converting to Islam, he became involved in NU and followed the practices of that traditionalist Muslim organisation. He served as vice chairman of the economy bureau of NU and a leader of PKB,
a political party closely linked to NU. He had a close relationship with the former NU chairman, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) and served as his bodyguard. He told me that he was the one who had recommended that Gus Dur include a lion dance performance to celebrate the launching of PKB in 1999, and claimed that that had been the first public performance of lion dance in Indonesia since the downfall of Suharto.

When asked whether ethnic intermingling or Islamic preaching was the higher priority for him, using the example of the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya he replied, ‘Pembauran and dakwah are two sides of a coin. There is no contradiction between them. The mosque is a place where Chinese and non-Chinese get together. It also preaches Islamic the message to non-Muslims’ (interview, Abdul Chalim, 3 October 2008). During Idul Fitri 2008, he organised an open house at his home, called ‘Lebaran bernuansa budaya Tionghoa’ (Celebration of Idul Fitri in the Chinese style). He contends that the inclusion of Chinese cultural elements is important to the Islamic outreach.

In contrast to Abdul Chalim, Sholilin Sani, who is an FPI supporter, suggests that many Chinese cultural practices, such as the Chinese New Year celebrations and ancestor worship, are un-Islamic and should be avoided. Nevertheless, he has adopted some Chinese idioms and philosophical texts in his preaching to show the commonality between Islamic teaching and Chinese philosophy. Sholihin Sani, who was born in 1952 and converted to Islam after high school, is a marketing director and a part-time religious teacher. He speaks fluent Indonesian and Arabic, but has very little literacy in Mandarin. He is a religious teacher in Islamic study sessions organised by PITI and gives lessons on Islam to various religious organisations and private companies.

Sholilin Sani is also a co-founder and a former leader of a local branch of PKS (Prosperous Justice Party) in Jakarta. Like many other PKS members, he supports the full implementation of sharia law in Indonesia. Unlike Abdul Chalim, who is a close ally of Gus Dur, Sholilin Sani accuses Gus Dur of being ‘too liberal and pro-Western’. Sholilin Sani also claims himself to be a supporter
of FPI. According to him, FPI is the only ‘genuine’ Islamic group brave enough to fight for Muslims’ interests. He disagrees with the widespread perception that FPI is a radical, violent and ‘anti-Chinese’ group. On the contrary, he claims the FPI is ‘tolerant’ and ‘multi-ethnic’ because it welcomes Chinese Muslims as members. He also told me a story about FPI helping the non-Muslim Chinese,

A few years ago, a non-Muslim Chinese woman asked FPI for help in closing down an illegal gambling centre in central Jakarta. The women said she was worried about her son, who frequently visited the gambling spot. She had reported this illegal centre to the police several times, but no action had been taken. Therefore, she reported it to FPI and FPI acted against the illegal gambling centre. Violence is the last resort for FPI, but we had to crack down on the venue because the police were corrupt. (Interview, Sholihin Sani, 11 January 2009)

Involvement beyond Chinese and Muslim organisations

Not all Chinese Muslims feel comfortable affiliating with specifically Chinese or Muslim organisations. Some Chinese Muslims, especially those who are younger, non-Chinese speaking, non-upper class and more flexible in their religious practices, prefer to join non-ethnic and non-religious groups, such as human rights organisations and neighbourhood associations. Some of them view Chinese Muslim organisations, as dominated by rich businessmen or conservative religious teachers, whom they dislike. They are more preoccupied with broader issues, such as gender rights, poverty, political freedom and anti-discrimination. One of them is Andy Yentriyani, who is a researcher and activist in KOMNAS Perempuan (Komisi National Perempuan, the Indonesian National Commission for Women).

Andy Yentriyani, born in 1978 into a mixed-religious family in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, and recorded as a Muslim on her identity card, is a graduate in International Relations from the University of Indonesia. She cannot speak Mandarin and rarely incorporates Chinese culture in her everyday life, yet she is aware
that she will always be treated as an ethnic Chinese because of her appearance. She noted that the 1998 ‘anti-Chinese’ incident in Jakarta solidified her identity as a female Chinese. She was a volunteer in helping the victims of rape and that began her activism in various gender organisations to fight discrimination against women and minority groups. In terms of religiosity, she has sufficient Islamic knowledge, as she went through Islamic classes during high school, yet she does not see herself as a ‘pious’ Muslim. She shared a work experience with me: when she was chairing a discussion regarding women and conflict in Indonesia, some participants questioned her credentials because she was both an ethnic Chinese and a woman. However, after she quoted Qur’anic verses and revealed that she was a Muslim, she felt respected by most participants, who were Muslims (interview, Andy Yentriyani, 19 June 2008). This shows that Andy has creatively negotiated her Chinese, Islamic and gender identities in her activism.

Another young Chinese Muslim, Muhammad Gatot, born 1978, is currently a researcher in Legal Aid Institute (LBH, Lembaga Bantuan Hukum). Like Andy Yentriyani, he disassociates himself from Chinese Muslim organisations, such as PITI and the Karim Oei Foundation, as he views the former as led by rich and conservative businessmen, and the latter as full of ‘fanatical’ young Chinese Muslim converts. He is a member of a young Chinese Indonesian network called Jaringan Tionghoa Muda (JTM). Gatot said that he had no interest in joining Chinese organisations that were mostly dominated by elderly businessmen, but was keen to be a part of a loose network that discussed various issues related to Chinese Indonesians. Given that most of the members in JTM were not Muslim, he said that he might be able to contribute different Islamic-oriented opinions to the group discussion (interview, Muhammad Gatot, 4 April 2008).

**Chinese Muslim politicians: identity, interests and political involvement**

This section focuses on the participation of Chinese Muslims in electoral politics. After the collapse of the New Order regime,
many Chinese Indonesians stood as candidates in the elections. Some were successful, not only as legislative members at both local and national level, but also as governors and high-profile ministers. At the same time, many political parties, including Islamic parties, expressed their interest in having ethnic Chinese as party leaders and election candidates. They did so to show their commitment to multiculturalism, as well as to attract Chinese votes and the financial support of Chinese businessmen. PKS, for instance, has fielded a couple of Chinese Muslims as election candidates to show its inclusivity and establish connections with the ethnic Chinese. Non-Islamist Muslim-based parties such as PKB and PAN have even fielded some non-Muslim Chinese as candidates. For example, Alvin Lee, who was a legislative member in the national parliament for PAN, was always mistaken for a Muslim convert, whereas he is a Christian.

Within such contexts, a few Chinese Muslims find an opportunity to involve themselves in politics. Some of them have contested both national and local elections, for seats in the DPR (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, People’s Representative Council or the national parliament) or the DPRD (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, Regional People’s Representative Council), mostly representing Islamic and Islamist parties, but some representing nationalist parties. There have been representative members in regional assemblies on behalf of PKB or PAN, such as Gautama Setiadi in DPRD Semarang, Central Java (PKB, 1999–2004), Eddy Susanto in DPRD Mojokerto, East Java (PKB, 2009–2014) and Budi Setyagraha in DPRD Yogyakarta (PAN, 1999–2004). Mochamad Anton, the chairman of PITI in Malang, is one of the most successful local Chinese Muslim politicians. With the endorsement of PKB, in 2013 he won the mayoral election of Malang and became the first Chinese mayor of that city. These local Chinese Muslim politicians have something in common – they are businessmen and PITI leaders. In addition, they are members of the Muslim organisation dominant in their localities (NU for those in East Java and Central Java; Muhammadiyah for those in Yogyakarta) and have joined the parties which represent their affiliated organisations (PKB for NU and PAN for Muhammadiyah).
Besides standing for PAN and PKB, some Chinese Muslims have stood as candidates in elections under the banner of the Islamist party, PKS, such as Iskandar Abdurrahman (DPRD candidate in Salatiga, 2004), Syarif Tanudjaja (DPR candidate for Jakarta, 1999) and Surya Madya (DPR candidate for East Kalimantan, 2004), but none has been elected. As I learnt, during the 2009 elections PKS tried to establish good relations with both Chinese Muslim organisations and individuals, for example by appointing the chairman of the Karim Oei Foundation, Ali Karim Oei as one of its advisers, visiting the PITI office and approaching the prominent Chinese Muslim, Syafii Antonio, to stand for them as an election candidate (he turned down the offer).

Local Muslim politics influences the involvement of Chinese Muslims in political parties, and thus it stands to reason that most Chinese Muslim politicians are PKS members in Jakarta, PAN members in Yogyakarta and PKB members in Surabaya and Semarang. As an ethnic minority, Chinese Muslims affiliating with mainstream political players not only guarantees their social security, but also gives them greater political opportunities. Religious background and understanding also play an important role in Chinese Muslims’ political participation. The more secular-minded see themselves more comfortable in nationalist parties or non-Islamist Islamic parties while a Chinese Muslim who supports Islamic causes is most likely to become involved in Islamist parties such as PKS.

Anda Hakim in PIB, a nationalist party

Anda Hakim, who was born into a Chinese Buddhist family in Medan in 1960 and converted to Islam in 1994, is a practising lawyer and the former chairman of PITI, Jakarta. He is a multilingual speaker, and can converse in Mandarin, Cantonese, Indonesian, Javanese and some Arabic. Besides being a member of the advisory councils for MUI and ICMI, he is actively involved in many Chinese-related organisations in Jakarta. To name a few, he is a vice chairman of PSMTI, a co-founder of KOMTAK (Komunitas Tionghoa Anti Korupsi, the Chinese Community for Anti-Corruption), the
Chairman of the law bureau of ICBC (the Indonesia China Business Council), and even an adviser to the Indonesian Tao Council (Majelis Tao Indonesia).

Anda Hakim grew up in a politically active family. His father, Lukmanul Hakim, was a Golkar DPRD member for Jakarta during the New Order period. As of 2009, Anda Hakim is the chairperson of PIB (Partai Perjuangan Indonesia Baru, the Party of the Struggle for the New Indonesia), a small secular-nationalist party in Jakarta. He promotes the concept of a ‘New Indonesia,’ which according to him is a fight for justice, democracy and pluralism. He told me, ‘In the past, Chinese Indonesians have been seen as “economic animals” that exploit the richness of this nation. By participating in politics and promoting the social improvement of all Indonesians, I would like to diminish this perception’ (interview, Anda Hakim, 7 January 2009). As a Muslim, he said he had an opportunity to establish close connections with religious leaders and government officials despite maintaining good relations with non-Muslim Chinese. Yet, he has a flexible attitude toward Islamic practices and does not endorse an Islamic agenda in Indonesian politics. His non-dogmatic religious viewpoints have been criticised by some activists in PITI.

Budi Setyagraha in PAN, an Islamic party

Budi Setyagraha, born in Solo in 1943, converted to Islam in Yogyakarta in 1983 and is a former chairman of PITI, Yogyakarta. He speaks fluent Mandarin, Indonesian and Javanese. He is a successful businessman who owns a hardware store, a local taxi service company and a few Islamic credit finance programs. He says his conversion to Islam was not driven by economic considerations, but does not deny that his Muslim identity has helped his businesses grow faster. For example, according to Budi, after the 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta, the Islamic universities bought equipment from his shop, instead of other Chinese-owned hardware shops, because he shares their religion and has close relationships with them. After conversion to Islam, he became involved in many Islamic-oriented social activities. He is a leader of PITI, and a member of Muhammadiyah.
STRATEGIC SOLIDARITY, DIVERSE PARTICIPATION

When Amien Rais created PAN in 1998, Budi Setyagraha joined the party’s local branch, ran in the 1999 election as a PAN candidate and was elected as a member for the DPRD Yogyakarta. In 2009, he participated in the election again as a PAN candidate for the national parliament. Although he gained enough votes to be elected, he failed to make it to parliament due to the electoral threshold. Budi told me that one of his motivations to be a legislative member was to represent the interests of ethnic Chinese. Seeing himself as a bridge between ethnic Chinese and Muslim Indonesians, he said ‘As I share the same religion with the majority Muslim population, I can convey and fight for the interests of ethnic Chinese more effectively’ (interview, Budi Setyagraha, 12 February 2009). For example, given that ethnic Chinese are not allowed to own land in Yogyakarta, Budi claimed that he was fighting for land ownership rights for ethnic Chinese in Yogyakarta.12

Although Budi has used Islamic symbols in his election campaigns, such as wearing peci in his poster and using Islamic greetings in his speech, he does not endorse the Islamist agenda in Indonesian politics. His election motto is rather nationalistic – ‘Selamatkan Indonesia’ (Save Indonesia) and his election leaflets focus on his commitment to improve social welfare in Indonesia. Although he has contributed to the establishment of local mosques and Islamic credit finance, instead of an ‘Islamic state’ he suggests that the ‘Pancasila’ ideology is more suitable for multi-ethnic and multi-religious Indonesia.

12. In 1975, the special region of Yogyakarta promulgated a Governor’s Instruction (No. K898/1/A/1975) on the policy of granting land rights. According to the decree, the Yogyakarta regional government does not grant land ownership rights to non-indigenous Indonesians. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Susanto (2008: 136–143). An informant revealed a rumour to me: An officer had approved Budi’s purchase of a piece of land because he was Muslim. However, after Budi had paid for the land, another officer claimed that Pak Budi could not own the land because he was Chinese. To challenge the decision, he brought a lawsuit to the district and central courts (field note, 15 February 2009). This means that his intention to ‘defend ethnic Chinese rights’ might be also a concern stemming from personal interest.
Surya Madya in PKS, an Islamist party

Surya Madya, born 1963 in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, is a manager of a fertilizer company. He speaks fluent Indonesian, Javanese and Banjar, but rarely converses in Mandarin or any other Chinese dialects. He does not practise Chinese culture in daily life and views himself more as an ‘Indonesian Muslim’ than a ‘Chinese Muslim’. Married to a Javanese Muslim, he said he had little interaction with Chinese Indonesians until he became involved in the Karim Oei Foundation. He is a Muhammadiyah member and was a leader of PBB before he joined PKS in 2004. He is an active PKS member and has participated in the party cadre training programs. He told that me, he is impressed with the strict discipline, uncorrupted practices and Islamic commitment of the party cadres. As of 2009, although he is less active in PKS because of his busy schedule, he is still a loyal supporter of this Islamist party. He supports a deep Islamisation of Indonesian society, yet he contends that the Islamic agenda should be implemented in a democratic and non-violent way.

Surya Madya is also the founder and the leader of a non-Chinese-based convert organisation, Amma Foundation (Yayasan Amma). According to him, there are some Muslim organisations that focus on ethnic Chinese, yet there are very few that provide specific help to non-Chinese converts. In addition, Chinese converts are more easily identified in the mosque because of their physical appearance. He said, ‘If I visit a mosque, although I have been a convert for 20 years, some Muslims will come and greet me, express their welcome and offer guidance to me. But non-Chinese converts, such as Javanese and Batak, do not receive such attention’ (interview, Surya Madya, 7 January 2009). Therefore he initiated the Amma Foundation to run Islamic study sessions for new Muslims from various ethnic groups, showing his commitment to preach Islam through religious activism and education.

Identity politics and beyond

The ‘identity politics’ of certain groups has been variously criticised for being exclusive, eliminating internal differences, and generating
conflict. Yet, as shown by this study of the identity construction of Chinese Muslims in contemporary Indonesia, it can also be inclusive and accommodate internal diversity. Although trying to stabilise unstable Chinese Muslim identities and project a solid idea of their identity, Chinese Muslim organisations are not exclusive and demanding of conformity, as they allow multiple affiliations and tolerance of both inter- and intra-group differences.

To conclude this chapter, let me restate three inter-related main arguments on the strategic solidarity, organisational dynamics and diverse social participation of Chinese Muslims in contemporary Indonesia. First, the grouping of ‘Chinese Muslim’ forms a strategic solidarity through the contingency of social interests and political claims. Businessmen and religious leaders lead most Chinese Muslim organisations. They share the aim of promoting Chinese Muslim identity, yet for different reasons – the former focus on ethnic intermingling (pembauran), while the latter focus on Islamic preaching (dakwah). Second, Chinese Muslim organisations are inclusive and allow internal diversity. Both their membership and activities are open to all Muslims regardless of ethnic background. In addition, there are diverse religious orientations and cultural outlooks among Chinese Muslim leaders themselves. Finally, many of them have multiple affiliations beyond Chinese Muslim associations; for example, being active in various social, religious and political organisations.
I visit the Chinese temple in Glodok, Jakarta with my non-Muslim Chinese friends during Chinese New Year. It is just an ethnic tradition. I want to show respect to my ancestors’ culture. Those who claim that visiting a temple is *haram* are either intolerant or have insufficient knowledge of Chinese culture and Islamic teachings. For me, to be a good Muslim does not mean one has to be less of a Chinese. (Interview, Kimman, 23 March 2008)

As Muslims, we can only celebrate two festivals – Idul Fitri and Idul Adha. Chinese New Year is not mentioned in the Qur’anic text, therefore it is *haram* and I avoid celebrating it. In fact, some traditional rituals practised by Indonesian Muslims, such as *ziarah*, *slametan* and *tahlilan*, are also improper inventions. I am not a fanatic. I just want to distance myself from un-Islamic practices. (Interview, Kapao, 24 October 2008)

Kimman, born in 1979 in Palembang, converted to Islam during high school and learnt Islam from an NU religious teacher. Since 2003 he works in Jakarta and visits Lautze Mosque on Sundays. He disagrees with some Chinese Muslim activists in the mosque who assert that visiting Chinese temples is *haram*. According to Kimman, Islam is a religion that appreciates ethnic traditions. Kapao formally born in 1966 in Surabaya, makes an interesting contrast with Kimman. In 2004, Kapao converted from Christianity to Islam after marrying a Javanese Muslim. However, in the beginning, he still went to church and persuaded his wife to become a Christian. A few years later, a business failure and a life crisis changed his religious views. He
became a practising Muslim and studied Islam in a mosque near his neighbourhood. A religious teacher in the mosque told Kapao that Chinese New Year celebrations and some other local Muslims practices were *haram*.

The two cases above show the different attitudes of Chinese Muslims towards the celebration of Chinese New Year (also known as ‘Imlek’ in Indonesia). ¹ This chapter examines how and under what conditions, Chinese Muslims understand, practise and give meaning to Chinese New Year celebrations. I then relate this to the broader issues of religious pluralism in Indonesia today. I first illustrate Chinese Muslims’ Chinese New Year celebrations in mosques and the media, showing how they re-appropriate such celebrations according to Islamic teachings. By distinguishing culture (Chinese) from religion (Islam), some Chinese Muslim leaders justify using Chinese cultural traditions as a means of spreading the Islamic message among ethnic Chinese, a practice they call ‘*dakwah pendekatan budaya*’ (preaching using cultural approaches).

Secondly, I examine the religious debate over whether Chinese New Year is *halal* or *haram* (permitted or prohibited according to Islamic principles). I look at how Muslim leaders issue their *fatwas* (religious opinions) by referring to religious texts and at what social contexts support their decision-making. ² In general, be it a commitment of embracing cultural diversity and religious pluralism, or a strategy of attracting Chinese political and financial support in post-1998 Indonesia, many Muslim leaders maintain that Chinese New Year celebrations are *halal*, as long as they do not involve customary rituals such as deity worship and the consumption of

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¹ *Imlek* is a Hokkien term (*Yinli*, in Mandarin) which means ‘Chinese lunar calendar’. In Indonesia, it is also used to refer to Chinese New Year. I will use *Imlek* and Chinese New Year interchangeably in this chapter.

² *Fatwa* means a religious opinion or Islamic legal advice, given by a Muslim scholar, addressing various issues faced by Muslims, from religious observance, political participation, to the usage of online social networks. *Fatwas* are not legally binding in Indonesia, and it is possible to have many differing *fatwas* on one issue. MUI, NU and Muhammadiyah are the three main Muslim organisations that often issue *fatwas*. Different organisations might issue different *fatwas*, and sometimes even different branches of one organisation issue different *fatwas* covering one case. For more discussion of the *fatwa* in Indonesia, see Hosen (2003).
*haram* food, such as pork. Lastly, I discuss the everyday practices of Chinese cultural traditions among Chinese Muslims, which reflect their religiosity, ethnicity and social experiences. Through this examination of Chinese New Year celebrations among Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, I suggest that religious hybridisation is a contested process defined by the interactions between religious texts, social contexts and everyday practices.

**Islam and religious hybridisation**

Like many other world religions, Islamic practices often have local manifestations, either blended with or influenced by various local cultural traditions and religious beliefs. Concepts such as ‘religious syncretism’ (Cople 1997; Geertz 1960; Stewart & Shaw 1994) have been used to analyse such religious mixings, and sometimes to defend contentious religious practices. Yet, such a concept can be problematic. The notion of ‘religious syncretism’ might suggest that there is a ‘pure’ and ‘authentic’ form of a religion (Yeoh 2009). The concept of syncretism also does not take into account some emerging factors such as the influence of the mass media, political Islam and religious commodification (Kitiarsa 2005). Therefore, this chapter uses the term ‘religious hybridisation’ (Kitiarsa 2005) instead of ‘syncretism’ to examine the interactions across cultural and religious boundaries as an on-going and contested process, rather than as a harmonious outcome.3

As Roy (2004) points out, globalised Islam is often hostile to the preservation of ethnic cultural traditions. This phenomenon is especially obvious among the second and third generation of Muslim immigrants in the West. Many ‘neo-fundamentalist’ Muslims who see cultural expression as an innovation that distorts the true tenets of Islam espouse this disassociation of Islam from ethnic cultures, called ‘deculturation’ (Roy 2004: 258). For Roy (2004: 232), ‘neo-fundamentalism’ is ‘not a structural movement

articulated around a coherent doctrine, but a form of religiosity that has spread among different milieus, and is shared by various Muslim groups, including Salafists, Tablighis, and Hizbut Tahrir. Neo-fundamentalists, as Roy (2004) suggests, hold to a strict and literalist reading of the Qur'an and the Hadith. They stress the absolute unity of God (tauhid), oppose any sort of innovation (bid’ah), and polytheism (syirik), and teach a strict following of classical Islamic practices (taklid).

In Indonesia, Muslim practices generally accommodate local customs. Nevertheless, the purification movement is not new. In the past, tensions between localised Islam and puritan Islam were seen as the conflicts between adat (customary law and culture) and Islam (Ellen 1983; Taufik Abdullah 1966). Today, such polarisations are between Muslims who are in favour of ‘purification’ or ‘Arabisation’ (Ghoshal 2010; Fakhraie 2008; Rahim 2006) of Islam and Muslims who support ‘indigenisation’ (pribumisasi) (Wahid

4. Salafism preaches a return to the practices of the Prophet and his companions (salaf means ancestor in Arabic). Salafists often use the Qur’an and Hadith to justify their rejection of many traditionalist Muslim practices associated with localised Muslim cultures, and of supposedly corrupting modern Western influences. While some Salafists such as those in Laskar Jihad are involved in violent action, many Indonesian Salafists focus on peaceful religiosity and missionary activities. For details about Salafist groups in Indonesia, see Bubalo and Fealy (2005: 74–79) and Hasan (2007). Meanwhile, Islamism is used to describe a variety of movements that conceive Islam as a political ideology. It mostly refers to political Islam, in which political activism is informed by Islamic principles. In general, they aim to see a greater implementation of sharia law in Muslim society. Like Salafists, many Islamists tend to be religiously conservative and intolerant of ‘impure’ religious practices. Yet, unlike Salafists, Islamists in general engage with Western political ideas and education, as well as participate in election processes. For more discussion of Islamism in Indonesia, see Bubalo and Fealy (2005: 66–74).

5. Tablighi Jamaat (Jemaah Tabligh, JT) is a transnational Islamic movement founded in 1926 by Muhammad Ilyas in India. The movement primarily aims to bring Muslims closer to the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. For discussions about the Tablighi movement in Southeast Asia in general and Indonesia in particular, see Noor (2007, 2009).

6. Hizbut Tahrir (HT, literally Party of Liberation) is an transnational Islamic organisation whose goal is for all Muslim countries to unify as an Islamic state or caliphate ruled by Islamic law and with a Caliph head of state, elected by Muslims. For discussions of HTI (the Indonesian branch of HT), see Mohamed Osman (2010) and Burhanuddin (2009).
2007; Rahmat 2003) or the ‘Indonesianness’ (keindonesiaan) (Madjid 1987, 2003) of Islam. The former tends to embrace a ‘generic transnational Islamic identity’ (Bubalo & Fealy 2005: viii), reject local customs and adopt Arab-influenced expressions of Islam. The latter aims to challenge the ‘purification’ of Islam, advocate religious pluralism and promote a ‘vernacular’ Islam that is grounded in local contexts (Rahmat 2003).

As noted by many scholars (Bowen 2003; Fox 2004; Ricklefs 2008), Indonesian Islam is not a singular entity, but a phenomenon involving different Muslim organisations, scholars and individuals who have different opinions about the role of local customs in everyday Muslim practices. These differences are reflected in the three divergent religious viewpoints of traditionalist, modernist and Salafist Muslims. Traditionalist Muslims accept local traditions and cultures as long as they do not harm the essence of Islam. Their Islamic practices, based on their interpretation of Islamic texts in a particular way, aim to preserve ethnic cultures and cultivate Islamic religiosity at the same time. They suggest that it is natural for Muslims to communicate their religious teachings with their own cultural traditions. Meanwhile, the modernist movement aims to purify Islam from any external cultural and religious influences, and to fight against any changes, bid’ah (innovation), and heretical practices. Salafist groups are a highly puritanical version of modernist Islam. They strive to replicate the Islamic practices of the time of the Prophet. They also reject local rituals and other traditions, which according to them do not have roots in Islam, such as Maulid (the birthday celebration of the Prophet), slametan (communal feast), tahlilan (Qur’anic recitation for a dead body) and ziarah (visiting tombs of Muslim saints).

In the past, such contestation was represented by NU (traditionalist) and Muhammadiyah (modernist). But over the years many Muhammadiyah leaders have come to acquire more relaxed attitudes to accommodating local cultural traditions when attempting to reform religious practices (Daniels 2009; Hadi 2007; Hidayat 2005). There are also crossings, interactions and competitions of religious views between and within NU and Muhammadiyah.
Post-1998 democratisation, together with the influences of consumer culture, urbanisation, social mobility, transnational flows and local dynamics, have made Muslim religiosities more diverse, and the dichotomy modernist versus traditionalist no longer reflects this increasingly complex reality. At the same time, there is also the growing influence of transnational ‘neo-fundamentalist’ Islamic movement among Indonesian Muslims. Compared to NU and Muhammadiyah, transnational Islamic groups such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) are more hostile towards local manifestations of Islam.

Muslim practices and beliefs are not clearly separable and cannot be analysed along the lines of organisational affiliations only. Indeed, varying by different political economies and social contexts, there is a broad spectrum of individual religious opinions that shift and combine on different issues (Fox 2004; Rickflet 2008). Furthermore, individual Muslims may have different religious affiliations at different phases of their lives, or even at the same time (Ellen 1983). Therefore, it is important in studying ‘ordinary Muslims’ (Peletz 1997), ‘everyday Islam’ (Alam 2007) or ‘everyday religion’ (Schielke and Debevec 2012) to examine the inconsistency and ambivalence of Muslim practices, and to reveal a range of subjectivities and negotiations among them.

According to Geertz (1973: 125), the anthropological study of religion should include ‘an analysis of the systems of meaning embodied in the symbols which make up the religion proper’ and ‘the relating of these systems to social-structural and psychological processes’. Seeing Islam as a discursive tradition, Asad (1986) proposes that we emphasise both the agency of the interpreters within certain material circumstances and the power of religious discourse itself. Informed by such propositions, this chapter considers both textual and contextual spheres in examining the debates of Chinese New Year celebrations among Chinese Muslims. The ‘textual sphere’ refers to the interpretation of Muslim religious texts, while the ‘contextual sphere’ refers to the socio-economic conditions and individual life experiences in which such interpretations take place.
Chinese New Year as a contested tradition in contemporary Indonesia

Before discussing Chinese Muslims’ responses to Chinese New Year celebrations, it is important to provide some general information about Imlek (Chinese New Year) in post-1998 Indonesia. During the New Order period, the public celebration of Chinese New Year was not allowed. After the downfall of the Suharto regime, Chinese Indonesians were given the freedom to celebrate Chinese New Year publicly. In January 2001, President Abdurrahman Wahid announced Imlek as an optional holiday, and a year later the Megawati government declared Imlek a national holiday. Since then, during Chinese New Year, decorations and ornaments in red, symbolising Chineseness, along with Chinese cultural performances such as lion dances have become popular, among not only ethnic Chinese but also non-Chinese Indonesians.

The Chinese New Year festivity has a particular significance in Indonesia today. It reflects a political commitment to end discrimination against the Chinese minority. For many politicians, it is a way of accessing Chinese electoral support and funding. For some Muslim leaders, it reaffirms the plurality and inclusivity of Indonesian Islam. For vendors, it is an opportunity to package and

7. In 2008, during my fieldwork in Jakarta, I attended two public celebrations of the Chinese New Year launched by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, one organised by MATAKIN (Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu Indonesia, the Supreme Council for the Confucian Religion in Indonesia) and another co-organised by WALUBI (Perwakilan Umat Buddha Indonesia, the Indonesian Buddhist Council Association). In 2009, when I was in Palembang during the Chinese New Year period, which was just a couple of months before national parliamentary elections, I saw many election banners sending greetings to ethnic Chinese.

8. It was during the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (who was also a former NU and PKB leader) that Chinese Indonesians were given greater freedom to celebrate Chinese New Year publicly. In addition, former Muhammadiyah and PAN leader Amien Rais, during his campaign for presidential election in 2004, appeared on TV in a Chinese outfit in front of a Chinese temple, sending ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’ greetings to the audience (Budianta, 2007: 174). Since both of them were politicians, their endorsement of Chinese New Year festivities was not only a way of promoting the tolerance of Islamic teaching, but also a means of gaining Chinese electoral support and funding.
promote their products. Meanwhile, for Chinese Indonesians, it imparts a sense of belonging, despite having little knowledge of Chinese culture or language. However, as Hoon (2009) has discussed in detail, the Imlek celebration is not without controversy. Is it a cultural tradition or a religious festival? Does it promote a Chineseness shared by all Indonesians or does it reinforce the ‘exclusivity’ of Chinese Indonesians?

Around the world, ethnic Chinese see Chinese New Year as a cultural celebration, but some Chinese Indonesians view it as a religious festival related to Confucianism. Since the early twentieth century, Confucianism, which Chinese elsewhere generally understand as an ethical framework or philosophy, has evolved into an institutional religion in Indonesia (Coppel 2002). Consequently, Confucians co-opt Imlek as a religious festival. They claim it is a sacred day commemorating the birth of Confucius, just like Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, and Maulid celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. For MATAKIN (Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu Indonesia, the Supreme Council for the Confucian Religion in Indonesia), the recognition of Chinese New Year is closely linked to the recognition of Confucianism as an official religion in post-1998 Indonesia. Furthermore, Imlek was first declared a national holiday in post-New Order

9. A striking example that I observed during fieldwork in 2008 was the promotion package by a mobile telecommunication company, HP Esia. During Chinese New Year, the telecommunication company introduced ‘HP Esia Fu (Prosperity), a phone service that featured a fengshui (a Chinese geomantic omen), a Chinese horoscope and a Chinese calendar. Meanwhile, during Ramadan, HP Esia launched another special package, entitled ‘HP Esia Hidayah Syiar and Plus’, which included Islamic content, such as Qur’anic verses, the azan (call to prayer) and ‘Islamic advice’.

10. In 1965, Confucianism was officially recognised as a religion together with Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism and Hinduism, yet in 1979, the Ministry of Religion declared Confucianism not to be a religion. After the collapse of the New Order regime, in 2000, President Abdurrahman Wahid revoked Suharto’s 1967 Presidential Instruction, which banned the open celebration of Chinese religion, belief and customary practices. In 2006, under the government of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Confucianism was again officially recognised as one of the formal religions of Indonesia (Pausacker 2007). For more detail on the development of Confucianism in Indonesia, see Coppel (2002) and Suryadinata (1998).
Indonesia on the basis of its religious rather than ethnic or cultural character, because only festivals of officially recognised religions can be observed as national holidays in Indonesia (Hoon 2009). Nevertheless, not all Chinese Indonesians endorse the connection between Chinese New Year festival and Confucianism.\(^\text{11}\)

Despite the claims of the Confucians, Chinese from other religious backgrounds, such as Buddhists, Christians and even Muslims also celebrate Imlek, either in private or publicly. In these cases, however, it is regarded it as an ethnic and cultural festival, and not a religious celebration. For them, Chinese New Year is a festival that welcomes a new year based on the Chinese lunar calendar, an event during which they pay respect to their ancestors and get together with their families. It is a celebration that gives them a sense of cultural belonging. By distinguishing religious rituals from cultural traditions, some of them even hold Chinese New Year celebrations in churches and mosques, as a way of preserving Chinese traditions and spreading religious messages. As Hoon (2009) has noted, in Jakarta, Imlek is celebrated at Sunday mass in Catholic churches with performances of Chinese songs and dances, as well as red decorations. Meanwhile, in Yogyakarta, Chinese Muslims held Imlek prayer sessions in mosques.

**Imlek celebrations in mosques: hybrid Islam**

Along with Chinese-style mosques and Chinese preachers, the Imlek celebrations in mosques, is another form of identity performance, bringing together Islamic messages and Chinese cultural symbols, thus forging a hybrid Chinese Muslim cultural identity. It provides

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11. The claim that Chinese New Year is related to the birth of Confucius is problematic, as it rarely appears among Chinese outside of Indonesia. As a Chinese Malaysian, I have never heard about such a link in Malaysia. Also, not all Chinese Indonesians agree with such a claim. As Hoon (2009) pointed out, for many non-Confucian Chinese Indonesians, Imlek only became a Confucian festival due to strategic considerations in order to be recognised as an official holiday, like other religious holidays in Indonesia, not because it is historically a religious holiday. For more discussion about how Confucians claim Imlek as a religious festival, see Hoon (2009).
a new understanding of the relationship between ethnicity and religion, especially between Chineseness and Islam in Indonesia. The Imlek celebrations in mosques have various meanings. First, they suggest another possibility of hybrid Islam along with other local Muslim streams such as 'Javanese Islam'. Second, it shows that there is another way of expressing Chineseness, that the celebration of Imlek is not limited to Confucian and Buddhist temples, but can happen in churches and mosques. Third, it is a way of spreading the Islamic message by using a vital component of Chinese culture.

These Imlek celebrations in mosques are not without controversy, as some puritan Muslims see them as un-Islamic. However, by differentiating religious rituals from cultural traditions, PITI Yogyakarta has successfully convinced many local Muslim leaders that the celebration of Chinese New Year does not violate Islamic principles. Through the enactment of rituals and the avoidance of ‘un-Islamic’ practices, Chinese Muslims seek to show that Imlek celebrations are not only compatible with but also complementary to Islamic values. During such ceremonies in mosques, Chinese Muslims do not worship deities, burn incense or indulge in any other rituals related to Chinese folk beliefs. Instead, they perform Islamic prayers. Chinese Muslim leaders also endorse for this time activities such as visiting family, relatives and friends as a form of ‘silaturahim’ (maintaining good relationships). All the same, the celebrants retain Chinese cultural symbols such as red decorations and ornaments, whilst scrapping ‘un-Islamic’ practices, such as the consumption of haram food and gambling.12 Such a juxtaposition of Chineseness and Islam, on the one hand, Islamises Chinese cultural traditions and, on the other hand, gives Islamic religiosity a touch of Chinese culture.

The Imlek ceremony of Chinese Muslims in Yogyakarta was first held in 2003 and the celebrations became livelier in the following years. In 2003, despite protests from some conservative Muslim individuals and groups, about two hundred Muslims from Chinese

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12. Pork is one of the main dishes during any Chinese New Year dinner, while gambling is one of the leisure activities for some Chinese during the festival. Yet, for Muslims, both pork consumption and gambling are haram.
and non-Chinese background, participated in the inaugural Imlek ceremony in the Syuhada Mosque in Yogyakarta. This celebration was organised by the Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association (PITI), Yogyakarta, and attended by local figures from MUI, NU, Muhammadiyah and the provincial administration. As the main organiser of the event, Budi Setyagraha pointed out to me, the Imlek celebration in the mosque was modest and its rituals had been modified to suit Islamic teachings, including a pengajian (Islamic studies session), sholat hajat (a blessing prayer for a prosperous and healthy year); and sujud syukur (a prayer to express gratitude to God). Fruits, such as apple and mandarin, which respectively symbolise peace and prosperity in Chinese cultural tradition, were also served during the ceremony. PITI chose the Syuhada Mosque in Kotabaru for this unprecedented event for its historical significance as a remembrance of the struggle of Yogyakarta Muslims for Indonesian independence (interview, Budi Setyagraha, 12 February 2009).

Before the ceremony, some ultra-conservative Muslims condemned it as bid'ah (improper innovation) and haram, and even threatened to disturb the event. But the celebration went off peacefully, after PITI won the support of mainstream Muslim figures and organisations, including a fatwa from MUI Yogyakarta that approved the celebration of Imlek in the mosque. According to a news report, MUI Yogyakarta had studied various materials and books about Imlek and reached the conclusion that the celebration of Imlek is not necessarily associated with Buddhist or Confucian religious rituals. Therefore, Chinese Muslims could observe Chinese New Year as long as the festivities did not involve ‘un-Islamic’ practices.

When delivering his sermon during the ceremony, Syafri Sairin, the then dean of the School of Social Science at the University of Gadjah Mada (UGM, Universitas Gadjah Mada), stressed it was a mistake to think Imlek was incompatible with Islam, because it was a cultural rather than a religious festival. He argued that

if Javanese Muslims could celebrate the Javanese New Year in mosques, there was no reason why Chinese Muslims could not celebrate their New Year in mosques. Referring to local hybridised Islamic traditions, he said, ‘Javanese Muslims use their cultural attributes and ornaments to celebrate their New Year and Idul Fitri, while those in North Sumatra use candles to mark important events.’ He continued, ‘Therefore, local Muslims should not oppose the use of red paper lanterns and other red-coloured ornaments in the mosques. We should adopt multiculturalism in disseminating Islam to all ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds’ (Sudiarno 2003).

Encouraged by the success of the 2003 Chinese New Year celebrations, PITI continued to hold them in the following years. The 2004 Imlek celebration began with Isya evening prayer led by the chairman of Yogyakarta MUI, Toha Abdurrahman, followed by an informal discussion (sarasehan) moderated by an anthropologist from UGM, Heddy Shri Ahimsa. During the discussion, Heddy described the ‘Islamised’ Imlek celebration as a positive and creative cultural innovation reflecting the inclusivity and intellectualism of Islam. Given that non-Chinese Muslims were also actively participating in the ceremony, he proposed this acculturation as ‘Imlek gaya Yogya’ (Yogya-style Imlek) which could promote better relationships among Muslims, as well as between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians. After the discussion, there were social activities such as the distribution of traditional Chinese New Year Cake (kue keranjang) and the giving of ang pao (money in red envelopes) from older people to younger ones. The celebration ended with sujud syukur, a prayer session for Muslims to express their gratitude to God.14

The 2005 PITI Imlek celebration was a very lively affair with lion dance performances outside the Syuhada Mosque. In 2006, the ceremony moved to the An Nadzar Mosque and a special pengajian was conducted to celebrate both Chinese New Year

and Islamic New Year (Hijrah) which fell on very close dates that year. One of the preachers, Toha Abdurrahman, the Chairman of Yogyakarta MUI, spoke of the similar meanings of Chinese and Islamic New Year, both signifying a positive transformation: Chinese New Year celebrates the changing seasons from winter to spring; while the Islamic New Year signifies the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in the cause of broader Islamic propagation. He also stated that these similarities strengthened the relationships between Indonesians from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Perdana 2008: 66). In 2007, after the earthquake in Yogyakarta, PITI and other local Chinese organisations arranged ‘Festival Imlek Bantul 2007’ with the theme ‘Imlek for the recovery of Bantul’. One of its aims was to promote the localised Imlek celebrations, including performances such as Chinese lion dances and Javanese shadow puppet shows, as a cultural attraction in Bantul.

The celebrations of Imlek in mosques would not be successful without the contribution of Budi Setyagraha, who initiated and then implemented the idea. Budi Setyagraha, a prominent Chinese-speaking businessman, was a former chairperson of PITI Yogyakarta (1983–2002) and a former local legislature member of PAN (1999–2004). In order to allay the fears of certain Muslim groups, in advance of the celebration Budi Setyagraha consulted MUI, NU and Muhammadiyah for their support. He has given many reference books and articles about Chinese New Year festivity to MUI. In addition, PITI has held a few seminars, inviting university lecturers and Muslim scholars to confirm that Imlek is a cultural festival and its celebration does not violate Islamic laws. One of the seminars held in 2003 was entitled, *Hari Raya Imlek Dalam Perspektif Budaya, Filsafat Tionghoa dan Syariat Islam* (Imlek in Cultural Perspective, Chinese Philosophy and Islamic Law). Among the speakers were Irwan Abdullah, executive director of Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, and H. Lasiyo, a professor of Chinese Philosophy at the UGM (Susanto & Sudiarno 2004).

Yet not all Muslims agreed that the Imlek celebration in mosques was a good idea. Not only did conservative Muslim groups...
CULTURAL DAKWAH, RELIGIOUS DEBATES

disapprove, but some Chinese Muslims did too. Some of them disapproved of the celebration of Chinese New Year on religious grounds, while others questioned the reason for Chinese Muslims celebrating Imlek in public, since they had converted to Islam and were supposed to have assimilated into the wider Indonesian community. Junus Jahja, an advocate of assimilation, disagreed with the public celebration of Imlek, by both Muslim and non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians. He worried that the Imlek celebrations would stress differences, and might lead to the re-emergence of ‘anti-Chinese sentiments’ among the ‘indigenous’ Indonesians if they were too conspicuous. As he said, ‘I have no problem if we observe Imlek at home, but we should be modest. We should not over-celebrate it’ (interview, Junus Jahya, 25 December 2008). Most Chinese Muslim leaders I met do not share the concerns of Junus Jahya, but they also think that celebrating Imlek in mosques could be too controversial. Surabaya PITI, for instance, holds a Chinese New Year Gala Dinner in a hotel attended by local Muslim and Chinese leaders; while Chinese Muslim individuals in Jakarta, Solo, Semarang and Palembang join their non-Muslim counterparts in organising various Chinese New Year events, but not in mosques.

Media depictions of Imlek: symbolic Chineseness

In post-1998 Indonesia, Chinese New Year celebrations are widely reported in various print and electronic media. How do Chinese Muslims engage with the media coverage of Imlek? As I observed during fieldwork, some Chinese Muslims in Jakarta, including those who could not speak any Chinese language, had been Christians and previously did not observe Imlek, but now publicly endorsed it to manifest their Chineseness to media audiences. For them, this is a symbolic gesture to show that a Chinese does not

15. Some non-Muslim Chinese leaders share Jahya’s caution about an exuberant celebration of Imlek. For example, in 2004, a prominent Catholic Chinese, Harry Tjan Silalahi, expressed his concern that the celebration of Imlek might have gone ‘over the limit’, as it could ‘disturb’ the feelings of Indonesians living in poverty. For more discussion about these worries, see Hoon (2009).
lose his or her cultural heritage after becoming a Muslim. Syarif Tanudjaja, a Chinese Muslim leader, who has been frequently interviewed by journalists regarding Imlek celebrations, argued that media appearances are a form of ‘dakwah’. As he said,

I used to observe Chinese New Year when I was a kid, but stopped since my parents passed away and after I became a Christian. Furthermore, my wife is a Dutch-educated Peranakan Chinese. Therefore, I did not observe Imlek at home, and only spent time visiting relatives and catching up with schoolmates. However, since the downfall of Suharto, everyone celebrates Imlek. Even the churches have their Imlek ceremonies. Many journalists ask me if Chinese Muslims can celebrate Imlek. I say that Chinese Muslims can and some of us do as long as we do not eat pork and worship deities. Visiting parents, relatives and friends during the festival is a form of silaturahim encouraged by Islamic teachings. If we want to wear red clothes or give ang pao, why not? Becoming a Muslim does not imply one has to lose his or her family connections and cultural roots. (Interview, Syarif Tanudjaja, 9 June 2009)

In 2008, a week before Chinese New Year, a group of Chinese Muslims led by Syarif Tanudjaja attended a recording session for an interactive survey television show, PadaMu Negeri. The theme of the show was ‘Menelusuri Jejak Naga di Bumi Nusantara’ (Searching for the Heritage of the Dragon in Indonesia) and a few Chinese associations were invited to give their opinions. Besides PITI, other guests included representatives from the Women’s Branch of INTI (PINTI, Perempuan INTI), members from MATAKIN and students (mostly non-Chinese) from the Department of Chinese Literature in the University of Indonesia. One of the questions thrown to the floor was whether Chinese New Year was a cultural or religious phenomenon (Adakah Imlek Fenomena Budaya atau Agama?). As expected, the audiences were divided: representatives from MATAKIN and PINTI insisted that Imlek was a Confucian religious festival, while PITI and
students from UI viewed Imlek as a cultural tradition (field note, 31 January 2008).

It was interesting to note the preparations made for Chinese Muslims to appear on the TV show. Given that it was on a working day, there was difficulty finding enough Chinese Muslims to join the program. New converts who had embraced Islam without informing their parents were reluctant to appear on television. As a solution, a Chinese Muslim proposed that some non-Chinese Muslims who had fair skin and narrow eyes could participate in the show to substitute for the ‘real’ Chinese Muslims. In order to differentiate themselves from non-Muslim Chinese from MATAKIN and PINTI, also it was suggested they wear Islamic clothing to show their Muslim identities, baju koko and peci for male, jilbab or kerudung for female.

**Imlek as cultural *dakwah*: distinguishing religion from culture**

The celebration of Chinese New Year among Chinese Muslims is a contentious practice because many puritan Muslims see it as violating Islamic teachings. Some Chinese Muslim leaders defend the Imlek ceremonies in mosques by differentiating Chinese ‘cultural’ traditions from ‘religious’ rituals. Such a notion is not a new one. As Tschacher (2009) noted, it is becoming more common for some Muslims to justify their contentious practices by removing them from the sphere of ‘religion’ to that of ‘culture’. For example, Tamil Muslims in Malaysia and Singapore defend their controversial flag-raising ceremony by pointing out that such a practice is simply not religious at all, but ‘cultural’. Since no other religion is involved, there can be no question of polytheism (*syirik*) or other ‘religious’ sins in such practice (Tschacher 2009: 71). In a similar way, Chinese Muslims argue that their Imlek ceremonies held in mosques are not *haram*. They promote Chinese New Year celebrations as a form of ‘budaya’ (culture), ‘adat’ (custom) or ‘tradisi’ (tradition). Furthermore, they have removed the Chinese customary rituals and replaced them with Islamic prayers to welcome a new year.
Statements such as, ‘Imlek is not a religious practice. It is a Chinese custom’ (interview, Rudiansyah, 16 February 2009) and ‘Imlek does not belong to any religion. It is a cultural event shared by all Chinese’ (interview, Merry Effendi, 8 February 2009) were commonly used by my informants to justify their celebrations of Chinese New Year. In an Imlek TV program in 2008 the secretary of PITI, Willy Pangestu, elaborated in detail,

The celebration of Imlek is a cultural tradition to welcome a new year and the changing of seasons from winter to spring. Over the years, its celebration has included some Chinese customary rituals, such as deity worship; yet such rituals are not essential parts of Imlek. Today, Chinese Indonesians from different religious backgrounds celebrate Imlek in different ways. Confucians visit klenteng [Chinese temple] and Buddhists visit vihara [Buddhist temple] to pray and express their gratitude to Tian [God]. In Jakarta, some Catholic churches organise special masses to thank God during Chinese New Year. In Yogyakarta, Chinese Muslims have Islamic prayers in mosques to welcome Imlek. In short, Imlek itself has no religious connotation (field note, 31 January 2008).

Arguing that there is no contradiction between Chinese culture and Islamic religiosity, some Chinese Muslims active in accommodating Chinese cultural elements in their Islamic preaching call it ‘dakwah pendekatan budaya’ (dakwah through cultural approaches). Such a notion is quite similar to ‘cultural dakwah’ (dakwah kultural), a concept that emerged within Muhammadiyah circles over the last few years, as a change in the way the modernist organisation reaches non-practising Muslims (Daniels 2009: 107). In the past, Muhammadiyah has distanced itself from local cultural traditions. Yet, under the notion of ‘cultural dakwah’, some Muhammadiyah activists strive to accommodate local traditions, when attempting to reform religious practices. As noted by Daniels (2009: 108), such stances do not mean that they are going to accept practices that contradict their understandings of Islam, but rather that they are
going to increase their involvement in cultural activities, often with the intention of ‘Islamising’ them. In this chapter, I use ‘cultural dakwah’ in a broad sense, referring to the efforts of an Islamic outreach using Chinese cultural symbols. The ‘cultural dakwah’ of Chinese Muslims is not only about giving Chinese traditions an Islamic meaning, as exemplified in the Imlek ceremony in mosques, but also about giving Islamic celebrations a touch of Chineseness.

For example, during Idul Fitri 2008, a Chinese Muslim leader in Surabaya, Abdul Chalim Lee, organised an open house, called ‘*Lebaran bernuansa budaya Tionghoa*’ (Celebration of Idul Fitri with Chinese cultural features). He decorated his home with red Chinese lanterns, ornaments and calligraphy. As well as serving Indonesian cuisine, he also provided both *halal* Chinese food, such as *mee sua* (a long noodle, symboling long life) and Arabian dates. Beyond such festivities, Chinese-style mosques, Chinese *nasyid* groups and Chinese *halal* restaurants, which combine Chinese cultural symbols with Islamic messages, are other creative forms of ‘cultural dakwah’.

In Yogyakarta, PITI under the leadership of Budi Setyagraha and his wife, Lie Sioe Fen, has been consistent in preaching Islam through ‘cultural approaches’. Perdana (2008: 61) notes two cases of Budi Setyagraha accommodating Chinese cultural traditions in the spread of Islam. The first one was to do with the burial of a Chinese convert, Sutanto, who passed away after recently converting to Islam. There was a dispute about whether he should be buried in a Chinese cemetery or a Muslim graveyard. Budi helped to resolve this problem by consulting the opinions of religious scholars. *Ulama* (religious scholars) from Muhammadiyah and NU had different viewpoints, with the former arguing that Sutanto should be buried in an Islamic grave, while the latter approved burial in a Chinese cemetery using Islamic rituals. PITI Yogyakarta chose the NU solution thinking it would reduce the anxieties of

16. Discussions of ‘cultural dakwah’ began with Muhammadiyah’s congress in 1995, but it was at meetings in 2002 and 2003 that it was debated and shaped as a discourse within the Muhammadiyah movement. For more discussion, see Daniels (2009: 107–113), Hadi (2007) and Syamsul (2005).
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ethnic Chinese about converting to Islam. The other case was of a Chinese woman, Nurhayati, who was interested in Islam but was reluctant to convert after hearing that Islam prohibited mourning for a loved one according to Chinese traditions. PITI explained to her that there was no such prohibition in Islam and Budi himself had practised Chinese mourning when his parents passed away. Appreciation of ethnic cultural practices is not new to Indonesian Islam. In fact, the ‘cultural dakwah’ of Chinese Muslims is reminiscent of the early efforts of the Muslim saints who appropriated Javanese traditions to disseminate Islamic messages (Dijk 1998; Woodward 1989). Today, both the traditionalist NU, and the modernist Muhammadiyah have a more relaxed attitude towards local cultural traditions (Daniels 2009; Syamsul 2005).

The ‘Islamised’ Imlek ceremony in mosques reveals how some Chinese Muslim leaders differentiate ‘ethnic practices’ from ‘religious ritual’ to preserve their cultural traditions, but not at the expense of Islamic principles. However, such a ‘culture–religion’ distinction has limitations and can be problematic, especially when it comes to defending contentious practices (Tschacher 2009). First, the difference between ‘culture’ and ‘religion’ is not clear-cut: how to define a practice as being an aspect of ‘culture’ or ‘religion’ is always open to debate. For example, Harnish (2006) described such an ambiguity in his observations of a festival in Lombok. The festival, in which both Hindu Balinese and Muslim Sasak participate, is perceived as a ‘religious’ affair by the Balinese, yet as a ‘cultural’ tradition by the Sasak, who justify their participation on these grounds (Harnish 2006: 6–7). This of course resembles the case of Imlek celebrations in Indonesia, which Confucians claim as their religious festival, and Muslims and Christians celebrate as a cultural event. Second, the ‘culture–religion’ distinction discourages Muslims from defending their controversial practices through progressive interpretations of Islamic scriptures and legal traditions. The ‘culture–religion’ distinction is tied to the notion of

17. Since the 1950s in Java such a distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘culture’ has also influenced cultural and religious reforms, not just among Javanese Muslims, but among Javanese Hindus, Catholics, Protestants and others.
religious purification because it still rejects practices, be they cultural or religious, that contradict Islamic understandings of orthodox Muslims. Furthermore, it falls short of addressing the interactions between Islam and other religions, as well as the different opinions within Islam. Such distinction might be convincing enough to justify the Chinese New Year ‘cultural’ celebration, yet it is inadequate to defend Muslims wishing a ‘Merry Christmas’ to Christians, and to protect Muslims who follow ‘deviant’ sects, such as those in Ahmadiyah. I will return to these issues when I discuss the possibilities and limitations of cosmopolitan Islam in contemporary Indonesia later.

**Imlek as religious debate: halal or haram**

Having discussed how some Chinese Muslims employ the ‘culture–religion’ distinction to justify their Chinese New Year celebrations, it is now important to look at how Muslims, both Chinese and non-Chinese, debate Imlek by referring to religious texts. I begin this section with part of a dialogue between two Chinese Muslims, Syarif Tanudjaja, a PITI leader, and Hadi Tham, a convert, which I noted during a MUSTIKA Islamic study session in a mosque in Serpong, Tangerang. This conversation happened a week before the Chinese New Year in 2008 (field note, 3 February 2008).

During the *pengajian*, a Betawi Muslim *ustaz*, Ahmad, reminds attendants that converts should not practise their former religious traditions, because those practices are violating Islamic principles. Hadi Tham then raises a question, ‘Can a Chinese Muslim celebrate Imlek?’ When Ahmad tries to explain, Syarif Tanudjaja interrupts and says:

> Let me explain the Imlek celebration, as the non-Chinese always have misperceptions of it. Imlek is a cultural festival that signifies a new year according to the Chinese lunar calendar. Yet sometimes, Imlek celebrations involve customary rituals and un-Islamic practices, such as gambling. Therefore, a Chinese Muslim should avoid Imlek. It does not mean that we want to forget our traditions, but I worry...
we might infringe Islamic teachings. Even some Christians
do not celebrate Imlek. And for Muslims, local traditions
such as slometan and tahlilan are not essential.

Hadi asks, ‘Does that mean we can’t visit our family members
during Imlek?’ Using various Islamic terminologies, Syarif Tanud-
djaja explains:

When I said I discourage the celebration of Imlek, I did not
mean that it is haram. But it is also not wajib (compulsory).
If a Chinese Muslim wants to celebrate Imlek with his family,
silakan (please do so), as long as you do not follow the rituals
and eat pork. We can celebrate it in Islamic ways. It also
depends on niat (intention). For example, if we celebrate
Imlek for syiar (preaching), that is fine. If we visit our relatives
for silaturahim, that is good too.

Hadi then asks another question. ‘I have heard that MUI pro-
hibits Muslims wishing Christians ‘Merry Christmas’. How about
“Gong Xi Fa Cai’?’ Syarif Tanudjaja replies:

We have to understand the meaning of such greetings.
‘Merry Christmas’ means the appreciation of the birth of
Jesus Christ, who is understood as the son of God according
to Christianity. If we wish Christians ‘Merry Christmas’, that
implies that we agree with the concept of trinity which is
incompatible with our belief in tauhid. ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’
wishes prosperity and has no religious meaning, therefore it
is allowed. We can also give or receive angpao (money in a
red envelope). Islam is a religion that values cultural diversity.

It should be noted that Syarif Tanudjaja has been consistent with
his opinion that Imlek is allowed (diperbolehkan) with conditions,
yet he has different emphases for different occasions. On TV, he
says that Chinese Muslims are allowed to celebrate Imlek, as a way
of Islamic outreach. However, during pengajian, he discourages
Chinese converts from celebrating Imlek, so as to cultivate their
faith and to prevent them from observing ‘un-Islamic’ practices.
The audiences on Metro TV are mostly non-Muslim Chinese, while pengajian is for both Chinese converts and non-Chinese Muslims.

How do Indonesian Muslim scholars view Imlek celebrations? Is it considered halal or haram? To answer this question, it is important to locate it within the broader religious debates regarding the role of local or ethnic cultural traditions in everyday Muslim practices. In terms of theology, the acceptance of non-Islamic cultural and religious practices among Muslims is based on their interpretation of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and Hadith (Prophetic traditions). Islamic jurisprudence places all human actions within five categories: wajib (obligatory acts like daily prayer and fasting), mandub (commendable but not required acts like performing extra prayers), mubah (acts towards which Islam is indifferent, like eating foods that are not forbidden), makruh (reprehensible but not forbidden acts like divorce) and haram (forbidden acts like adultery and theft). Meanwhile according to Prophetic traditions, ‘innovation’ (bid‘ah, practices not mentioned in Islamic texts) can be classified as good (hasana) and praiseworthy (mahmuda) or bad (sayyia) and blameworthy (madhmuma) (Vikør 2005). Both frameworks provide space for debate on contentious practices in Muslim societies. Traditionalist and liberal Muslims tend to view ‘innovation’ neutrally or positively, thinking such practices at least do not violate, indeed may complement Islamic teachings; while modernist and Salafist Muslims tend to view ‘innovation’ negatively, thinking such practices could undermine faith and lead to un-Islamic behaviour.

Similarly, there are divergent religious viewpoints over whether Chinese New Year celebration is halal or haram. I will contrast two different opinions of Imlek among Muslims in Indonesia. The first is that of the national MUI fatwa and the second is found in an article written by a HTI activist. Both of them refer to Qur’anic texts for their reasoning, yet end with different viewpoints; the former argues that Imlek celebration is not haram and the latter strongly condemns it. I will also discuss a response of a Chinese Muslim activist in Lautze Mosque, who takes a middle position.
MUI Yogyakarta issued a *fatwa*, allowing the celebration of Chinese New Year in mosques in 2003. According to a feature report by *Nurani* magazine in 2008, entitled ‘*Fatwa MUI: Boleh Rayakan Imlek di Masjid*’ (MUI Fatwa: It is permissible to celebrate Imlek in the Mosque), the national board of MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Indonesian Council of Ulama) also issued a *fatwa*, stating that the Imlek celebration was permissible (*diperbolehkan*) as long as it did not contain customary rituals. According to Mahruf Amin, Head of the MUI Fatwa Commission, the *fatwa* decision was based on Qur’anic texts. To support his argument that Islam acknowledges cultural and ethnic differences, Mahruf Amin first quoted a Qur’anic verse from Chapter Al-Hujurat, which holds: ‘People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.’

He then quotes the Qur’anic verses 26–30 from Chapter Al-Zukhruf, which state that Islam strongly prohibits idolatry and polytheism (*syirik*), associating God with other human inventions. According to Mahruf Amin, the Chinese New Year tradition is not a part of religious doctrine, but a social and cultural tradition; therefore, Chinese Muslims are allowed to celebrate Imlek in mosques to show their gratitude toward Allah by welcoming a new year. He says the Imlek ceremony is only *haram* if it involves non-Islamic praying rituals, such as deity worship and the consumption of forbidden food, such as pork. He further equates Chinese New Year with the Islamic New Year, and thus it does not violate sharia. He quotes Qur’anic verses from Chapter Al-Asr supporting the reflection of the passing of time during Chinese New Year as a good tradition that Muslims should appreciate. He

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stresses that Islam is not hostile to cultural traditions, and sees cultural expressions of Islam as variations of *siyar*.

Ichwan Syam, the secretary of MUI, who was also interviewed in the same report, echoes Mahruf Amin’s viewpoint. He contends that Islam allows cultural practices that are not idolatrous and polytheist. He explains his endorsement of Imlek celebration in mosques by arguing that mosques are the preaching centres of Islam. He contends that the Imlek ceremonies in mosques are Islamic as they include prayers of gratitude, Islamic chanting, Islamic study sessions and cash contributions to orphans, all of which are encouraged by Islamic teachings. He concludes by promoting Islam as a religion that blesses all (*rahmat lil-alamin*), including non-Muslims.

Although MUI justifies the celebration of Chinese New Year in terms of Qur’anic texts, the ‘culture–religion’ distinction is the main reason MUI gives the green light to Imlek celebrations in mosques. The input of Chinese Muslim leaders is crucial in such *fatwa*-making. Leaders such as Budi Setyagraha in Yogyakarta and Syarif Tanudjaja have close relations with religious scholars in MUI and Muslim leaders in NU and Muhammadiyah. Syarif Tanudjaja himself is also an advisory member of MUI. By sharing information and lobbying, Chinese Muslim leaders have convinced Muslim scholars that Imlek is not a religious festival.

In general, MUI’s viewpoint on Imlek is shared by many mainstream Muslim leaders from both NU and Muhammadiyah. It is not a surprise that former NU leader Abdurrahman Wahid, who endorses religious pluralism and has claimed himself to have Chinese descent, throws his support behind these Imlek celebrations among Chinese Muslims (interview, Abdurrahman Wahid, 10 January 2009). During his campaign for president in 2004, former Muhammadiyah leader Amien Rais sent ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’ greetings to Chinese Indonesians on a TV program (Budianta, 2007: 174).

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Yet, not all Muslims agree with the MUI fatwa and those who are Salafist-inclined argue that Chinese New Year celebration is haram. Such an opinion is well represented in an article entitled, ‘Imlek adalah hari raya agama kafir bukan sekedar tradisi Tionghoa: Haram atas Muslim turut merayakannya’ [Imlek is a religious holiday for heathens, not merely a Chinese tradition: Muslims are forbidden to join the celebrations], which was written by a HTI activist, M. Shiddiq Al-Jawi (2007). Referring to a book entitled ‘Mengenal Hari Raya Konfusiani’ [Understanding the Confucian Festivals] (Winarso 2003), Al-Jawi concludes that Chinese New Year is an integral part of Confucian (i.e. religious) teachings and therefore not merely a cultural event. He follows Winarso’s book argument that Imlek signifies the birth of Confucius and is an important day to pray to Tian (God), to back up his view that the Chinese New Year festival has a religious connotation.

Al-Jawi (2007) also quotes Qur’anic verses to disapprove of Imlek celebrations. Highlighting that the Qur’an and the Hadith are the only references for Muslims, he rejects the ‘culture–religion’ distinction to determine the permitting of a contentious practice. He uses the example of ‘free sex’ to repudiate the logic of the ‘culture–religion’ distinction. He claims that ‘free sex’ is a ‘western tradition’ and not a part of Christianity. He says Muslims cannot practise ‘free sex’, even though it is a ‘culture’ and not a ‘religion’. Quoting Qur’anic verses from Chapter Al-A’raf and Chapter Al-Baqarah, he contends that the question of whether Muslims are allowed to carry out a certain practice or attend a particular event is not related to whether the practice or event is part of a cultural tradition or a religious ritual, but to whether it is stated in the religious scriptures or not (Al-Jawi 2007). He views those practices not specially mentioned in the scriptures as improper innovations. The Chinese New Year celebration is thus violating

21. Among the Qur’anic verses that he quoted are ‘Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord; do not follow other masters beside Him. How seldom you take heed!’ from Chapter Al-A’raf (verse 3); and ‘You who believe, enter wholeheartedly into submission to God and do not follow Satan’s footsteps, for he is your sworn enemy’ from Chapter Al-Baqara (verse 208).
Islamic principles, even though it does not involve ‘un-Islamic’ rituals. The HTI activist even goes so far as to propose that sending ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’ greetings, using red paper lanterns as decoration and lion dances are all *haram*. Compared with mainstream NU and Muhammadiyah, HTI is a small organisation in Indonesia. Except for some ultra-puritans, most Muslims in Indonesia do not endorse Al-Jawi’s viewpoint.

Nugroho Laison, educated in a Muhammadiyah high school in Jakarta, has written a long and comprehensive article, entitled ‘*Imlek: antara Budaya dan Aqidah*’ [*Imlek: between Culture and Faith*], on his blog to discuss whether a Chinese convert should celebrate Chinese New Year (Laison 2008). He asserts that Imlek was merely a cultural tradition in beginning, but over time its celebrations have become mixed with mystical beliefs and superstitious rituals, such as incense burning, which according to him are ‘un-Islamic’. While approving practices such mutual visiting and *angpau* giving that he claims are compatible with Islamic values, he fears that celebrating Imlek might lead a convert into habits such as eating pork, drinking alcohol, following horoscopes and gambling; all *haram* activities.

In order to keep converts from such ‘un-Islamic’ activities, in another article, ‘*Muallaf menyikapi tradisi*’ [Convert responding to tradition], Laison (2009) proposes that Chinese Muslims if possible, should avoid Imlek celebrations; or only celebrate it with the intentions of preaching Islam or to express gratitude to God. For him, religion is more important than ethnicity, therefore ‘a Muslim should not place culture in front of Islam’. He defends the MUI *Fatwa* on Christmas celebrations and claims that the prohibition of wishing ‘Merry Christmas’ does not mean to cut off Muslims from Christians, but to preserve Muslims’ belief in *tauhid* (the oneness of God), especially among new converts.

Some Christian groups and individuals in Indonesia also discourage Chinese Christians from celebrating Chinese New Year. For instance, a protestant pastor in Jakarta, Rev. Markus Tan has written a book entitled ‘*Imlek dan Al-Kitab*’ (*Imlek and the Bible*), questioning Chinese customary rituals observed during Imlek
celebrations and fearing that Chinese Christians may return to a syncretised religious belief if they celebrate Imlek (Tan 2008). In contrast to Protestantism, Catholicism in Indonesia has a more flexible attitude towards ethnic practices and traditions. For example, there are Chinese New Year masses in Catholic churches in Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Pontianak (Hoon 2009). Not surprisingly, some of my informants equate such Catholic–Protestant differences with those between NU and Muhammadiyah in Indonesia.

**Contextualising fatwa: the possibilities and limitations of Islamic pluralism**

The MUI *fatwa* that allowed the celebration of Imlek was a surprise for some people, as the conservative-inclined council had previously issued *fatwas* against religious pluralism. For example, in 1981, MUI issued a *fatwa* proposing it was *haram* for Muslims to attend the celebrations of Christmas, with some Muslim leaders arguing that Muslims should avoid wishing anyone ‘Merry Christmas’. In 2005, MUI issued a *fatwa* describing pluralism, secularism and liberalism as ‘un-Islamic’ (Gillespie 2007). In 2009, the West Java branch of MUI issued another *fatwa* that prohibited Muslims from celebrating Valentine’s Day; a view shared by Mahruf Amin. For sure, not all Muslim leaders and scholars agree with MUI *fatwas* on the above-mentioned matters.

The ‘culture–religion’ distinction is one of the major reasons for MUI’s different attitudes toward Chinese New Year and Christmas. MUI views Imlek as a cultural tradition, but treats Christmas as a religious celebration that is incompatible with Islamic theology. Some Muslim leaders contend that by using the greeting ‘Merry Christmas’, one is assenting to the birth of Jesus as son of God, and accepting the trinitarian concept in Christianity, which is violating ‘tauhid’ (the oneness of God). A similar argument is made by MUI

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to declare that the celebration of Valentine’s Day is forbidden according to Islam. Amidhan, Head of MUI, said, ‘We have to ban Valentine’s Day because this is celebrating another religion’s holiday. Santo Valentino was a Christian; therefore, Valentine’s Day is not allowed in Islam. People who celebrate Valentine’s Day are in fact spreading Christian beliefs.’

To summarise: in the stand of Muslims towards both Imlek and Christmas, there are at least four possible outcomes:

1. Both Imlek and Christmas celebrations are haram.
2. Imlek celebration is halal with conditions, but Christmas celebration is haram.
3. Both Imlek and Christmas celebrations are halal with conditions.
4. Both Imlek and Christmas celebrations are halal.

The first viewpoint is shared by most Salafist-inclined Muslims, who insist that Muslims can only celebrate Idul Fitri and Idul Adha. Many of them even reject the Maulid celebration and local Muslim rituals such as tahliian and slametan, as they view those practices as improper innovations. Many Indonesian Muslims adhere to the second or third viewpoints. Muslims who are puritan-inclined allow the practice of cultural traditions in Islamic ways, but prohibit the celebration of other religious festivals for Muslims; while those who are less orthodox see no problem with Muslims celebrating Chinese New Year and wishing Christians a ‘Merry Christmas’ as long as no religious rituals are involved. The fourth point is held by Muslims who think that their visiting of temples or churches for celebrations will not affect their belief in Islam. Of course, such generalisations are rather simplified and used only for analytical purposes. They do not reflect the complexity of Muslim religiosities, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Although interpretations of religious texts are important in accepting or rejecting contentious practices, one should not overlook the social contexts that constrain the religious debates. For example, Gillespie (2007) and Hosen (2003) have demonstrated


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how political situations and government policies influenced fatwa-making in Indonesia. Indeed, in analysing the issuing of fatwa, both textual and contextual spheres have to be considered. Textual spheres refer to the interpretation of religious scriptures, while contextual spheres refer to the socio-economic and political situations in which the interpretation takes place. I have previously discussed how religious interpretation has influenced the fatwa-making concerning Imlek, and now I examine the social contexts backgrounding the fatwa-making.

The MUI approval of Imlek celebration is a reflection of cultural openness in post-1998 Indonesia. The issue of whether Imlek was halal or haram was not raised during New Order period, as the public expression of Chinese cultural identity was prohibited. In the past, some Muslim leaders were seen as ‘anti-Chinese’; today many of them are ‘Chinese-friendly’ to show their commitment to cultural diversity and the tolerant face of Indonesian Islam. Given that many Muslim scholars in Indonesia are involved in politics directly or indirectly (Hosen, 2003: 170), we might also speculate that one of the reasons they choose to allow Imlek celebrations is to get on the good side of Chinese Indonesians and obtain their electoral support and funding. In addition, the MUI fatwa allowing Imlek celebrations would not have been possible without the lobbying of Chinese Muslim leaders and their involvement on the board of MUI. Their clarification that Imlek was a cultural tradition was crucial in influencing the fatwa-making of MUI. It was also likely for some Muslim scholars in MUI who were less orthodox to endorse the Imlek fatwa, as a reaction against the anti-pluralism fatwa, a bulwark against narrow Islamism, and a moderation of the ‘conservative’ public image of MUI.

At the same time, the MUI prohibition of the ‘Merry Christmas’ greeting should also be analysed beyond its theological argument, as it reflects the worries some Muslims have about the ‘Christianisation’ of Muslims, and their suspicions of Christian missionaries in Indonesia. Generally speaking, relations between Islam and Christianity are more troublesome in Indonesia, compared to those between Islam and Confucianism or Buddhism. There have been conflicts between Muslims and Christians in
Maluku and Poso; and more recently, the burning of churches in West Java. Being anti-Christian is interwoven with anti-colonial and anti-western sentiments, and some conservative Muslim scholars justify their prohibitions of Christmas and Valentine’s Day on moral grounds, as they think such celebrations encourage ‘immoral’ Western lifestyles and lead to ‘un-Islamic’ behaviours, such as ‘free sex’, night clubbing and alcohol consumption.25

I argue that the MUI fatwas allowing Imlek yet prohibiting Christmas celebrations among Muslims reflect the possibilities and limitations of religious pluralism in contemporary Indonesia. Paradoxically, while there is an increasing acceptance of cultural diversity among Muslim leaders, there is also a rising intolerance towards religious intermingling and intra-religion differences within some sections of Indonesian Muslim society. While most Indonesian Muslim openly support the establishment of Chinese-style mosques, some hesitate to endorse Chinese New Year ceremonies in mosques. Many Muslims, including the conservatively-inclined MUI allow the celebration of Chinese New Year if it does not involve non-Islamic rituals, yet keep themselves always from Christmas celebrations. When it comes to Ahmadiyah, few Muslim scholars lend their support to this minority Muslim sect, which was deemed ‘deviant’ according to an MUI fatwa. Even the government does not take firm action to protect Ahmadiyah followers from being attacked by hardline Muslim groups.26

25. I suggest that a contextualised interpretation of a religious text does not necessarily lead to a more progressive and inclusive viewpoint, as many would assume. For example, some Muslim scholars disapprove of the celebration of Christmas, not based on religious grounds, but because such a celebration might lead to immoral behaviour. In Malaysia, in 2009, was a controversy over whether non-Muslims could use the term ‘Allah’ to refer to their God. Some Malay Muslims who read religious scriptures literally approve the usage of ‘Allah’ by non-Muslims, claiming that no Qur’anic verse prohibits it; while those who disapprove justify their position by saying that it could cause confusion among Muslims and might lead to apostasy. In this case, ironically, those Muslims who are ‘literalist’ seem to be more tolerant than those who are ‘contextualist’.

26. Ahmadiyah is a controversial Muslim sect, founded in India near the end of the 19th century, which has existed in Indonesia since the 1920s. In the last few years, Ahmadiyah’s followers in Indonesia have experienced increasing and hostility from hardline Islamic groups. For some Muslims, the Ahmadiyya movement is considered non-Islamic, especially because of its teaching that its founder, Mirza
Generally speaking, Chinese Muslims share the religious viewpoints of their indigenous Muslim counterparts. For example, Chinese preachers such as Anton Medan and Syafii Antonio do not mind giving angpao during Chinese New Year, but hesitate to visit Chinese temples and burn incense; they are happy to wish ‘Gong Xi Fa Cai’, yet reluctant to greet ‘Merry Christmas’ (interview, Anton Medan, 7 November 2008; Interview, Syafii Antonio, 11 January 2009). In other words, many Muslims accept a cultural diversity and expression of Islam. Yet, their attitudes are different in the realm of religion; they hesitate to cross religious boundaries, observe non-Islamic rituals and endorse alternative interpretations of Islam.

**Chinese New Year celebration as everyday practice**

How do ordinary Chinese Muslims respond to the religious debate about Chinese New Year celebration? How do they view and practise Chinese cultural traditions in their daily lives? In general, they have three responses towards Imlek celebration: haram, not haram with conditions, and not haram even if it involves customary rituals. Many Chinese Muslims consider that Imlek celebration is not haram, as long as it does not involve rituals such as burning incense; some insist that Imlek celebration in all forms should not be observed; and others continue the practice of customary rituals to show respect to their ancestors. These diverse viewpoints reflect their Islamic affiliations and understandings, as well as their social experience, familial interaction and cultural upbringing.

In terms of cultural upbringing, as expected, Chinese converts who speak Mandarin or a Chinese dialect and have closer relations with non-Muslim family members tend to take the Chinese New Year festival seriously, while those who have assimilated seldom relate to this Chinese tradition. Others see Imlek as a social and family event during which they visit their parents and relatives,

Ghulam Ahmad, is a Prophet, in succession to Muhammad. For more discussion of Ahmadiyah in Indonesia, see Alfitri (2008) and Budiwanti (2009).
wear new clothes and eat special food. Regarding religiosity, Chinese Muslims who have been through an Islamic education and have religious affiliations tend to have stronger viewpoints on the celebrating of Imlek.

There are some Chinese Muslims, especially those who are NU-inclined, who still practise customary rituals at home or visit temples to celebrate Imlek. One of them is Syamsul Ariffin, a part-time practitioner of Chinese medicine in Surabaya. He told me that he not only observes both Chinese and Islamic festivals, but also follows the Javanese traditional rituals, kejawen. According to Syamsul, his observance of various traditions does not make him feel less a Muslim. He claims, ‘I am a Chinese, a Muslim, and perhaps I am also a Javanese’ (interview, Syamsul Arrifin, 30 October 2008). In contrast, Felix Siauw, an HTI-affiliated popular social media preacher, disapproves of Chinese New Year celebrations. Meanwhile, Chinese Muslims who are close to Muhammadiyah and PKS are in the middle of the spectrum: they think Imlek is not wajib, but is also not haram, as long as no ‘un-Islamic’ elements are involved.

Beyond religious considerations, some Chinese Muslims practice contentious rituals during Chinese festivals for familial reasons. Quite often, they justify such practices by comparing Chinese traditional values to Islamic teachings, and suggest that some rituals, although seen as ‘un-Islamic’ by puritan Muslims, are in fact complementary to universal Islamic principles. For example, in 2008, Marlina, who is married to Nugroho Laison, went back to her hometown in Bangka Island to celebrate Imlek with her parents. She followed rituals such as burning incense and offering food for ancestors and deities. Despite knowing that these practices are contentious, she observed them because she did not want to hurt her parents’ feelings. She says her actions could be justified in Islam, because Qur’anic texts teach Muslims to respect their parents and to maintain good relationships with family members (interview, Marlina, 2 March 2008). Also in 2008, a Chinese Muslim couple, Hadi Tham and Julie, who attended pengajian frequently, invited me to their home in Jakarta during Imlek. They served me various halal Chinese foods, including mee sua (a long noodle
that symbolises long life) and Mandarin oranges. I noticed at their home that there was a praying altar with incense and food for one of their parents who had passed away. Hadi Tham explained that they were sharing the house with non-Muslim relatives and that they kept the ancestor’s altar to show respect. Like Marlina, he said Islam taught him to live harmoniously with non-Muslims and to express filial piety to elders (field note, 18 February 2008).

Similarly, some Chinese Muslims who still observe the rituals of Ceng Beng (Grave-Sweeping Day), a festival for ethnic Chinese to pay respect to their ancestors by visiting the cemetery and praying with incense and food, state it is to do with Islamic teachings: living harmoniously and respecting elders. One of them, Alex Tjiu said he accompanied his mother to his father’s tomb every year during Ceng Beng. For him, making an offering based on Chinese tradition is an expression of filial piety (interview, Alex Tjiu, 6 September 2008). Comparing traditional Chinese beliefs and Islamic principles, he argues that maintaining the Chinese virtue of remembering ancestors is complementary to Islamic teachings that urge Muslims to respect elders. Meanwhile, Chinese Muslims who are more puritan say they appreciate the values of Ceng Beng, but insist that Muslims should distance themselves from observing non-Islamic rituals. Therefore, they visit the cemetery and pray in an Islamic way, without burning incense and offering food. As I will further discuss in the following chapter, despite the disapproval of orthodox Muslims, some Chinese Muslims continue with various controversial practices in their everyday lives, such as Ida’s involvement in *slametan* rituals, Shamsul’s participation in *kejawen* rituals, and Mary’s worshipping Buddha at home.

These everyday practices show that Islamic religions are not only constrained by religious texts and their interpretations, but also depend on the social interactions and living experiences of Muslims. In this sphere of ‘everyday Islam’ (Alam 2007), or ‘practical Islam’ (Beatty 1999), many Muslims can spontaneously negotiate themselves between religious doctrines and social contexts in their observing of contentious practices.
Religious hybridisation: texts, contexts and everyday practices

I began this chapter describing Imlek ceremonies in mosques and I end it here with a *slametan* (communal feast) ritual in a Chinese temple. Ikhsan Tanggok (2005) in his description of a *slametan* in *klenteng* Sam Poo Kong (Cheng Ho Temple) in Semarang, noted that the *slametan* is co-celebrated by Javanese and Chinese Indonesians, to strengthen their relationships and to ask for temple protection. As he illustrated, the *slametan* prayer in the temple is a mixture of Qur’anic verses and Javanese *kejawen* texts, and is observed by both Javanese Muslims and Chinese Confucian, to ask for a blessing from *dewa Sam Poo Kong* (the Cheng Ho deity). Thus hybridised religious practices continue to exist in Muslims’ everyday lives, despite the rise of Islamic ‘purification’. It is also not uncommon for Chinese businessmen to observe *slametan* before the beginning of a new business transaction, by inviting Javanese Muslim scholars to pray for a blessing by reciting Qur’anic texts. Likewise, there were some Muslim students involved in Chinese temple processions in Jakarta streets in 2009 (Chan 2010).

Religious syncretism has been used to analyse and to defend contentious Muslims’ practices, yet it is problematic. What is the best way of analysing the encounter of Islam with other cultural and religious practices? I suggest that it is insightful to view religious hybridisation as a contested process, contested between the interactions of textual interpretations, social conditions and everyday practices. On the issues of Imlek in mosques, both proponents and opponents have referred to Qur’anic texts to justify their stands. Here, individuals and groups with diverse interests and orientations may find their own, often conflicting, truths in the very same scriptures. At the same time, different cultural upbringings and religious experiences influence Chinese Muslims’ individual reception of their ethnic traditions. For instance, the return of Chinese culture in the post-1998 Indonesian public space and efforts by moderate Muslim groups to promote inclusive Islam amidst the rise of religious conservatism form a broader canvas backgrounding the debates of Imlek celebrations among Chinese
Muslims. However, beyond religious considerations, whether ordinary Chinese Muslims celebrate Imlek or not – and how they observe it – depends on their life experiences, family influences and other everyday practical considerations. Some of them also justify their controversial customary practices by referring to more universal Islamic values.
Chapter 7

Conversion to Islam, Flexible Piety and Multiple Identifications

I have three names. My official Indonesian name on my identity card is ‘Julia Vitha’. Most people I know from schools and workplaces call me ‘Vitha’. My parents and family members in Bangka call me ‘Lee Woon’. After conversion to Islam, I adopted an Islamic name, ‘Raihanah’. When I attend religious activities, my Muslim friends use my Islamic name. But since you are a Chinese person, you can address me by my Chinese name.1 (Interview, 10 June 2008)

The case of Vitha’s multiple names is not exceptional, as many Chinese Muslims have more than one name, and sometimes even three names – Indonesian, Chinese and Islamic. This allows them to emphasise different dimensions of their identities at different times. Such naming practices show not only that different Chinese Muslims have different cultural orientations and religious affiliations, but also that an individual Chinese Muslim can situationally shift and variously stress their manifold identifications.

In the previous chapters, I have analysed the emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities in post-1998 Indonesia without treating Chinese Muslims as a bounded ethnic–religious group. I have also hinted at their multifaceted and multi-layered identities. Focusing on naming practices, female veiling experiences and life stories, this chapter further investigates the multiple ways of being ‘Chinese Muslim’ (and sometimes also escaping from being labelled as ‘Chinese Muslim’) and reveals a range of subjectivities, self-expressions and identity negotiations in everyday lives.

1. In previous chapters, in most cases, I used real names for my informants. However, in this chapter, for two reasons, most names used are pseudonyms. First, my informants do not want their names to be quoted when they comment on certain contentious issues and ‘sensitive’ topics. Second, I want to protect the privacy of my informants, especially when I discuss their ‘un-Islamic’ habits, such as gambling and drinking alcohol.
Drawing on Bourdieu’s work (1990) on intertwining relations between structure and agency, this chapter argues that identity practices are the outcome of the strategic action of individuals operating within a constraining, but not determining, social context. While being constrained by historical contexts and influenced by social forces, we should not overlook the role of personal living strategies in shaping people’s identities. As Karner (2007: 4) suggests, identity is not only a social construction, but also a biographically grounded and emotionally charged way of experiencing everyday life. Everyday life is an arena where the self performs in a number of different ways dependent upon time, place and audience (Goffman 1959).

To study the everyday religiosity of Muslims, scholars have deployed terms such as ‘practical Islam’ (Beatty 1999) and ‘everyday Islam’ (Alam 2007) to examine Muslim religiosity as a negotiation between the areas of normative and non-normative Islam, between religious doctrines and everyday living conditions. Peletz (1997: 266) proposes that the study of Muslim identities should ‘devote greater attention to the cultural psychology of ambivalence and its various refractions in different political economies and the myriad social contexts they comprise’. Thus, this chapter analyses the cultural politics of Chinese Muslims’ everyday ethnicity and religiosity, without neglecting the importance of the socio-economic conditions that constrain their choices.

I begin this chapter with a brief review of conversion reasons among Chinese Muslims. I stress the importance of differentiating conversion motives from conversion narratives. While conversion motives are personal and private affairs, conversion narratives are public stories tailored to suit audiences, therefore such narratives do not necessarily reflect the ‘real’ conversion reasons. Second, I discuss the ‘official’ conversion processes and ‘spiritual’ experiences of Chinese Muslims. Becoming ‘officially’ Muslim does not automatically mean that someone is also becoming a ‘religiously’ practising Muslim. Furthermore, Islamic conversion, especially a ‘genuine’ one, often implies not only the adoption of a new religious
identity, but also the transformation of personal practices, cultural orientations, social networks and political views.

Following the discussion of converts’ diverse and shifting religiosity, the third part of this chapter considers the everyday religiosity of Chinese Muslims. The life experiences and stories of my informants show that instead of openly supporting or resisting the rising of assertive Islam in Indonesia, many converts adjust or accommodate their understandings and practices of Islam according to their living contexts, which quite often result in an inconsistency of Islamic religiosity, which I call ‘flexible piety’. Although such inconsistent religiosity is more prevalent among converts, it can also be applied to many other Muslims in contemporary societies.2

Fourthly, I provide a brief overview of the shifting and diverse ethnic identifications among Chinese Muslims after Islamic conversion. By discussing the naming practices of a few who switched religion, I demonstrate that a Chinese convert can emphasise or downplay his or her Chinese identity, depending on conditions. I conclude this chapter by reiterating that both the political economies of religious conversion and shifting ethnicity, as well as the cultural politics of flexible piety and multiple identifications are important in the study of Chinese Muslim identities and also of Chinese and Muslim identities in general.

Conversion reasons and narratives

Most Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are not born Muslim but convert to Islam. These new converts are often referred as ‘mualaf’ in Indonesia. There are various conversion factors, including political (escaping from discrimination), economic (seeking business opportunities), religious (seeking spiritual truth and meaning in life), and cultural (intermingling or intermarriage with Muslim Indonesians). Different conversion motivations mean that becoming Muslim has different meanings for different converts. The motivation for

2. For an interesting account of Chinese conversion to Christianity in Taiwan and China, see Jordan (1993).

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conversion is also one of the major factors that determine how seriously Chinese converts learn and observe their new religion, thus influencing the formation of their religious identities.

In the past, conversions of Chinese to Islam were mainly ‘strategic conversions’, meaning the adoption of Islam was a response to political or economic incentives, or was for the purpose of intermarriage. Although such reasons still persist today, the increase in both the public display (in the form of Chinese-style mosques) and the personal observance of faith (shown by Chinese religious teachers) indicates that there are an increasing number of ‘genuine conversions’ among Chinese Indonesians, who take their new religion ‘seriously’. Below I briefly discuss four types of conversion among Chinese Indonesians. It must be clarified that these classifications are rather simplified and do not fully capture the complex reality. I use the classifications for analytical purposes; they do not indicate a value judgement.

**Economic considerations**

Chinese businessmen are quite often suspected of converting to Islam for their business careers, in order to get a license from the government, to build networks with security officers, to gain support from Islamic leaders and to attract Muslim customers. However, very few Chinese business converts openly admit their ‘real’ motivations. A number of these conversions do not involve their spouses and children. While some converts are involved in social and religious activities, others take a low profile. A few Chinese Muslim businessmen have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca and obtained the title of ‘Haji’ which is respected among Muslims, not only as a reflection of religious commitment, but also as a sign of socio-economic status. Some poor Chinese Indonesians see

3. Some Chinese Muslim businessmen were cautious when they talked to me. They were happy to discuss with me general topics and public issues. Yet, they were reluctant to share with me their personal conversion experiences and religious journeys. Some of their typical answers were ‘religion is a personal matter’ and ‘I prefer to discuss Islam in a general sense’.
Islamic conversion as a way of gaining economic mobility. During fieldwork, I met several Chinese Muslims who had converted to Islam to gain financial assistance (e.g. zakat or Islamic alms) and employment opportunities from Muslim organisations.

**Political strategies**

Politically driven conversion to Islam is not a new phenomenon, as documented in the conversion of low-caste people in India and African–Americans, who see Islam as a way out of discrimination and oppression (McCloud 1995; Simmons 2006). During the New Order period some Chinese leaders, such as Junus Jahya, suggested that conversion to Islam provided an escape from discrimination, as according to them by embracing the religion of the majority population, the difference between ethnic Chinese and indigenous Indonesians would diminish. Not all Chinese Muslim leaders agree with this notion of ‘assimilation through conversion’ and the idea is no longer popular in post-1998 Indonesia. Some argue that conversion is a personal religious choice and should not be politically motivated, while others suggest that conversion will only promote better relationships between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians, if converts maintain their ‘Chineseness’. There are also some Chinese business people, especially those living in Muslim-majority areas, who convert to Islam to seek security or reduce the possible hostility from local Muslims towards them. Such conversions are motivated by both economic and political interest.

**Intermarriage and intermingling**

As observed during my field research, most Chinese converts (70–80 per cent) practice ‘marital conversion’; that is, they convert to Islam because of intermarriage. If politically and economic driven converts are mostly older Chinese men, those who convert to intermarrry are mainly younger Chinese, both male and female. Since the enactment of the 1974 Marriage Law, which tightened the conditions for legal marriage, many Chinese Indonesians become
Muslim, or at least officially register themselves as ‘Muslim’ on their identity cards, in order to marry Muslim Indonesians. Conversion to Islam means a Chinese will have greater interaction with Muslim Indonesians, but frequent interaction with local Muslims also leads some Chinese to convert. It is not uncommon for many Chinese Indonesians to have a close interaction with local Muslims especially if they live, work or study in Muslim majority neighbourhoods, workplaces or schools. Greater exposure to Islamic practices and teachings has inspired some Chinese to learn more about the religion and finally to convert, as well as to marry a non-Chinese Muslim. The religiosity of these converts is greatly influenced by their Muslim spouses, relatives and friends. Some of them live as nominal Muslims; some practice Islam seriously; some see Islam as a form of cultural attachment in which they follow localised Islamic traditions; some see themselves being a ‘Javanese’ more than being a ‘Muslim’.

Religious interests

Mystical experiences (e.g. receiving religious messages in a dream), religious encounters (e.g. being touched by the call to prayer (azan) or inspired by Qur’anic verses on a television program), religious comparisons (often of Islam and Christianity), and life crises (e.g. a search for meaning or encountering a turning point in life) bring some Chinese closer to Islam. Compared to the three reasons above, in which conversion is a means to an end, these fourth type of converts have volitionally chosen to acquire a new belief and religious identity. Some of them were once Christians and converted to Islam after seriously comparing both religions. They think Islam is more attractive because ‘the absence of the concept of Trinity makes Islam more logical’ and ‘Islam is a complete religion as it does not separate religion from daily lives’. Such converts are often emotionally bound up with the new religion, seeing it as a complete way of life, and are enthusiastic about practising every detail of Islamic precept. Some treat Islam as an ideology, especially those who are involved in Islamic activism.
Conversion narratives and motives

I have earlier indicated that there are limitations to the categorisation of conversion factors as above, and here I would like to make three related points. First, in general, as is perhaps not surprising, those who convert for religious and cultural reasons are more serious about learning and observing Islam than those who convert for political and economic purposes. However, there are always exceptions. A serious convert can become disappointed by his or her new religion and stop practising it, or a ‘utilitarian’ convert can become a pious Muslim after being influenced by their Muslim friends or as a result of a life crisis.

Second, in some cases there are multiple reasons for a conversion, involving any combination of the conversion factors I have discussed above. For example, a Chinese person who has been interested in Islam for a long time might convert after marrying a Muslim, a student in a Muslim-majority university might begin to practise Islam due to both the social influence of Muslim friends and a religious calling, or a businessman might convert to Islam to build up his business network and at the same time to promote better relationships between the local Chinese and non-Chinese.

Third, and perhaps most important, is the difference between conversion narratives and conversion motives, or between ‘official’ and ‘real’ conversion reasons. For example, a Chinese Muslim man in Surabaya once revealed to me that he converted to Islam because he wanted to be ‘blending with the mainstream (Muslim) society’ (field note, 6 October 2008), but when he was interviewed on a religious program on TV, he claimed that he was interested in Islam because he was inspired by the call to prayer (azan). It is also not unusual for a Chinese Indonesian who converts to Islam for marriage or economic purposes to tell the Muslim crowd during a conversion ceremony that his or her conversion is genuinely religiously motivated. When a convert turns a personal and private conversion into a public story, the narrative, whether in verbal or written form, might not reflect his or her ‘real’ conversion motives, but be tailored to suit the audience. Therefore, instead of
investigating the ‘real’ conversion reasons of converts, this chapter now focuses on examining under what conditions and how Chinese Muslims narrate their conversions, as well as learn and practise Islam. I am not here to judge whether a Chinese Muslim is a ‘genuine’ convert, but rather to examine how he or she engages with diverse religious discourses and practices in Indonesia.

The circulation of convert narratives always constitutes one part of Muslims’ preaching agenda, towards both non-Muslims and non-practising Muslims. A comparison between the dominating conversion narratives during the New Order period and the post-1998 period is interesting. In 1988, Usman Effendy, a Chinese Muslim journalist, edited a book entitled ‘AMOI: Aku Menjadi Orang Indonesia’ [I am becoming Indonesian] (Effendy 1988). As its title indicates, the book consists of various conversion stories that share a similar theme: pembauran (intermingling). But in 2008, Dyayadi, a Muslim writer, edited a book entitled ‘Mengapa Etnis Tionghoa Memilih Islam’ [Why Ethnic Chinese Choose Islam] (Dyayadi 2008). The book is a compilation of articles about the conversion experiences and religious journeys of Chinese Muslims, in which many of them describe their challenges in practising Islam and the benefits they gain after becoming a Muslim. Generally speaking, during the New Order period, conversion narratives aimed at showing Chinese Muslims’ commitment to being part of the Indonesian majority through Islamic conversion; while today, conversion narratives focus on highlighting Chinese Muslims’ true religious commitment and illustrate their Islamic piety as a role model for born Muslims. This resembles the shifting of the dominating discourse, from ‘pembauran’ to ‘dakwah’, among Chinese Muslim leaders in Indonesia (discussed in Chapters 2 and 5).

**Conversion processes: becoming officially Muslim**

In the previous section, I discussed why Chinese Indonesians convert to Islam. Now, I will describe the official process of becoming a Muslim. To become a Muslim, religiously speaking, is rather simple: one only needs to proclaim the syahadat (witness
or testimony) that ‘There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is God’s messenger’. However, conversion to Islam is not merely a personal and private affair in Indonesia. It is also a bureaucratic procedure, as official conversion involves visiting government offices and changing the stated religion on one’s identity card.4

Let me describe a ‘typical’ conversion in Indonesia. A person who is interested in converting to Islam first visits a mosque and talks to the ustaz (religious teacher) or other staff in the mosque. Sometimes, religious guidance and courses, either in the form of individual consultation or group discussion, will be provided in the mosque before or after the conversion. The ustaz will arrange a simple ceremony, usually in the mosque, which has to be witnessed by two Muslims. Sometimes, the ustaz also suggests that the convert adopts an Islamic name. After the ceremony, the convert will be issued with a certificate of conversion. With the letter as proof, the convert can then change their religious status on the identity card at the sub-district office (kantor kecamatan) or village office (kantor kelurahan) with the help of the neighbourhood community organisations (Rukun Tetangga, RT or Rukun Wilayah, RW), and then he or she will officially be a Muslim. For a convert who is planning to marry, he or she will then go to the Religious Affairs Office (Kantor Urusan Agama, KUA) to register the marriage.

Unlike the process in Malaysia, ‘official’ conversion to, or renouncement of, Islam in Indonesia is not firmly regulated by the religious authorities. Furthermore, the matters of religious conversion (as well as renouncement) are not strictly legalised in Indonesia. Thus, there is always some flexibility in the process. For

4. In comparison to Malaysia, Islamic conversion in Indonesia is more flexible. Conversion to Islam in Malaysia is highly controlled by the state. It changes a person’s official identity to a Muslim and binds them by Islamic laws. Converts need to go through a bureaucratic procedure at the Religious Affairs Department, including a change of name (adoption of an Islamic name), which is not required by law but always advised by the authorities. In some states in Malaysia, converts have to take religious lessons and pass a test before being issued an ‘Islamic card’ (Hew 2014). Once converted to Islam, given the implementation of strict Islamic laws, he or she has difficulty in leaving the religion officially. In Indonesia, conversion to Islam is less bureaucratic, the adoption of an Islamic name is optional and a convert can change his or her religious status on the identity card more easily.
an example, a certificate of conversion from the mosque is recommended but not compulsory for changing religion on an identity card. I have encountered a few cases in which converts went directly to the neighbourhood community organisation without a certificate to ask for a change in their religious status, because they had a close relationship with the officers or were accompanied by local religious figures, such as a kiai or an ustaz. One of my informants did not even change the religious status on his identity card, yet was able to register his marriage with a Muslim girl in the KUA, as he convinced the KUA official that he was a Muslim by showing his religious knowledge. There are also some cases in which converts change their religious status, from Islam back to their original religion after marriage. The renouncement of Islam may raise social pressure from some Muslims, but is not prohibited by law in Indonesia.

Piety in the making: becoming spiritually Muslim

Having reviewed the ‘official’ conversion procedure, let us turn to the religious experiences of Chinese Muslims. Conversion reasons are important in determining the religious piety of converts, but religious education after conversion, together with other factors such as social encounters and localities, also play significant roles in shaping one’s religiosity. Given that Muslim practices and discourses in Indonesia are diverse, it is not surprising that Chinese Muslims go through a variety of religious journeys and have divergent understandings of their new religion.

Many converts learn about Islam from mosques. Some mosques offer special religious guidance and classes for new converts. Otherwise, converts can learn about their new religion from general Islamic study sessions at mosques. Converts also learn about Islamic practices from their Muslim spouses, relatives, neighbours and friends. To deepen their understanding of Islam, some read books on Islam; listen to cassettes; watch religious programs on television; attend Islamic preaching; join Friday sermons; learn to read Al-Qur’an; follow a religious teacher; study in a religious
school or take course in an Islamic university. Given the plurality of Islamic religiosities in Indonesia, which strain of Islam do most Chinese Indonesians convert to? I would like to highlight three inter-related features of Chinese converts’ religiosity: first, there is no singular, locally bounded ‘Chinese Islam’ identity in Indonesia; second, Chinese converts’ religiosity is not necessary stable; and third, their religiosity is highly diverse.

Not a singular ‘Chinese Islam’ identity
Although there are public manifestations of a ‘Chinese Islam’ identity through mosques and preaching styles, there is no unique ‘Chinese Islam’ religious practice and understanding in Indonesia. Unlike varieties of locally bounded Muslim communities in Indonesia, such as Javanese Muslims, Bugis Muslims, Acehnese Muslims and Sasak Muslims, Chinese Muslims are not regionally concentrated and village-based, but dispersed individuals who are mainly urban dwellers. Given that they are dispersed minorities and do not constitute a majority in any locality, they do not form a specific ethno-local Islamic tradition; therefore ‘Chinese Islam’ is a problematic concept. Chinese Muslims from Sumatra to Sulawesi follow religious practices that are dominant in different localities rather than share a common ‘Chinese Islam’ practice. Put in other words, how Chinese Muslims practice Islam has less to do with their ‘Chineseness’ and more to do with their situated localities, together with their conversion motivations, religious experiences and what kind of Islamic teachings they are exposed to from their Muslims spouses and friends.

5. It is important to state that ‘local Islam’ in Indonesia, such as ‘Javanese Islam,’ is not monolithic either and can also be a problematic concept. I see Javanese Muslims as a locally bounded Muslim community in a comparative sense only, contrasting with Chinese Muslims who are dispersed minorities and do not constitute a majority in any locality in Indonesia. In terms of religious practices and understandings, influenced by various transnational flows, local dynamics and rapid urbanisation, Islam in Java is also a complex reality, rather than a monolithic tradition. For more discussion of Islam in Java, see Beatty 1999; Bowen 2003; Daniels 2009; Hefner 2000; Greetz 1960; and Woodward 1989.
Let me demonstrate the plurality of Chinese Muslim identities by discussing their local religious affiliations and transnational religious connections. Regarding local religious organisations, one might think that Chinese Muslims would prefer the traditionalist NU, since NU is in general more tolerant towards local culture and ethnic customs. Furthermore, NU’s former leader, Abdurrahman Wahid, was well respected by Chinese Indonesians for his tolerance and support of multiculturalism. Indeed, some converts who prefer to keep their Chinese traditions say they are more comfortable with traditionalist Islam that allows them to pray for their ancestors. However, there are also some converts who think that the Islamic practice of Muhammadiyah is more logical, simple (involving fewer rituals than NU) and ‘time-saving’ (shorter prayer sessions for taraweh). They also suggest that urban, modernist Muslims have more similarities to Chinese converts, who are mostly town-dwellers and business people. Beyond NU and Muhammadiyah, Chinese Muslims are involved in other Muslim groups, ranging from the ‘progressive’ JIL, the ‘Islamist’ PKS, the ‘radical’ HTI to the ‘hardline’ FPI. As such, Chinese Muslim religious affiliations are mostly influenced by local Islamic currents.

Conversion to Islam is often followed by a change in one’s worldview and transnational subjectivity. Many begin to see themselves as a part of a worldwide Islamic ummah, hope to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca, and identify with Muslims across the world – sometimes with the ideology of a transnational Islamic movement such as Hizbut Tahrir or the Muslim Brotherhood. As an example, on a Friday afternoon in January 2009, following an Israeli bombardment that killed hundreds of Palestinians in Gaza, a Chinese Muslim ustaz could not stop himself from crying when he was delivering a Friday sermon at a mosque in Jakarta. He urged Indonesian Muslims to share the suffering of their Muslim counterparts in Gaza, support their struggles and pray for better livelihoods for them. On the same day, thousands of PKS supporters clogged the main streets in Central Jakarta after Friday prayers in a show of solidarity for Palestinians. A few Chinese Muslims also participated in the rally to show their support (field note, 2 January
The transnational connections of Chinese Muslims go beyond Muslims in the Middle East, as some of them also associate themselves with the plight of Muslims in Mainland China. During the riots involving Han Chinese and Uighur Muslims in 2009, a Chinese Muslim in Indonesia, who claimed to be a spokesperson of PITI, criticised China’s treatment of the Uighur Muslims, and regretted the silence of Muslim nations on the Chinese discrimination against and persecution of the Uighurs. Furthermore some Chinese Indonesian Muslim leaders have established transnational links with Hui Muslims in China, by building in Indonesia Chinese-style mosques and organising mutual visits.

Shifting religiosity

Generally speaking, there are two common assumptions about Islamic conversion. The first is that new converts tend to be ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘fanatical’, meaning that they are more likely to subscribe to puritanical and conservative forms of religious understanding, as a way of asserting their commitment to their newly found ‘true’ religion (Roy 2004). Second is the assumption of two stages of conversion, i.e. from a rigid observance to a more flexible one. Hereby converts tend to be ‘fundamentalist’ after embracing their new religious ‘truth’, but then become disappointed with observed Muslim behaviour and ideas, before being able finally to locate their religious understanding in everyday life (Nieuwkerk 2006). My study of Chinese Muslim religiosity reveals nuances in and challenges to both these conventional assumptions. Chinese Muslim religiosities are divergent and dynamic; not all converts embrace Islam for religious purposes and take their new religion seriously; some converts who are only ‘official’ Muslims at the beginning transform into ‘practising’ Muslims.

There are some Chinese Muslims who are non-observant – only ‘officially’ Muslim, mostly for the purpose of marrying a Muslim. During my interviews, some of my informants told me that they

have friends and family members who have converted to Islam, but did not practise Islam and still ate pork, for instance. Most non-practising Muslims keep a low profile and do not involve themselves in public religious activities. Many of my informants were practising Muslims, yet with a wide range of religious orientations.

As might be expected, religiously driven converts and ‘born-again’ Chinese Muslims tend to be more serious in observing Islam, and some are more ‘rigid’, than the born Muslims. They are enthusiastic about practising every detail of the Islamic precepts. Some of them even eschew their own cultural practices, such as praying for ancestors, which they see as violating Islamic principles, and criticise traditionalist Muslims’ practices, such as tahililan, as un-Islamic. Reborn Chinese Muslims can be divided into two groups. The first groups are second-generation Chinese Muslims, who are mostly the offspring of inter-marriage between Chinese converts and non-Chinese Muslims. In my research, I found a few Chinese Muslim women whose parents were nominal Muslims, who had become aware of their ‘religious duty’, such as putting on the veil, after encountering Islamic activists from HTI and PKS at university. The second group are those who initially converted for practical reasons, but took their religion seriously later.

Some life stories I collected from fieldwork show that religiosity is not fixed and can change at different stages of life. One of my informants, Hermawan, a shopkeeper, told me that he initially became a Muslim for the purpose of ‘pembauran’ (inter-mingling), but did not practise Islam in his daily life. A few years after his conversion, his business went bankrupt and this led him to question the direction of his life. He began to study Islam seriously and, according to him, he finally found peace and truth in Islam. He is now a devout Muslim and a religious activist in a mosque. He also expresses his disappointment that some Chinese Muslim businessmen only practise Islam in public, but do not observe the religion at home (interview, 18 October 2008). Kapao, another Chinese Muslim man, had a similar religious journey to Hermawan. He runs a small printing business, and officially converted from Christianity to Islam for intermarriage. At the
beginning, he still went to church and even persuaded his wife to engage with Christianity. But a life crisis made him question his belief in Christianity. He read and compared the Bible and the Qur’an, which led him to conclude that Islam was the better religion for him. He said that he not only transformed himself into a pious Muslim, but persuaded his wife to be more ‘Islamic’ by wearing a headscarf and abandon ‘un-Islamic’ Javanese traditions, such as *slametan* (interview, 24 October 2008). Both Hermawan and Kapao converted to Islam twice: first, to be ‘official’ Muslims, and later to be ‘rigid’ and ‘practising’ Muslims.

While Hermawan and Kapao’s religious routes are from less pious to more devout, Wijaya and Edi went through the reverse trajectory. They converted to Islam because of religious interests. At first, they were emotionally bound to their new religion and enthusiastic to practise it rigidly, yet later they developed more flexible attitudes towards Islamic teachings. Wijaya converted to Islam from Christianity after comparing both religions. He said, ‘At the beginning, I was a “fanatical” Muslim and held conservative religious viewpoints. But after engaging with different discourses about Islam, I became a “liberal” Muslim’ (interview, 4 April 2008). Once a student activist in Islamist circles, Wijaya is now a human rights campaigner. Meanwhile, Edi, the curator of an art exhibition, converted to Islam in high school because he was attracted to the philosophy of Islam. However, after he entered a local university, his interest in Islam declined as he felt himself alienated by the dogmatic and conservative viewpoints of the Muslim activists on the campus. Now, he sees himself as a nominal Muslim (as recorded in his identity card) and is married to a Christian woman. When I met him in 2009, he told me that he was a supporter of JIL, the Liberal Islamic Network and campaigned against the passing of the Anti-Pornography Bill (interview, 7 January 2009).

**Diverse religiosity**

Chinese Muslims in Indonesia come from all walks of life: big businessmen, shopkeepers, barbers, make-up artists, Islamic preachers,
religious teachers, fortune tellers, lawyers, lecturers, activists, politicians, public servants, housewives and students. Chinese Muslim religiosities also have at least three different aspects as compared to other Muslims in Indonesia. First, Chinese Muslims are not a locally bound ethno-religious group but are dispersed minorities. Second, they are mostly converts. Third they are a religious minority within the Chinese ‘community’. After conversion to Islam, they might face opposition from their non-Muslim family members and friends. They also have to meet the expectations of their Muslim counterparts, and they need to negotiate daily practices between former Chinese cultural traditions (if they still observe these) and their newly acquired Islamic practices. Their religiosities are as diverse as, if not more diverse than, other Muslims in Indonesia. At the extreme end of each spectrum, I met a Chinese Muslim man who said he was still drinking beer and eating pork at home, while a Chinese Muslim woman privately told me that she supported Abu Bakar Basyir, the former leader of the terrorist group, Jemaah Islamiyah. However, most Chinese Muslims are in between these extremes.

For Chinese Indonesians, Islamic conversion is both a religious experience, and an on-going process of social transformation and cultural negotiation. Conversion to Islam is not only the subjective embracing of a complete set of new beliefs, but is also likely to involve the changing of personal practices and appearance, such as diet, dress, social networks, cultural identification, political affiliations. Chinese Muslims’ religiosities go beyond the domain of religious interpretations and practices, such as the five daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan. There are many other indicators of their diverse religiosities, such as naming practices (the adoption of an Islamic name), eating and drinking behaviour (the consumption of halal food), bodily practices (dress code and appearance), social networks (relations with family members, Chinese and non-Chinese), worldviews and political ideologies (transnational connections and viewpoints on the implementation of sharia), economy (the usage of Islamic banking), education (school choice for their children) as well as attitudes towards Chinese cultural practices, their former religions and local Muslims practices.
Everyday religiosity

Many scholars have expressed concern about a rising Islamic conservatism in Indonesia, whereby a localised, hybrid and peaceful Islam is giving way to a globalised, puritan and sometimes radical Islam while flexible religiosity is being replaced by assertive religiosity (Beatty 1999; Bruinessen 2013; Hefner 2005; Salim 2007). Yet, ‘Islamisation’ in contemporary Indonesia is a multifaceted phenomenon. It involves not only the religious and political spheres, but also economic activities (Juoro 2008; Sakai 2008) and popular culture (Fealy 2008; Heryanto 2010). Therefore, for many ordinary Muslims, their support for ‘Islamisation’ varies, and the perceived meanings of ‘Islamisation’ are multifarious. As an example, one may support the ‘Islamisation’ of consumer culture, yet disapprove of any official implementation of Sharia law.

How do Chinese converts situate themselves and respond to ‘Islamisation’? Some of them contribute directly or indirectly to ‘Islamisation’ in Indonesia, such as those who are involved in Islamic activism, banking and preaching (see Chapters 4 and 5). There are also a few Chinese Muslims who resist, if not reject, ‘Islamisation.’ But instead of criticising ‘Islamisation’ publicly, they choose to react quietly in diverse ways. Some refuse to adhere to ‘puritan Islam’ and continue their daily practice which might be seen as ‘un-Islamic.’ Some hide their Muslim identities in public. Many others still embrace Islam as a part of their identities, but distance themselves from ‘political Islam.’ Between promoting and refusing ‘Islamisation,’ most Chinese Muslims are in the middle – accommodating Islamic practices according to their living contexts, and also adjusting their daily habits according to their religious understandings. In many cases, their religiosities have less to do with their interpretations of religious texts, but are mostly influenced by the contingent political, social, cultural and economic circumstances of their understanding of Islam. Their social and religious practices are the outcome of on-going negotiations between the expectations of other Muslims and their self-identifications, and of accommodations between normative Islam and their everyday lives. Therefore, their
religiosities can be selective, inconsistent, ambivalent and fluid. Such flexibilities do not necessarily imply that they are insincere or hypocritical, but reflect how they strive to practise Islam within certain social constraints.

During my fieldwork, I came across some Chinese converts who seemed to have contradicting religiosities, but managed to reconcile, justify or at least contain such inconsistencies. Examples of such cases include: a self-professed Salafist Muslim who criticised traditionalist Muslim practices, yet was himself an activist in a Chinese-style mosque; an FPI supporter who condemned Ahmadiyah as ‘deviant’, but was active in mediating possible conflicts between non-Muslims and Muslims; a part-time preacher who wore the *jilbab* when giving religious talks in Indonesia, but took off her headscarf when gambling in a casino in Malaysia; a businessman who delivered a speech at a religious function in the morning, yet drank beer at a social gathering at night that same day; a Mandarin-language teacher who first told me that interfaith marriage should be avoided, but later confessed that his wife was a Chinese Christian; and on the list goes.

Such inconsistent religiosities of Chinese converts challenge the simplified dichotomies of Muslim religiosity: between *abangan* (nominal) and *santri* (observant Muslims), modernist and traditionalist (Geertz 1960), radical-conservative and progressive-liberal (Anwar 2009), scripturalist and substantialist (Liddle 1996), literal and liberal (Rahim 2006). These dichotomies overlook the complex realities of Islamic identities in contemporary societies. These familiar and convenient typologies fail to capture the complex everyday religiosity of many ordinary Muslims, especially the converts.

**Female veilings and everyday Islam**

The practice of female veiling, which in Indonesia usually means wearing the *jilbab*, has grown rapidly among Muslim women since the 1990s (Brenner 1996). After the collapse of the New Order regime, some schools even made the wearing of the *jilbab* compulsory (Parker 2005); while some regional governments issued
regulations requiring women to wear the veil in public (Bush 2008; Setyawati 2009; White & Anshor 2008). Recently, there has sprung up a Muslim clothing industry that produces fashionable ‘Islamic dresses’ and stylish jilbabs (Amrullah 2008; Jones 2007). I now look into female Chinese Muslims and their attitudes toward the jilbab (wearing or not wearing, why and when). Generally speaking, there are three attitudes: donning the headscarf all the time, donning it occasionally and not donning it at all.

Female Chinese Muslims who convert for religious reasons and are active in Islamic organisations are more likely to wear the headscarf consistently and continuously. They don it for various reasons: to inform others of their new religious identity, to show their commitment to practising Islam, and to ‘regulate’ themselves as ‘devout’ female Muslims. Ritha, born in 1976, converted to Islam when she was 20, after she recovered from a serious illness. When she was ill, she questioned the meaning of life and she found her answers in Islam. After marrying into a pious Chinese Muslim family in Jakarta, she is now an account clerk in an office owned by a Chinese Muslim businessman and is also an activist in MUSTIKA. Wearing a headscarf is akin to wearing a new identity, she says, ‘I wore the headscarf immediately after I converted. I wanted to show others that I am Muslim now. So they will treat me as a Muslim. They will not serve me food that is haram or ask me to go to the Chinese temple.’ After she took to wearing the headscarf, her parents reject her and she lost her job in a Chinese business company. She recalls the tough time and says, ‘These are the challenges of God. With my strong belief, and thanks to God, I overcame such difficulties’ (interview, 10 June 2008).

For Ritha, Islamic dress is not only about wearing a headscarf, but also about wearing clothes that hide the female body shape. As I observed, she always wore a headscarf with loose-fitting clothes in plain colours, even at her home and when she swims. She says,

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7. In Indonesia, kerudung and jilbab are words both used to refer to women’s head coverings. Kerudung is an easily removable headscarf that covers the head loosely, and which can still expose part of one’s hair and neck. Meanwhile, the jilbab is a longer piece of headscarf that covers the hair, neck and ears, but not the face.
‘I have to wear the headscarf consistently, because I want to follow Islam fully. Wearing Islamic dress will remind me of my identity as a female Muslim and that I have to act modestly.’ In other words, veiling is not only an act of strengthening her faith and forging her sense of being a Muslim woman, but also a form of self-regulation to ‘discipline’ herself according to her understanding of Islam. It was not a surprise that she supported the implementation of the controversial Anti-Pornography Bill and other regulations that control Muslims’ morality in public.8

Liliana was born in 1973. She is a nurse and converted to Islam from Christianity and is married to a Muslim of Arab descent. As for Ritha, the jilbab is both symbolically and religiously important for Liliana. Once a church activist, she says, ‘By wearing a headscarf, no one will ask me to go to church again. In the church, males and females mix freely; but in the mosque, there is a clear moral boundary between genders.’ For her, ‘both gender segregation and female veiling is not a form of discrimination, but a protection for women’ (interview, 15 November 2008). Jilbab wearing is also important for ‘born-again’ second generation Chinese Muslims, to assert their religious piety, distinguish themselves from their parents who are ‘nominal’ converts. Yani, a HTI activist, who was born into a mixed Javanese–Chinese family, is one of these. She told me:

My Chinese mother does not wear the headscarf because she converted to Islam to marry my father, while my Javanese father is a nominal Muslim. Although I was born a Muslim, I was never taught to be a good Muslim in my family. I learnt

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8. In late September 2005, a draft anti-pornography bill that covered both pornography and pornographic activities or obscene acts (pornoaksi) was handed to the Indonesian parliament for review. The initial bill not only proposed to regulate the production and distribution of pornography, but also to prohibit pornographic acts, the scope of which was potentially very broad, encompassing such things as traditional ethnic dances and the wearing of ‘improper’ clothing. It came under heavy criticism because of fears that it would undermine local cultural traditions, artistic expression and women’s rights. After undergoing changes, the bill was passed in late 2008. The controversial ‘pornographic activities’ section was eliminated and provisions banning ethnic dress in the original were omitted from the revised bill. Nevertheless, opposition to the bill remained, especially among human rights and women’s rights activists. See Allen (2007, 2009) and Salim (2007).
Islam in school and I began to put on the veil after I followed Islamic study sessions with my Muslim friends. After I first wore the headscarf, I felt that I was a ‘real’ Muslim. I also feel peace of mind. I will never take it off again. I hope my mother will wear the headscarf one day, too. (Interview, 29 November 2008)

Siew Hwa, a make-up artist, and Sandy, a women’s rights activist, hold different attitudes towards veiling. Siew Hwa, born in 1980, converted to Islam due to the influence of Muslim friends in high school. I first met Siew Hwa at a religious function in the PITI office in Jakarta. She stood out because, compared to other female Muslims, she did not wear a jilbab or kerudung. Dressed fashionably and with a colourful and trendy hairstyle, she clarifies, ‘I have just come from my workplace. I am a make-up artist. I have to dress up. It is impractical for me to wear headscarf because I have to interact with people from different backgrounds for my job, including westerners’ (field note, 10 January 2009). When I met her for a short interview in a shopping mall, she told me that some of her Muslim friends ask her to veil, but she does not follow their advice. She explains, ‘I am not ready yet. Veiling cannot be forced. It has to come from the heart. Furthermore, with headscarf also comes the responsibility; I have to be very careful with my behaviour. People will have higher moral expectations of me’ (interview, 16 January 2009). Nevertheless, according to her, not donning the jilbab does not make her less of a Muslim. She says, ‘I try to observe Islam in daily life. I pray if my work is not too busy. I fast during Ramadan if I am not travelling. With God’s will, I hope I can put on headscarf if I have a new job or after I get married.’

Sandy, born into a mixed religious family, grew up as a Muslim and now is a women’s rights activist. She shares the opinion of many other liberal-minded Muslims that female veiling is not compulsory, but a personal choice. She strongly criticises the Anti-Pornography Bill and any regional regulations that make female veiling obligatory in public. Sandy explains why she resists donning the jilbab, ‘It will place me under the scrutiny of other Muslims. My
belief in Islam is my own relationship with God. I do not want to be judged by others whether I am a good Muslim or not.’ She also tells me of an experience when her ‘Chinese-looking’ appearance saved her from being caught by the religious police in Aceh, a province in Indonesia where strict Islamic laws are implemented (which includes punishment for Muslim women not wearing headscarf). She says wryly, ‘When I was in Aceh for work early this year, no one bothered whether I was wearing headscarf or not. That is because I look “Chinese” and people assume that I am not a Muslim. This might be one of the few situations in which I feel that being a Chinese woman is a blessing’ (interview, 19 June 2008).

However, most female Chinese Muslims I met during my fieldwork are in the middle position, in which ‘sometimes they put headscarf on, other times they take it off’. Many of them don headscarf during religious functions and when meeting Muslims, but put it aside when interacting with non-Muslims. Lai Ting, a middle-aged housewife, who converted to Islam to marry, is one of those female converts who are flexible in wearing ‘Islamic clothing.’ When I first met Lai Ting she was wearing a headscarf in the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque during an Islamic study session. When I met her for a second time at her home, she was in a T-shirt and long trousers, without a headscarf. She said, ‘I just come back from gym with my Chinese friends. Islam teaches me about moderation. I am not going to don headscarf while doing exercise, right? Similarly, I will not wear mini-skirt if I visit mosque’ (interview, 16 November 2008).

Balancing religious observance and occupational reality, it is also not uncommon for younger female Chinese converts to don headscarf while attending mosque activities, but to take it off while working to avoid discrimination, especially for those who work in non-Muslim majority workplaces. Mariana is an English teacher in a primary school in which most teachers and students are non-Muslim Chinese Indonesians. She tells me, ‘I wear headscarf most of the time, except during work and visiting my parents.’ She explains, ‘In the school, I do not want to be treated differently because of my religion. At my parents’ home, I do not want to
make them angry. Islam teaches us to maintain good relationships with our family members and friends’ (interview, 2 March 2008).

Ella, a Chinese Muslim businesswoman, owns a computer shop in Mangga Dua Plaza, Jakarta, where most shops are owned by Chinese. I met her a few times during Islamic study sessions and she often wore a fashionable headscarf. When I talked to Ella at her shop, she said:

For the first few years of being a Muslim, I did not wear headscarf in my shop. Most of my Chinese friends did not know that I was a Muslim. I worried that I might lose my customers. Yet, a month ago, I had a dream that I would die soon, although I am not ill. I realised that I should wear headscarf more consistently. Thus, I decided to wear headscarf to my shop. I wear colourful and trendy headscarf, so people do not suspect me of being a Muslim. Indeed, for the first few days, instead of asking me why I converted to Islam, many customers asked me if I am going for a party after work. After a week or so, most of them realised that I was a Muslim. Surprisingly, business is going on as usual. Customers are pragmatic. If I provide good service, they still come to my shop. They do not really care about my religion. (Interview, 12 January 2009)

The cases above illustrate the flexibility and pragmatism of Chinese converts’ everyday Islamic religiosity. Islam is an important but not a totalising factor that determines their daily behaviour. Various practical reasons inform and constrain how a female convert practises Islam.

Life stories and flexible piety

Here I analyse more life stories of Chinese converts, reflecting their multifaceted religiosities. My aim is not to judge how pious they are nor to investigate what is their ‘true’ religious standpoint, but to explore how and under what conditions they adjust and justify their somewhat inconsistent religiosities. I see these ambiguous
commitments to religion as a form of ‘flexible piety’ that acknowledges the possibilities of disjuncture between one’s understanding of, feeling about and practice of Islam, and of the inconsistency of one’s religious opinions and practices. Flexible piety, I suggest, is prevalent among but not limited to converts; as many Indonesian Muslims have to respond to the rise of assertive Islam and, in some provinces, the implementation of sharia-inspired laws that aim to control the public morality of Muslims. While many Muslims, including converts, would like to live a more religious life, they do not necessarily want their religiosities to be regulated by state law and authorities.

Ibrahim was born in 1949. He is a Chinese Muslim activist in Jakarta. Ibrahim has an impressive religious profile: he is a follower of NU traditions, a Muhammadiyah member and a PKS supporter. He sees his multiple religious affiliations as complementary, not contradictory. ‘I follow zikir (Islamic chanting) to feel closer with God, I support PKS to implement Islamic principles in society. Islam is a religion that combines both the spiritual and social dimensions of life. Good relations with different Muslim also maximise my dakwah efforts’ (interview, 9 June 2008). Like Ibrahim, Halim adapts to different religious views and practices. Once a barber and a part-time baker, Halim is now one of the religious teachers in the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque. Growing up in a Javanese neighbourhood, he speaks fluent Javanese and can perform Gamelan and traditional Javanese dance. However, he abandoned Javanese cultural practices after he became a Muslim and was influenced by the modernist Muhammadiyah. He explains, ‘I am not fanatic. It is not about haram or halal. I just feel that cultivating Islamic faith is more important.’ Although a modernist Muslim himself, Halim tells me, he has no problem with other religious teachers in the mosque who follow traditionalist Muslim practices, such as slametan. He says, ‘After all, we are all Muslims. We share the same goal, which is dakwah’ (interview, 2 November 2008).

Kamal Lee, born in 1973, an official in a private company, represents a contrasting religious standpoint. Although he rejects violence, Kamal Lee is a self-professed Salafist and holds puritan
and conservative Islamic views. For example, he criticises Gus Dur for being a ‘western agent’, disapproves of local Muslim practices such as *tahlilan* and views Ahmadiyah as ‘deviant’. He also keeps his beard to demonstrate his commitment to Islam, as the Prophet Muhammad did. Yet, he is an activist in the Lautze Mosque in Jakarta. He says, ‘As a Muslim, Islam is my priority, Chinese or not is not important. I practise Islam according to the Qur’an and Hadith. I do not follow Chinese cultural traditions that are *haram*, such as ancestor worship.’ Then he explains, ‘But, I have to compromise. I join the Chinese mosque, so that I can spread my understanding of Islam to new converts. If I am not here, Chinese converts might still burn incense. I have to rectify such behaviour’ (interview, 28 March 2008). Asri, a young male convert, shares Kamal Lee’s views. Asri graduated in Islamic laws from the Saudi-funded LIPIA (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab, Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies) in Jakarta in 2008. Without giving up his aims to purify Muslims practices, he tells me, he joined PITI, learnt to speak Mandarin and observes Chinese New Year celebrations as strategies to preach ‘true’ Islam to Chinese converts and non-Muslims (interview, 27 December 2008).

While Halim, Kamal and Asri strongly believe in religious orthodoxy, Ida and Mary do not confine their everyday practices to rigid understandings of Islam. Ida was born in 1952. She is an astrologist and a part-time preacher. Married to a Javanese Catholic, Ida tells me that she and her husband converted to Islam after they met Masagung, a prominent Chinese Muslim, in 1984 and were convinced by him that Islam was a beautiful religion. Ida practises her grandfather’s style of fortune-telling that combines Chinese *fengshui*, the Islamic calendar and Javanese astrology. She also offers the service of *slametan* for businessmen and other Javanese rituals at a mystical site, Gunung Kawi in East Java. When I met Ida at her home, I noticed there was an altar with burning incense for her grandfather. She comments, ‘Who says Muslims cannot pray for ancestors? According to my understanding, Islam teaches us about filial piety.’ She then surprisingly reveals to me, ‘I have just returned from the casino in Genting Highlands, Malaysia, a few days ago.'
days ago. I went with my Javanese friends and I helped them to gamble with my mystical knowledge. We do not wear the headscarf. No one in the casino knows that we are Muslim.' However, when she preaches, she wears the headscarf. She tells me frankly, 'I only speak in public occasionally. My Islamic knowledge is not deep. What I can do is quote a few Qur'anic verses and give general moral advice.' At the end of the interview I was confused by her religious attitudes. She sensed this and told me before I left, 'I am a Muslim, but I am also a normal human being. Muslims also need to have fun, right?' (interview, 2 November 2008).

Ida’s life story is not exceptional, as several Chinese converts I met shared similar experiences. Mary, a middle-aged convert, who became a Muslim to marry, is another interesting example. Mary trained in law and is now a businesswoman. She is also a committee member for PITI and a Muslim representative in FKUB (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, Inter-religious Harmony Forum), East Java. When I first met her at a PITI function, she covered her head with a kerudung, a loose headscarf. When I met her at her home for an interview, she was dressed in a Western-style office suit without any headscarf. She tells me, ‘I have just come back from meeting a customer from Japan. It is not practical to wear a headscarf when I do business. Furthermore, Surabaya is very hot and sweaty.’ Her living room is decorated with a few Javanese shadow puppets and two huge Chinese vases. On the wall, there is Islamic calligraphy, a poster of a popular Muslim preacher, Aa Gym, and a poster of Sai Baba, a popular Indian spiritual figure. She says, ‘I used to like Aa Gym a lot, but now no more, because he practises polygamy.’ With regard to Sai Baba, she explains, ‘When I was a teenager, I went through a serious illness. At that time, I was not yet a Muslim. With the blessing of Sai Baba, Buddha and other Chinese deities, I recovered.’ Then, she took me to a small room on the upper floor of her house. I was a bit shocked that there were many Buddha statues and Chinese deities with candles and incense inside the room. She defends her deity worship, which would be seen as polytheism by orthodox Muslims: ‘I know some ustaz will tell me that it is un-Islamic. But Islam also teaches us to
be grateful. I think that it is not wrong for me to show appreciation to my former religion that helped me a lot when I was sick.’ She also tells me that she sends her son to a Catholic School, so he can interact with people from different religious backgrounds. She adds, ‘After school time, we hire an ustaz to teach him Islam’ (interview, 17 November 2008).

A more extreme case is that of a Chinese Muslim businessman who manifested contrasting facets of his religiosity within the same day, at two different events. Agus is a successful businessman and also a haji, who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. One morning in 2008, to celebrate the Islamic New Year, Agus organised an Islamic study session at his company. He delivered a sermon in the Indonesian language in front of a Muslim-majority crowd, one of whom was a former religious minister. He discussed the meaning of Islamic New Year and the similarities between Islamic teachings and Chinese philosophies. In the evening of the same day, I joined him for a birthday dinner at a Chinese restaurant, at which most guests were Chinese Indonesians. It was not surprising that he spoke in Chinese, but he also ate pork and drank beer. One of his friends asked, ‘Mr Haji, are you sure you can drink beer?’ He responded, ‘Just once in a while, that is fine’ (field note, 22 March 2008).

In contrast to Agus, Afat is a relatively poor Chinese convert. Afat was born in 1956. He converted to Islam to marry a Muslim. He makes his living by selling koko clothes at mosques and during religious functions. He often attends Islamic study sessions at PITI, not to learn about Islam, but to seek financial help from richer Chinese Muslims and to sell koko clothes. During the 2009 elections, he campaigned for a Chinese Muslim candidate in an Islamic party, PPP, to earn money. Without explaining his reasons, he tells me that he does not have an identity card. Instead, he always carries along with him a certificate of conversion, issued by the Istiqlal Mosque. For instance, when he visits government offices, he will show officials his certificate of conversion. He says, ‘Once they know that I am a Muslim, everything becomes easier. Unlike other Chinese Indonesians, I do not have to pay extra money’ (interview, 20 December 2008).
Ethnicity in flux

Departing from religiosity, now I turn to another dimension of Chinese Muslim identity: ethnicity. A Chinese Indonesian converting to Islam is not only embracing a new religious identity, but also negotiating a new set of ethnic identities, given that the major ethnic groups in Indonesia are mostly Muslim. Many Chinese Muslims do not retain their Chinese identity after more than one generation, and the act of their conversion often intensifies the adoption of other non-religious aspects of non-Chinese identity, such as the use of Indonesian (and also Javanese for many of my informants) language, names, rituals and other lifestyle aspects. I address now two main aspects of the ethnic identification of Chinese Muslims: first, their shifting sense of belonging and diverse attitudes towards their Chinese identity; and second, their naming practices and multiple identifications in everyday lives.

Varieties of Chineseness

During the New Order regime, some Chinese leaders saw Islamic conversion as an attempt at assimilation and to overcome discrimination. However, such notions of assimilation are no longer popular today. In general, Chinese Muslims agree that conversion to Islam will lead to closer relationships between Chinese and non-Chinese. But they do not advocate losing their Chineseness in the process. They feel that Chinese Muslims can keep their Chinese cultural traditions as long as those practices do not violate Islamic teachings.

In everyday reality, ways to this reassertion of Chineseness are diverse and complex, mainly influenced by situated localities, cultural upbringing, economic status, social interaction and religious understanding. Some Chinese Muslims are proud to be Chinese and prefer to have a Muslim partner from the same ethnic background. They join Chinese Muslim organisations and visit Chinese-style mosques not only for religious purposes, but also for matchmaking and socialising. Meanwhile, most Chinese Muslims, especially those who live in Muslim-majority neighbourhoods and
those who study in state-owned schools, have frequent interactions with non-Chinese Muslims and many intermarry, so the mixing of culture is unavoidable. In this sense, Chinese culture can be altered, Indonesianised, Islamised, or sometimes discarded. At another extreme, there are Chinese Muslims who do not want to be seen as Chinese after conversion to Islam, saying they are ‘biologically Chinese, but culturally Javanese’ (field note, 25 September 2008).

One of my fieldwork limitations was that most of my informants were those who still saw themselves as ‘Chinese’ or ‘partly Chinese’ Muslims, however defined. Although the openness of post-New Order Indonesia has motivated some Chinese Muslim leaders, activists and preachers to reclaim their Chineseness, many ordinary Muslims who have a Chinese background do not really care about their Chinese identity and have integrated if not assimilated into the non-Chinese Muslim majority. I encountered some second-generation ‘Chinese Muslims’ who have Chinese and non-Chinese mixed parentage. When asked about their ethnic identifications, many of them did not see themselves as a ‘Chinese person’, and said they were ‘just Indonesian’ (orang Indonesia sahaja), ‘becoming Javanese’ (menjadi Jawa) or ‘mixed’ (campuran).

However, this self-identification is not always consistent with how other people may identify them. Some Chinese Muslims cannot ‘escape’ their Chineseness because of their physical appearance: they have fairer skin and narrow eyes, distinguishing themselves from many other Indonesians. From such physical attributes, preconceived notions of how each group behaves might have been already internalised before any kind of interactions occur. For example, a mixed Chinese-Malay-Dayak born-Muslim woman who does not see herself as a Chinese person, has always been seen as a new convert and been treated as a Chinese person by others because she is ‘Chinese looking’ (field note, 29 April 2008). Meanwhile another Chinese Muslim told me, ‘Every time I visit the mosque, I attract special attention, although I have been a Muslim for more than twenty years.’ He continues, ‘But non-Chinese converts, such as Batak Muslims, are ignored. They cannot be easily identified because they share similar facial features and
skin colour to the Javanese’ (field note, 7 January 2009). ‘Chinese-looking’ can be both a ‘curse’ and a ‘blessing’. Some informants told me that, although being Muslim, they continued to face discrimination especially in government offices because of their Chinese appearance. But for some Chinese preachers ‘Chinese-looking’ and other Chinese markers are their trademarks.

Below I list the various attitudes towards Chinese identity among Chinese Muslims or Indonesian Muslims of Chinese descent: (a) practice Chinese culture and proud to declare themselves as a Chinese person; (b) do not practise Chinese culture, but self identify as an ethnic Chinese; (c) have a Chinese appearance, but do not see themselves as Chinese; (d) strategically or conditionally emphasise their Chineseness; e) hide their Chinese identity to avoid discrimination; (f) do not look Chinese, but claim themselves as Chinese; (g) are indifferent or do not care (biasa-biasa saja, tidak peduli). This list is not a categorisation, but contains descriptions of how Chinese Muslims perceive themselves. In reality, people cannot be grouped easily under just one category; they might fulfil the criteria of several identifications. I explore such multiple identities through naming practices later. By doing so, I go beyond the conventional dichotomy of ‘Totok’ (pure blood, which also means Chinese-cultured) versus ‘Peranakan’ (mixed blood, also implying intermingled into local cultures), which is insufficient

9. Conventionally, scholars divide Chinese Indonesians into two main groups, the Chinese-cultured Totok (China-born, pure blood) and the acculturated Peranakan (local-born, mixed blood). In the twentieth century, Totok was used to refer to the new Chinese migrants to Indonesia who were foreign born. Meanwhile, Peranakan was used to refer to the descendants of mixed marriages, often between Chinese males and Indonesian females. The totok-peranakan distinction based on birthplace became unrealistic after new migrations of Chinese to Indonesia were banned after Indonesian independence. Hence, some scholars adopted a socio-cultural account of Totok and Peranakan. In this case, a Totok refers to those who still practise Chinese culture and speak Mandarin or one of the Chinese dialects. Similarly, a Peranakan refers to those who cannot speak Chinese and use Indonesian or a local language in their daily lives. However, during the Suharto period, Totok Chinese were rapidly ‘peranakanised’, largely as a result of the state’s assimilation policy. The consequence was a breakdown of the dichotomy between Totok and Peranakan. Today, in post-Suharto Indonesia, there is a celebration of ‘Chineseness’, including the ‘reclaiming’ of Chinese identity among Chinese Indonesians who had previously assimilated if not integrated into the
to capture the complexity and fluidity of ethnic identifications and cultural orientations. During my fieldwork, with the exception of those in Madura, not many Chinese Muslims saw themselves or other converts as either ‘Totok’ or ‘Peranakan’ Chinese.

Apart from cultural upbringing and social interaction, class and gender also play significant roles in determining ethnic identification among Chinese Muslims. Upper and middle class Chinese Muslims may utilise their identities for business and political purposes, yet some Chinese suffer financially after conversion to Islam because their non-Muslim Chinese families no longer support or recognise them. It is often, but not always, richer Chinese Muslims who tend to maintain their Chinese identities, while poorer Chinese Muslims are more likely to be assimilated. In terms of gender, male Chinese Muslims have a higher probability of passing their Chinese identity to the next generation by maintaining their family names.

Multiple names, multiple identifications

Many recent studies have pointed out that identities shift in different situations and can be variously stressed (Ang 2001a, Eriksen 1997, majority Indonesian population (see Hoon 2008). In short, as Tjhin (2002: 8) argues, such categories are confusing, superficial and misleading, and the grand fallacy is to picture the Chinese-Indonesian community as divided into these two major groups with distinct differences; while Budianta (2007: 186) suggests, ‘The process of negotiating the meaning and construction of Chineseness in Indonesia will not reach a closure.’

10. I visited Madura for a few days in 2008. The identity profile of Peranakan Muslims in Madura Island is interesting in reviewing the role of class in identity formation. There are a few Peranakan families in coastal Madura that have been Muslim for a few generations and still maintain their Peranakan identity today. The males are mainly businessmen and tend to practice endogamy: they marry other Peranakan or sometimes non-Peranakan Chinese to keep their distinct identity and business lineage. Others, especially those who are not involved in business, have intermarried with ethnic Madurese and lost their Peranakan heritage. Many Peranakan Muslims participate in Muhammadiyah, instead of NU, which is dominant in the island. This Peranakan experience in Madura shows that organisational affiliations and marriage patterns help in keeping or altering one’s identity. Zawawi Imron and Abdul Hadi WM are among the prominent Madurese poets and writers who claim themselves as Peranakan Muslims, although they do not look Chinese and do not have Chinese names.
2002; Ong 1993; Song 2003); such a multiplication of attachments is especially true for Chinese Muslims in Indonesia who have to deal with different identities: Indonesian (including Javanese), Chinese and Muslim. Distinctions such as ‘front-stage-backstage’ (Goffman 1959) and ‘detached-embedded identity’ (Tilly 2002) have been used by scholars to study different enactments of an individual identity in the public and the private spheres. Yet the multifaceted character of Chinese Muslim identifications goes beyond the divide between a public and a private identity. Many Chinese converts perform in more than one public setting. One can emphasise Chineseness to attract audiences to a public sermon, while downplaying Chineseness to escape discrimination when dealing with government officials. Chinese Muslims also often highlight the different dimensions of their identities, in their daily interactions with family members, friends and colleagues. One can use a ‘Chinese name’ when talking to a Chinese person, but use an ‘Islamic name’ when talking to a Muslim. Furthermore, quite often there is no clear distinction between one’s public and private identity.

Personal names play an important role in reflecting and sometimes determining one’s identity and cultural affiliation, as well as having broader historical and political meanings within a society (Reid & McDonald 2010; Scott, Tehranian & Mathias 2002). Seeing the use of personal names as a negotiable identity definer, I illustrate the everyday naming practices of Chinese Muslims to reveal their multiple identifications.11 Although it is not compulsory, many Chinese converts adopt an ‘Islamic’ name.12 Also, during the

11. For a discussion of Chinese Muslim naming practices and their multiple identifications in Malaysia, see Hew (2010).

12. Islamic names often originate from Arabic personal names (also Turkish and Persian), of which many are names of prophets or companions of the Prophet, such as Ibrahim and Yusuf and Omar. Yet, the meaning of ‘Islamic name’ is contested, since Islamic texts do not require Muslims to adopt certain kinds of names. Moreover, a variety of ‘Muslim names’ evolved to fit various cultural traditions and local settings where Muslims reside. Muhammad (2010) has argued that the concept of an ‘Islamic name’ has no basis in the Qur’an, and has questioned whether the so-called Islamic names such as Muhammad, Ali and Khadija are merely Arabic names. He adds that the act of changing one’s name does not make someone more Muslim; rather, it alienates that person from the
New Order period, the regime forced Chinese Indonesians to drop their Chinese names and adopt ‘Indonesian-sounding’ names. Many Chinese Indonesians, therefore, depending on their religion and locality, adopted different types of names, including Western or Christian names, Javanese names, Batak names and ‘Islamic’ names. Some of them also used ‘Indonesianised’ Chinese family names, such as Salim for ‘Lim’, Wijaya for ‘Oei’, Tanujaya for ‘Tan’.

Like many other Chinese Indonesians, the Chinese Muslims that I met during fieldwork had adopted a variety of naming forms: Javanese (or other local ethnic names), ‘Islamic’, Chinese, Western, Christian, or a combination of any two of these. Some had three names: Javanese, Chinese and ‘Islamic’, which allowed them to use different names to stress different aspects of their identities, depending on the situation.

During my fieldwork, a couple of Chinese converts did not use an ‘Islamic name’. As one of them said, ‘I converted to be a Muslim, not an ethnic Arab. Many Javanese Muslims also keep their customary names, so why do I have to use a name such as Muhammad?’ (field note, 6 November 2008).

13. An ‘Indonesian-sounding’ name is a problematic concept, since Indonesians from different ethnic and religious backgrounds adopt different types of naming, including Islamic names, Western or Christian names, Javanese names, Sundanese names, Batak names. Such naming diversity gives Chinese Indonesians many options to creatively adopt ‘Indonesian-sounding’ names. Some Chinese Indonesians, especially those who are Christians or educated in missionary schools use Western or Christian names as their first names, with Javanese or other local names as their family names, such as Albert Gunawan and Edwin Suryalaksana. Those who prefer to keep their family or business lineages adopt Javanese or other local names based on phonetics that are identical with their Chinese surnames. They create ‘Indonesianised’ Chinese family names and sometimes pass it to their children. Chinese businessman, Liem Sioe Liong, became Sudono Salim, and his family and corporation retained ‘Salim’ as an inherited family name. Despite using ‘Indonesianised’ names in legal documents, some Chinese Indonesians, especially those who are Chinese-educated, also keep giving Chinese names to their next generations and sometimes use their Chinese names at home. There are also a few Chinese Indonesians who choose to keep their Chinese names public. For example, Kwik Kian Gee, who was finance minister during the Megawati presidency, despite his commitment to Indonesian nationalism, refused to change his name. Meanwhile those who do not wish to keep their Chinese identity use fully Javanese or other local names. There are also some Chinese Indonesians, including non-Muslims, who adopt Islamic names on their identity cards, especially those who reside in Sumatra, Sulawesi and Kalimantan, where the local majorities use Islamic names. For example, during my fieldwork in Palembang, many Chinese Muslims told me that they had used Islamic names before their conversion.
For some Chinese Muslims, their Chinese names are concealed, to avoid discrimination in the workplace, school or government agencies. Suhandoyo Laison, who was born into a Chinese convert family, did not reveal his Chinese ethnicity to his schoolmates at his Islamic school because he was the only ethnic Chinese among them and did not want to be treated differently. Suhandoyo recounted his experience of nevertheless being bullied by his classmates for his ethnicity: They kept calling him ‘Cina’ (a derogatory term for a Chinese Indonesian) and asking him to give them money, as they assumed that the Chinese were economically better off. He stopped using his ‘Indonesianised’ Chinese family name, Laison, and tried to darken his skin by exposing himself to the sun frequently. He said, ‘After I went to high school, no one noticed that I was Chinese because I was known as Suhandoyo only.’

But, Suhandoyo changed his attitude towards his Chineseness when he was studying at the State Islamic University in Jakarta. As a student activist during the reformasi period, in order to challenge the perception that ethnic Chinese were not interested in politics, he reclaimed his Chinese identity by emphasising his Chinese name. He told me, ‘During a discussion group, a few Muslim students said the anti-Chinese violence could be justified, as Chinese Indonesians were arrogant and not patriotic.’ He disputed this, ‘The Chinese are not unpatriotic. Maybe some of you are not aware that I am an ethnic Chinese. My full name is Suhandoyo Laison and Laison is my family name. My Chinese name is Lai Jia Kit. Do you think I am not patriotic just because I am a Chinese person?’ (interview, 13 April 2008). By hiding his Chinese name, Suhandoyo ‘conceals’ his Chineseness; and by revealing it, he ‘reclaims’ his Chinese identity. In other words, name choice reflects how a Chinese Muslim like him would like to be perceived by others, either to highlight or downplay his Chineseness.

Chinese names can also be a feature of attraction, some Chinese Muslim preachers, such as Tan Mei Hwa and Koko Liem, use their Chinese names to draw media attention. Ahmad Hariyono Ong, a religious teacher in Surabaya, purposely uses his Chinese surname, Ong, during Islamic study sessions, to preach the universality of
Islam. He was born during the New Order regime, and thus given a Javanese name by his parents, Hariyono, on his identity card. His father also gave him a full Chinese name, which he rarely uses and could not for me even remember. After converting to Islam, he adopted an Islamic name, Ahmad. Over the last few years, after becoming a religious teacher, he put his Chinese surname along with his Javanese and Islamic names, to show that Chinese ethnicity, Indonesian nationality and Islamic religiosity can co-exist. When I talked to Hariyono in 2008, he had a newborn son, to whom he had given the name ‘Muhammad Relaghtus Al-Fath’. He told me that the Islamic name was chosen by a prominent local Islamic scholar and that he believed the name was both a form of blessing and a reminder to his son to behave according to Islamic teachings. In addition, his son has a full Chinese name, Ong Qiang Lin, given by Hariyono’s father. He said, ‘This is important so my son will not forget his Chinese heritage’ (interview, 30 September 2008).

Occupation plays an important role in the naming practices of Chinese Muslims. Ki Budi or Nurul Fajar is an obvious example. He is a paranormal practitioner and a leader of an Islamic chanting group (majelis zikir). He tells me, ‘I am Ki Budi when I practise alternative medicine, and I am ustaz Nurul Fajar when I lead an Islamic chanting group’ (interview, 23 December 2008). Ki is a Javanese title of respect for a learned person; Budi is derived from his Javanese name, Budiyono; while Nurul Fajar is his Islamic name. Siew Hwa, a make-up artist, also has more than one name. She says, ‘My name on my identity card is Dian Christanto. When I converted to Islam, I was given an Islamic name, Aisyah, by an ustaz. I only use it when I attend religious functions.’ In her workplace, Siew Hwa prefers to use her Chinese name. She tells me, ‘Siew Hwa means beautiful flower. It suits the nature of my job. I feel uncomfortable using my Islamic name at work because I have to interact with a lot of non-Muslims’ (interview, 16 January 2009).

Like Siew Hwa, Ahmad Naga, a young activist in the Lautze Mosque, has three names. He has listed all his personal names on his business card, which he gave to me when I first met him. His official Indonesian name is Naga Kunadi, while Ahmad is
his Islamic name. On the business card, he also lists his Chinese name, both in Romanised pinyin and Chinese characters, Chiou Xue Lung. He tells me, ‘Different people address me by different names. My Muslim friends call me ‘Ahmad’ and non-Muslims call me ‘Naga’ At home, my parents call me Ah Liong’ (interview, 11 April 2008). Naga (Indonesia), Lung (Mandarin) and Ah Liong (Hokkien) have the same meaning – dragon.

Flexible piety and multiple identifications

Reflecting on the various life stories I have unravelled above, I think of the elusive shapes and colours of being Chinese Muslim in Indonesia: the flexibilities, the inconsistencies and the very different life experiences. These wide ranging and complex identities make neat generalisations and comprehensive analysis almost impossible. Not only is there a diversity of religious affiliation and cultural orientation among different Chinese Muslims, but an individual can also stress different dimensions of their identities across time and space. Rather than approaching their everyday lives in the hope of distinguishing between the authentic and the inauthentic self, or investigating which identity is more important for them, this chapter recognises that the Chinese Muslim self is the collection of multiple and sometimes conflicting attachments. As revealed by their choice of names, many Chinese Muslims can emphasise or downplay their Chineseness depending on conditions. Such multiple identifications are shared by other Chinese Indonesians, and as Budianta (2007: 176) suggests, ‘provide a space for understanding and appreciating the multiple meanings of Chineseness that are expressed in the “Chinese euphoria” of post-1998 Indonesia.

To study Islamic identities, understandings and practices among Chinese Muslims, two dimensions need to be considered: the political economies of shifting religiosities and the cultural politics of flexible piety. Their religiosities rely not only on their interpretation of Qur’anic texts and Islamic teachings, but also on the contingent political, social, cultural and economic circumstances of their
understandings of Islam. The diverse religiosities reflect the wide range of social and religious interests among Chinese Muslims, as well as their very different conversion motivations and religious experiences. Given that conversion is an on-going process of religious transformation, the notion of flexible piety implies the multiple, selective and sometimes inconsistent adaption of Islamic religiosity amongst converts according to their living contexts. They accommodate Islamic practices in their daily lives, and also adjust their daily habits according to their religious understandings.

Such flexible piety is prevalent among but not limited to converts. As ordinary Indonesian Muslims today are in differing ways facing the challenges of an ‘Islamic resurgence’ that is associated with legal-formalistic demands and conservative attitudes. Nevertheless, negotiating their religious commitments, diverse Islamic understandings and everyday life challenges, Muslims’ resilient flexibility in the practices and interpretations of Islam persist amid the rise of assertive Islam. Such flexibility is the antithesis of a rigid observance of religious doctrines, by asserting that there are multiple ways of being a Muslim in Indonesia. Let me end this chapter by recounting my conversation with a Javanese Muslim girl, Indah, in Surabaya. Indah often wears colourful and up-to-the-minute ‘Islamic dress’, and wishes to run an ‘Islamic fashion’ boutique. When we went out for dinner one day, she refused to eat at a noodle stall run by a Chinese person and said, ‘I know he uses chicken instead of pork, but I’m afraid that he may still use lard when cooking noodles’ (field note, 17 September 2008). On another day, at lunchtime during Ramadan, I visited her office. She was eating pizza, and invited me to join her. She said, ‘Don’t worry. I am hungry and I have to eat so that I can keep doing my job.’ Refusing to eat noodles that may contain lard, yet eating lunch during fasting hours, she explained, ‘Islam is a flexible religion. We can follow Islamic teachings according to our ability.’ She then asked me, ‘When are you going to convert to Islam?’ (field note, 22 September 2008).
Chapter 8

Conclusion: Inclusive Chineseness and Cosmopolitan Islam

Reflecting on the discussions of my preceding chapters, I think of the often fluid shapes and elusive colours of being Chinese Muslim in post-New Order Indonesia: the heterogeneity and multiplicity; the different life experiences; the range of economic, political, social and religious interests. My research has shown how and under what conditions ethnicity and religiosity are performed and negotiated in a variety of ways, in public and private, individually and collectively, unintentionally and intentionally. Given the multifarious motivations, processes and outcomes of such identity negotiation, it is difficult to come to a neat conclusion, but easy to set one’s eye on one part, incorrectly believing it to represent the whole. Despite these diversified identifications, I witness vividly a growing public manifestation of Chinese Muslim cultural identities, as shown in their mosques, preaching strategies and cultural celebrations.

In this concluding chapter, by pulling together the main arguments from earlier chapters, I explore the possibilities of cosmopolitan Islam and Chineseness in contemporary Indonesia. Instead of seeing themselves as a ‘double minority’ (an ethnic minority within Muslim Indonesians and a religious minority within Chinese Indonesians), many Chinese Muslims today capitalise on their strategic positions as ‘bridge builders’ between non-Muslim Chinese and non-Chinese Muslim Indonesians. They creatively promote the universality of Islam, uphold the inclusivity of Chineseness, and reconcile the widely held incompatibility between Islam and Chineseness in Indonesia.

The diverse responses towards the reaffirmation of a Chinese identity in today’s Indonesia, as well as the divergent progressive and conservative tendencies of Indonesian Muslims, form a broader canvas for the emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities.
CONCLUSION

The public celebration of Chineseness reflects the cultural openness of post-New Order Indonesian governments and empowers the formerly suppressed minority. Yet, this is not without criticism and opposition, from both non-Chinese and Chinese Indonesians. Dahana (2000) and Tjhin (2004) have questioned whether the symbolic celebration of Chineseness can address the real problems faced by many Chinese Indonesians, such as the discrimination they face when dealing with officials. Meanwhile, Budianta (2007) and Hoon (2009) have pointed to the worries of some Chinese that an excessive display of Chineseness might reinforce negative stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians as being exclusive and arrogant, as well as deepen the prejudice of non-Chinese towards them, given that there are social jealousies against those who are seen as ‘rich Chinese’. Furthermore, as Heryanto (2004, 2008) indicates, there is a growing tendency to essentialise Chineseness as a given reality, reducing the complexity of Chinese Indonesian living identities to a set of characteristics and traditions, such as speaking Mandarin and wearing Chinese attire. Responding to these critics, many Chinese people incorporate national elements, local traditions and Muslim figures in their promotion of Chinese culture, as a way of reconciling their assertion of Chinese identity and their commitment to Indonesian nationalism, while many younger Chinese Indonesians are involved in social advocacy beyond ethnicity, such as promoting human rights and fostering interethnic solidarity.

Islam has played an important role in democratising Indonesia as a moral force for social justice and clean government. Yet, Indonesian Islam post-1998 has also been marked by negative manifestations, such as the terrorist attacks in Jakarta and Bali, the burning of churches and the killing of Ahmadiyah followers in Banten, which have challenged general views about the supposedly peaceful, inclusive and tolerant nature of Islam in Indonesia. The ‘conservative turn’ in Indonesian Islam is also evident in events such as the issue of a MUI fatwa against ‘secularism, pluralism and liberalism’, the passing of the Anti-Pornography Bill and the implementation of sharia-influenced by-laws in some regions. This trend has worried many Muslims and non-Muslims, who see it
as undermining Indonesia’s inter-religious harmony and intra-religious diversity. Human rights, women’s rights and arts activists have also expressed their concerns that Islamic conservatism might suppress personal freedom, gender equality and artistic expression. Nonetheless, amid this growing conservatism, there are various attempts by many Muslim groups and leaders to promote an Islam that is liberal in interpretation, supportive of cultural diversity, valuing local culture and peaceful in approach. For example, Islamic feminism has gained momentum in Indonesia, suggesting there is no contradiction between Islamic religiosity and gender equality, and promoting of women’s rights using an Islamic framework (Robinson 2008).

Situated in these contexts, some Chinese Muslims have found themselves in a strategic position to uphold a Chinese culture that is inclusive and to advocate an Islamic religiosity that is tolerant. Many Chinese Indonesians support the particular expression of Chinese Muslim cultural identities because this helps to redefine their minority position and promote a positive image of ethnic Chinese among local Muslims. Meanwhile, many Muslim leaders endorse such an ethno-religious cultural manifestation, as a way of preaching Islam, promoting religious pluralism, and gaining political and financial support from Chinese Indonesians. At first glance, this welcoming of a special Chinese Muslim culture shows that the expression of Chineseness can be grounded in local sensibility and shared by the local ethnic majority who are mainly Muslims, and that Islamic religiosity can be tolerant of cultural diversity and be accepted by non-Muslims.

Chinese-style mosques are the most successful and concrete expression of Chinese Muslim culture in Indonesia today. The inclusive architectural designs and social activities of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque are notable examples proposing that the celebration of Chinese cultural expression does not necessitate the promotion of social exclusivity. Although the mosque was built in a Chinese style and is managed by Chinese Muslims, it is a socio-religious space wherein both Muslims and non-Muslims from different ethnic groups can mix and interact with each other. The
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explicit expression of Chineseness in the mosque challenges the notion of ‘assimilation through Islam’ which was prevalent during the New Order and shows that there is a Chinese way of being Muslim, which however does not mean the abandonment of the idea of ethnicity as flexible and multiple. Indeed, many Chinese Muslims who are active in the mosque have frequent interaction with non-Chinese and are also involved with religious activities in other mosques. Moreover, most of those who perform Friday prayers and attend Islamic study sessions at the mosque are non-Chinese Muslims. Therefore, the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque embraced ‘inclusive Chineseness’, demonstrating that the practice of Chinese culture is no longer a sign of ethnic exclusivity but a common heritage that can be shared by all Indonesians.

The Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque also promotes Islam as a localised yet universal religion. Its ‘temple-like’ look nudges Indonesian mosques away from their large domes, onion-shaped arches and minarets. Some Muslim who support the localisation of Islam see it as a form of resistance against the ‘Arabisation’ of mosque architecture in Indonesia. The adaptation of religious symbols from both modernist and traditionalist Muslim groups, and the incorporation of Muslim preachers from various religious backgrounds, reflect the openness of Chinese Muslims towards various interpretations and practices of Islam. While the avoidance of using loud-speakers to broadcast morning *azan*, and the collaboration with non-Muslim organisations, show that the assertion of Islamic identity does not affect the relation of Chinese Muslims to their non-Muslim counterparts. To project a cosmopolitan image of Islam, Chinese Muslim leaders quoted Qur’anic texts to show that Islam is a religion of ‘rahmatan lil ‘alamin’ (blessings for the universe) that emphasises ‘hablum minalloohi wa hablum minannaas’ (the good relationship with God and also among humankind). Cheng Hoo Mosque is arguably a ‘cosmopolitan [space] envisaged in marginality’ (Bhabha 1996a), in which minority Chinese Muslims redefine their social position, from a ‘double minority’ to an ‘intermediate community’, by playing a significant role in promoting interethnic solidarity and religious harmony.
The inclusivity of Chinese Muslim cultural practice affirms that there is no necessary contradiction between cosmopolitan visions and identity claims, that in fact many cosmopolitan practices may be ‘grounded’ in the experiences of particular cultural groups (Kahn 2008: 268; also Appiah 1998; Werbner 2006, 2008). However, a closer examination of the popularity of Chinese Muslim preachers and debates on Chinese New Year celebrations may caution us about the cosmopolitan potential of their cultural identities. Some Chinese preachers strategically use Chinese cultural symbols in their preaching to promote the universality of Islam and to ‘perform’ a hybridised form of Islam. Instead of the koko shirt with a peci, or a long robe with a turban, some Chinese preachers wear traditional Chinese clothing with a Chinese skullcap. Yet this risks essentialising a complex and fluid Chineseness into a set of clichéd and fixed cultural markers, such as Chinese names and attire, thus reconsolidating an ethnic Chinese stereotype among the broader Indonesian population, albeit not a negative one.

Furthermore, although Chinese preachers project diverse faces of Islam, they neither offer a critical understanding of Islam nor pluralise the religious debates in Indonesia. The messages of the Chinese preachers can be both cosmopolitan and ‘counter-cosmopolitan’ (Appiah 2006), depending on the preachers and their audiences. While Tan Mei Hwa emphasises the inclusivity of Islamic teachings and the applications of Islamic values in everyday life, Irena Handono constantly criticises Christianity and questions various localised Muslim practices. Other Chinese preachers are in general moderate and tolerant in their preaching, yet sometimes they restrict themselves to rather conservative religious viewpoints, for example, Anton Medan’s support of the implementation of Sharia laws, Koko Lim’s disapproval of Muslims celebrating Valentine’s Day, and Syafii Antonio’s disapproval of Muslims wishing Christians a ‘Merry Christmas’. For converts-turned-preachers, affirming an orthodox understanding of Islam is not surprising, as this is a way of proving their commitment to Islam and demonstrating their credentials as preachers.
CONCLUSION

The controversies and debates around Chinese New Year ceremonies in Yogyakarta mosques reveal the diverse religious opinions of Indonesian Muslims, including Chinese converts. Some Muslims view Imlek as halal, some as haram, and many think it is permissible as long as its celebrations do not involve ‘un-Islamic’ elements, such as deity worship and the consumption of haram food. Chinese Muslim leaders deploy the ‘religion–culture’ distinction to defend Imlek celebrations in mosques, by arguing that Imlek is merely a Chinese ‘cultural’ tradition, and thus that there is no question of polytheism or other ‘religious’ elements in such celebration. Some Chinese Muslims also see this accommodation of Chinese cultural elements in mosques as a form of Islamic preaching, part of their ‘dakwah pendekatan budaya’ (preaching through cultural approaches). The ‘religion–culture’ distinction might be convincing enough to justify ‘cultural’ celebration, yet it stops short of defending customary practices which might contain ‘religious’ elements. Despite the disapproval of orthodox Muslims, many Chinese Muslims continue to practice ‘non-Islamic’ rituals in everyday life, such as ancestor worship and the burning of incense. They justify these customary practices by referring to universal Islamic values, such as filial piety and the respecting of elders.

By distinguishing the sphere of ‘religion’ from that of ‘culture’, MUI has issued a fatwa stating that the celebration of Chinese New Year is not haram, provided it does not involve ‘non-Islamic’ religious rituals. However, MUI has previously also issued fatwas that prohibit Muslims from celebrating Valentine’s Day and Christmas, as well as calling for the banning of the Ahmadiyah, a controversial Muslim sect rejected by many orthodox Islamic groups. I propose that the MUI fatwas allowing Imlek but prohibiting Christmas both reflect both the possibilities and the limitations of Islamic cosmopolitanism in contemporary Indonesia. While there is an increasing acceptance of cultural diversity among Muslims, there is also a rising intolerance towards religious intermingling and intra-religion differences within some sections of Indonesian Muslims. While most Muslim scholars do not have problems with the establishment of Chinese-style mosques, some hesitate to
endorse Chinese New Year ceremonies in mosques. Many Muslim leaders, including those in the conservatively inclined MUI, allow the celebration of Chinese New Year, yet disapprove of and avoid Christmas celebrations. When it comes to Ahmadiyah, few Muslim scholars lend their support to a Muslim sect which was deemed ‘deviant’ according to a MUI fatwa. Even the government fails to protect Ahmadiyah’s followers from being attacked by radical Muslim groups. In other words, many Muslim scholars accept the cultural diversity, provided it falls within specified ‘orthodox’ boundaries; yet they hesitate to cross religious boundaries, observe non-Islamic rituals and endorse alternative interpretations of Islam. While such Muslim scholars can be seen as ‘pluralists’ for their acceptance of cultural differences, they are far from being ‘cosmopolitans’, because of their unwillingness to cross religious boundaries.

Nevertheless, despite the self-essentialisation of Chineseness and the subscription to a conservative religious understanding among some Chinese Muslims, I propose that Chinese Muslim cultural identities, especially as manifested in their mosques, embrace a limited kind of cosmopolitan Islam and inclusive Chineseness. Chinese-style mosques provide a model for multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence. Being ‘more’ Muslim does not necessarily mean being inward-looking and losing your cultural traditions. Being ‘more’ Chinese does not necessarily mean being exclusive and losing your local affiliations. In other words, one can be ‘more Islamic, but no less Chinese’, as well as ‘more Chinese, but no less Indonesian’. The emergence in Indonesia of a variety of Chinese Muslim cultural identities has pluralised the discourses of Chineseness and Islam. Furthermore, Chinese Muslim cultures are now shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims, Chinese and non-Chinese; and they open up more spaces for social interactions and boundary crossings. Indeed, Chinese Muslim cultural identities are always at risk of disappearance because of the intense interaction and frequent intermarriage between Chinese Muslims and non-Chinese Muslims.

However, there are three reservations that deserve to be mentioned here. First, the inclusivity of Chinese Muslim culture does
not necessarily guarantee the decline of class differences, racial inequality and religious conservatism. Second, while Chinese Muslim cultural identities in general embrace ‘cosmopolitan’ values, not all Chinese Muslims are equally ‘cosmopolitan’; some of them are hostile to both their former religions and their cultural traditions. Third, such ‘cosmopolitan’ practices are not new in Indonesia, but can be traced back to the interaction between Islamic, Chinese and local cultures during the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

Amidst the concerns about ‘purification’ and the ‘conservative turn’ of Indonesian Islam (Bruinessen 2013), this book has sketched another face of Indonesian Islam, which is inclusive and in favour of diversity, albeit not without contestation. Amidst the propagation of an ‘Islam of the archipelago’ (Islam Nusantara) (Sahal and Aziz 2015), this book has analysed Chinese Muslim cultural identities as part of Indonesian Islam, contributing to the on-going negotiations of diverse Islamic traditions in the archipelago. The growth of Chinese Muslim cultural identities in contemporary Indonesia shows that the mediation between the growing Islamic religiosity and the existing cultural diversity is leading to a form of Islamic piety which is both assertive and inclusive.
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Chinese Ways of Being Muslim


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