Negotiating Identity: The Cheng Hoo Mosque and Ethnic Chinese Muslims in Post-Soeharto Indonesia

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Introduction

For ethnic Chinese, the New Order period (1966-1998) marked a dark passage of time in regard to negotiating their identity in an Indonesian context. The Soeharto regime pressured ethnic Chinese to act only in an economic sphere, so that there was scarcely any room to articulate any other interests and identity, including their traditional culture. By the presidential decree of 1967, followed by the Presidium Instruction No. 14/1967, the regime further banned all public expression of Chinese religion, beliefs and tradition. This state repression of Chinese socio-cultural and political activities for over three decades caused Chinese identity to rust and almost to be lost.

The political situation has changed since the collapse of the New Order in 1998. As with other social groups, state control over ethnic Chinese has lessened, especially from 2000 when President Abdurrahman Wahid abolished the 1967 presidential decree and Presidium Instruction No. 14/1967. In response to this changed political situation, attempts have occurred to re-promote long suppressed ethnic Chinese identities, and alternative discourses of identity have emerged along varying avenues, from political to socio-religious and cultural ones. One good example of the re-promoting of ethnic Chinese identities in contemporary Indonesia is the subject of this paper. It is the establishment of the Cheng Hoo mosque in Surabaya by an ethnic Chinese Muslim group called Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam or PITI (literally “the Supervisory Board for Islamic Faith and Theology”, meaning “the association of Indonesian ethnic Chinese Muslims”) of East Java.

This research note considers how Indonesia’s Chinese Muslims, and particularly those in Surabaya, are using the Cheng Hoo mosque to negotiate their identity as Muslims and ethnic Chinese within Indonesia’s wider cultures. Several questions arise from this broad topic. Is the Cheng Hoo mosque only oriented towards ethnic Chinese Muslims? How do the mosque’s main members (jama‘ah) perceive their mosque? Do ethnic Chinese Muslims, for instance, hope to use the Cheng Hoo mosque instrumentally, as a way of securing themselves from possible anti-Chinese riots like those that erupted so violently for several days after the toppling of Soeharto from power, or do they have more complex goals in mind?

The PITI and the Cheng Hoo Mosque

After the failed 1965 coup in Indonesia, in which Chinese communists were heavily involved, a social assimilationist idea was advanced by Chinese figures like Junus Jahja and Muh Budyatna who suggested ethnic Chinese people should convert to Islam. They argued that conversion would lessen the political problems and ethnically-
Conversion to Islam had existed for generations already on a small scale, and had been regarded by some ethnic Chinese Muslims as “a last and final act or a finishing touch of assimilation”. Even though the exact number of converts is unknown, conversion did seem to pave the way for greater social assimilation between ethnic Chinese in general and local communities in Indonesia. Ethnic Chinese Muslims had emerged as a variant within ethnic Chinese communities in Indonesia by the mid-twentieth century, and organised social groups arose within their ranks to accommodate this interest. Notable among these were Persatuan Islam Tionghoa (PIT/Islamic ethnic Chinese Association, established in 1953) and Persatuan Tionghoa Muslim (PTM/Muslim ethnic Chinese Association, headed by Gong Tjing). In 1961, these two associations merged to form an integrated organisation called Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia (PIT or Indonesian Ethnic Chinese Muslim Association), which changed its name to Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam in 1972.

Although the 1972 PITI still basically represented ethnic Chinese Muslims, its activists dropped the word “Tionghoa” (Chinese) from the title. In his study, Rubaidi maintains there was insufficient data to indicate why the name change occurred at the time, although he believed it was done as a jaminan keamanan (security guarantee), a strategy for protecting members from the overwhelmingly anti-Chinese sentiment rising within Indonesian communities at the time. By accentuating “Islam”, and leaving “Chinese” out of the symbolic identity of the organisation, the PITI wanted to protect ethnic Chinese Muslims against any possible violence associated with the growing anti-Chinese feeling. It is also likely that the name change reflected the increasingly restrictive policy of the New Order regime towards the public expression of Chinese culture, including using Chinese names for exclusive purposes, that culminated in the 1967 ban on the public expression of Chinese culture and religion.

The broad organisational structure of the PITI resembles other Muslim mass organisations, such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (or NU), in that it reaches from the national to the local levels. In two significant features the PITI’s structure differs, however. Unlike other organisations that penetrate to the ranting (village) level, PITI only reaches the kecamatan (subdistrict) level, and the PITI is more of an upside-down pyramid in the sense that organisational committees are larger at the national than at its lower levels.

The Cheng Hoo mosque is a project of a middle-level provincial grouping, the PITI of East Java, which begun to establish the mosque in Gading Street, Surabaya, on 10 March 2002. It was formally opened on 13 May 2003. The mosque was designed locally, by Aziz Johan Arifin from Bojonegoro, East Java, and the Rp 700 million it cost to build was raised from among PITI members. Accommodating approximately 200 people, the mosque covers 231 square metres (21 metres x 11 metres) in the back of

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7 Rubaidi, “Cina Muslim,” p. 73.
8 Rubaidi, “Cina Muslim,” p. 74.
the East Java PITI compound. It is run by the Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia (YHMCHI or the Indonesian Foundation of Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo), an organisation set up by the East Java PITI to optimise the day-to-day operations of the mosque.\(^{10}\)

The establishment of the Cheng Hoo mosque seems designed, among other things, to show the common identity in kemusliman (Muslimness) of ethnic Chinese Muslim communities and other Indonesian people. In the words of Edwin Suryalaksana, the head of the East Java PITI and a member of the YHMCHI supervisory board, the establishment of the Cheng Hoo mosque was intended, in part, to let "the [Indonesian] people to know that among ethnic Chinese there are Muslims and they also have a mosque, like other Muslim communities in Indonesia."\(^{11}\) However, Suryalaksana’s statement suggests a more political motive might also have influenced the establishment of the Cheng Hoo mosque. It implies that ethnic Chinese Muslims hope the existence of the mosque will encourage local Indonesian communities to treat them differently from ethnic Chinese in general, because of their shared religious beliefs. By behaving like other Indonesian Muslims, these Chinese Muslims hope to avoid stirring up any blind anti-Chinese sentiment arising from the socio-psychological bitterness of past experience in local communities. The establishment of the Cheng Hoo mosque can thus be seen as a stepping stone helping to pave the way toward non-discriminatory practices on the part of local Indonesian communities by helping them to recognise Chinese Muslims as having a similar Islamic religious identity as themselves. By establishing the Cheng Hoo mosque, Surabaya’s Chinese Muslims were striving towards greater social harmony with the majority Muslim population.

In the wider Indonesian context, the Cheng Hoo mosque also represents a new departure. It is the first ethnic Chinese-based mosque to promote previously-banned Chinese culture in a local context by making use of Chinese architectural features, both externally and internally. The Cheng Hoo mosque is certainly not the first ethnic Chinese Muslim mosque. Several other traditional mosques exist across Java, along with the Lau Tze mosque in a Chinese district of Pasar Baru in Jakarta. This last was built in 1997, only a few years before President Wahid issued the 2000 decree that allowed public expression of Chinese culture and tradition in Indonesia once again. Because it pre-dated that decree, little about the Lau Tze mosque seems specifically Chinese beyond its name and red-coloured wall. None of its design features typify Chinese culture, while the mosque itself looks rather like a shop-house, since the building that houses it was initially used for business purposes.

### Cheng Hoo Mosque and Ethnic Chinese Muslim Identity: An Indigenisation and Assimilation Process

On 15 April 1994, two related socio-religious events occurred involving the provincial branch committees of the PITI of East Java in the Islamic Centre of Surabaya. They were a Halal Bi Halal (or a meeting for mutual forgiveness) and a Silaturrahmi (literally “strengthening the brotherhood lines”). The provincial governor of East Java, M. Basofin Sudirman, attended and delivered a speech that encouraged ethnic Chinese Muslims in East Java not to worry about their social identity among the wider communities in Indonesia. In an event entitled “Memupuk Rasa Persaudaraan, Keakraban dan...”

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\(^{11}\) The original Indonesian reads: “supaya masyarakat mengetahui bahwa dari kalangan Tionghoa ada yang Muslim dan mereka juga mempunyai Masjid sebagaimana masyarakat Muslim lainnya di Indonesia.” Interview with Edwin Suryalaksana, Surabaya, 9 February 2007.
Muzakki: The Cheng Hoo Mosque and Ethnic Chinese Indonesians

Kepedulian Sosial [Cultivating the Spirit of Brotherhood, Acquaintance and Social Concern]

Sudirman said:12

To ethnic Chinese Muslims in Indonesia there is no need to be afraid and to worry that their Islamic identity will be suspected [by others...]. If the sense of hesitancy in showing an Islamic identity weighs on [our] colleagues who are ethnic Chinese Muslims, this basically results from the [negative] attitudes of wider Muslim communities in Indonesia who still frequently keep a suspicious watch [on their belief in Islam].

Sudirman’s statement indicates that distrust of ethnic Chinese Muslims, as of other ethnic Chinese communities, did not arise only from the policies and attitudes of the state bureaucracy or political elites but also reflected the feelings of ordinary people, referred to in Soeharto regime political vocabulary as “pribumi.” Among these pribumi were local Muslim communities.13 Although ethnic Chinese activities were limited to economic and commercial concerns under the Soeharto regime, this restriction could do little to lessen their social tensions with local communities because their fundamental cause was economic. A widespread pribumi identification of ethnic Chinese in general as exploitative, deceitful and dishonest continued unabated. This negative view of Chinese in Indonesia, which went back at least to the Dutch colonial policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of allowing mass Chinese immigration into their colony, was further reinforced by perceived Chinese involvement in the 1965 coup attempt. Thus, although ethnic Chinese had already left the practical political arena and political parties, they could not win full social acceptance within the wider Indonesian community. This broad distrust of local Chinese, that Sudirman alluded to in his statement quoted above, still lingers among wider Muslim communities in Indonesia. Many pribumi Muslims have not yet wholeheartedly accepted ethnic Chinese Muslims, and have tended to see their expressed belief in Islam (or their conversion as Muslims) as an attempt at social legitimation designed to afford them easy access to the political and economic resources of Indonesia.14

Under Soeharto, some Muslim groups further suspected ethnic Chinese in general were the “power behind the throne” that was responsible for various socio-political and economical crises in Indonesia.15 In part this was because the New Order regime’s demands on certain ethnic Chinese had made them, in effect, the “political and economic milk-cow” of the Soeharto regime. The New Order regime pretended to protect ethnic Chinese from the anti-Chinese sentiments and actions welling up from grassroots society while in fact exploiting ethnic Chinese economic capacity and

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13 A detailed discussion of the rising suspicion and distrust among Indonesian communities over ethnic Chinese can be found in Mona Lohanda et al., Antara Prasangka dan Realita: Telaah Kritis Wacana Anti-Cina di Indonesia [Between Perception and Reality: A Critical Analysis of Anti-Chinese Discourse in Indonesia] (Jakarta: Pustaka Inspirasi, 2002). See also Tomy Su, “Mengakhiri Dikotomi Islam-Tionghoa” [Coming to Terms with Islam-Chinese Dichotomy], Jawa Pos, 6 November 2006.

resources. In return for these supposed “security provision” services, members of the regime made ethnic Chinese their “automatic teller machines” (ATM) or private financial providers for their personal interests.  

In brief, ethnic Chinese in New Order Indonesia laboured under a twofold burden. They not only lacked political power when dealing with the state, but also experienced hostility and other social problems when interacting with wider Indonesian communities, particularly with the majority Muslims. The combined effect left ethnic Chinese, including Chinese Muslims, in a difficult situation.

Given all this, the theme of Memupuk Rasa Persaudaraan, Keakraban dan Kepedulian Sosial [cultivating the spirit of brotherhood, acquaintance and social concern] which Sudirman addressed in his 1994 speech was very topical, and it increased in significance to become a concern shared by PITI provincial branch committees in East Java and ethnic Chinese Muslims as a whole. When put into practice, these ideas played an important role in reducing the degree of suspicion and other tensions between ethnic Chinese Muslims and the pribumi Muslim majority through the cultivation of the three principles of brotherhood, acquaintance and social concern. Central to the success of this conceptual scheme has been ethnic Chinese Muslims' using their economic capacity and financial capital to assist Muslim communities to deal with their own local problems. The reformasi period after Soeharto’s 1998 fall opened an important opportunity for an even greater realisation of these three ideas in inter-ethnic Muslim relations, and since then local Muslim communities' suspicions of ethnic Chinese Muslims have been gradually reducing.

It should be noted, however, that while the Soeharto regime was falling in 1998, ethnic Chinese became the main target of social unrest across Indonesia.  As in other large urban centres, the coastal commercial city of Surabaya (East Java) witnessed bad anti-Chinese riots in which a number of racist and criminal acts occurred. Among the worst sites of unrest here were the northern areas where Chinese businesses and housing became the target for attack. Shops were looted and burned and the mass rape and harassment of dozens of ethnic Chinese women and girls was also reported.

Analysing why ethnic Chinese were the main target of this widespread rioting, it can be said that, over three decades of the New Order, ethnic Chinese had held the status of second class citizens. They tended to live with a half identity, in the sense that they could not express their own ethnic identity as could other such groups in Indonesia. As Melani Budianta said, when discussing ethnic Chinese cultural identity in New Order Indonesia, “Chinese remain an unwanted part of the Indonesian racial/cultural make up.” Other local factors also operated in Surabaya, as this was not the first such violence in northern Surabaya. In early April 1956, a sectarian clash had erupted there, driven by economic competition between ethnic Chinese and ethnic Banjar in Nyaampilungan, a business town in north Surabaya. Then in June 1996, large-scale destruction and the burning of churches broke out in Sidotopo, administratively part of

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16 Nitisaputra even describes the Soeharto regime as having made ethnic Chinese and their economic capital its “ister-isteri simpanan” [secret wives]. For more information, see Samuel Nitisaputra, “Mitos Dominasi Ekonomi sebagai Konstruksi Status Quo” [Myths of Domination in Economy as the Status Quo Construction], in Lohanda et al., Antara Prasangka dan Realita, p. 167.


eastern Surabaya but geographically close to northern Surabaya. The ethnic mix of northern Surabaya has also played a critical role in such disturbances, as several different ethnic groups live there including Arabs, Madurese, Javanese, Banjarese, and Chinese. Finally, social inequality also seems quite high in this area, where ethnic Chinese visibly live more prosperously than others, as they mostly own businesses such as shops or retail outlets.

After the transfer of power from Soeharto to the reformasi regime, changes began occurring in the Indonesian state. Bureaucratic reform became one of the main concerns of a government now under pressure to implement human rights principles. This reform is still on-going, but one of its early results has been the lessening of state restrictions on citizens’ socio-political activities and the decline in discrimination against particular social or ethnic groups. As the group with the greatest experience of state discrimination, ethnic Chinese are starting to feel much less restricted and can express their identity far more openly. In Surabaya, one of the best examples of this self-expression is the visibly Chinese Cheng Hoo mosque, whose existence would have been impossible during the three decades of the New Order period.

The Cheng Hoo mosque, geographically located close to the businesses that had been the main target of social unrest in 1998, seems to have been built in part as a way to re-negotiate Chinese and local Javanese culture through a process of indigenisation. As Figure 1 shows, architecturally the Cheng Hoo mosque resembles a kelenteng, or Buddhist temple. Its façade is dominated by three colours, red, green, and yellow. Its ornamental panorama is full of an old Chinese aura, and its entry gate is similar to that of a pagoda, especially since lion-like reliefs made of candle wax were put inside the mosque.\(^{21}\) In particular, the use of red in such a dominant way refers to Chinese cultural heritage in which it symbolises good luck, fortune and prosperity.\(^{22}\)

Despite these Chinese elements, the spirit of indigenisation and assimilation that ethnic Chinese Muslims would like to use in dealing with local Muslim communities is

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\(^{21}\) See also the details of this explanation in Cheng Hoo Mosque Committees, “Data Spesifikasi Masjid.”

\(^{22}\) Cheng Hoo Mosque Committees, “Data Spesifikasi Masjid.”
also present. For instance, it was no accident that the proportions of the main building were eleven meters by nine meters, with an eight-sided roof (pat kwa). This design illustrates the idea of developing the spirit of social assimilation between themselves and local Muslim communities, as unpublished mosque documents confirm. The Data Spesifikasi Masjid [Documentary Data of Mosque Building Specification] reveal that the building’s width of eleven metres symbolises the measurement of the Ka’bah in its initial establishment, while the number nine honours the Walisongo or nine revered Muslim saints who brought Islam to Java. The eight-sided roof embodies the traditional Chinese belief in eight as the number of luck and prosperity. These elements show an appreciation of three different traditions. Recognising the symbolic importance of the number eleven demonstrates that ethnic Chinese Muslims in Surabaya pay attention to Islam and Arabia, while the evocation of Walisongo through the number nine shows they also appreciate Javanese local tradition. The use of an eight-sided roof suggests their hope that social assimilation need not necessarily cause Chinese tradition to fade.

Internal and external aspects of the Cheng Hoo mosque also seem designed to extend the spirit of assimilation to all Muslims in Indonesia. They suggest that Surabaya’s Chinese Muslims want the Cheng Hoo mosque to belong to all believers, as a site of assimilation between different Muslim groups. To this end, they have taken Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah to represent all Muslim groups and installed a bedug (a drum used for calling to prayer) and mimbar (a pulpit used by an imam or preacher to deliver a sermon). Using the bedug, found on the north side of the mosque, is common to NU followers, although it can also be found in Muslim communities in China. But the mimbar is specifically designed to conform to Muhammadiyah practice, as its front is closed rather than open as among NU followers. Both features underline the idea that the Cheng Hoo mosque is open to all Muslim groups. The following figures clearly illustrate these two features:

Figures 2 and 3: Figure 2 (left) shows bedug positioned in right side of the mosque, and Figure 3 (right) shows mimbar placed inside the mosque (author’s images)

23 See also Akh Muzakki, “Dari Muslim Tionghoa untuk Bangsa” [*From Chinese Muslims for the Nation*], Jawa Pos, 14 February 2007.
26 Muzakki, “Dari Muslim Tionghoa untuk Bangsa.”
This principle of non-exclusiveness seems to be intended to articulate an ethnic Chinese Muslim identity located within the Indonesian people in general and in particular within the Indonesian Muslim community. As Burnadi, the imam of the mosque, put it, the mosque was designed “to send an important message that we ethnic Chinese Muslims of Indonesia represent a part of Indonesian Muslims in general.”27 This vision of the Cheng Hoo mosque as non-exclusive is equally shared by the Chinese culture-based mosque committee, who describe it as a “rahmat bagi alam semesta” or a blessing for the universe.28 By quoting a verse in the Qur’an (21:107) as the source of their vision, the mosque committee suggests their principle of non-exclusiveness is based on the divine call. For them, it is religiously mandated that the Cheng Hoo mosque is not oriented solely towards ethnic Chinese Muslims. The mission statement reinforces this principle of inclusiveness. Quoting from a Qur’anic verse (49:10), it states “the mission of the Muhammad Cheng Hoo mosque of Indonesia is to develop social assimilation among Muslims.”29 In practice, this principle gives no priority to ethnic Chinese over other Muslims, particularly in the rituals of prayer. The following explanation from the mosque committee provides a concrete description of social assimilation in performing prayers:30

Every single jama’ah (mosque attendant) has an equal right and responsibility with all others, and this can be symbolised by having an equal position when standing or sitting. There is no discrimination between one and another, between black and white, between persons with narrow eyes and those with round eyes. Those who come first to the mosque are more deserving of the foremost shaff (line in the mosque) which is worth VIP [“very very important person”], while for those who come late it will be enough to be seated in the last shaff.

Ethnic Chinese Muslims thus hold the principle of non-exclusiveness so strongly that it reaches into their practice of rituals or prayer. It is logical therefore that in their social and religious activities, ethnic Chinese Muslims, whether in the committees or the jama’ah of the mosque, do not appear to act as an exclusive social group but rather maintain collaborative efforts with other groups. On 11 February 2007, for example, they performed a mass khitanan (circumcision) in the compound of the Cheng Hoo mosque for poor Muslims of Surabaya and others, in cooperation with Al-Irsyad of Surabaya, a Muslim group especially for Arab descended people. As these examples suggest, this spirit of cooperation is meant to strengthen the efforts of ethnic Chinese Muslims in Surabaya towards social assimilation. In reality, the pursuit of this assimilation project has allowed Surabaya’s ethnic Chinese Muslims, with their Cheng Hoo mosque, to play a significant role in creating social harmony locally. If demographically ethnic Chinese Muslims are a minority within minority,31 as individuals

27 Interview with Burnadi, Surabaya, 28 January 2007.
30 The original Indonesian reads: “Setiap jama’ah mempunyai hak dan kewajiban yang sama, berdiri sama tinggi duduk sama rendah. Tidak ada diskriminasi antara yang satu dengan yang lain, antara yang hitam dengan yang putih, yang bermata sipit dengan yang bermata bulat. Siapa yang duluan dialah yang lebih berhak mendapat shof yang terdepan dengan nilai VIP, yang datang belakangan cukup duduk di shof paling belakang.” See Cheng Hoo Mosque Committees, “Data Kegiatan Ta’mir Masjid.”
31 Jacobsen notes that ethnic Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are a tiny minority, no more than 0.5 per cent of the ethnic Chinese population (1983 to 2003), while Chinese generally reached 3.5 per cent of the 202 million population in 2003. See Michael Jacobsen, Chinese Muslims in Indonesia: Politics, Economy, Faith and
like Edwin Suryalaksana (the head of provincial branch of East Java PITI)\(^{32}\) and Tony Hartono Bagio (the head of Surabaya branch of PITI)\(^{33}\) have said, their leading role in the social project of assimilation can hardly be called insignificant.

For this reason, what ethnic Chinese Muslims have done with the Cheng Hoo mosque has attracted a lot of attention from both the government of Surabaya and other communities in East Java. In 2004, for instance, the local Surabaya government named the Cheng Hoo mosque as the pilot project for assimilation between ethnic and other social groups.\(^{34}\) Due also to their significant role in developing assimilation and in facilitating the creation of social harmony between ethnic Chinese (Muslim) groups and others, Surabaya’s Chinese Muslims and the Cheng Hoo mosque now have an increased socio-political significance. This is shown by the elite individuals, both at the national and local levels, who have visited and prayed in the Cheng Hoo mosque,\(^{35}\) including the Kepala Staf Daerah Militer (Kasdam or chief of staff of the district army) V Brawijaya and his staff who attended the jum’ah (Friday prayer) there on 9 February 2007.\(^{36}\)

Others have also begun to imitate the Surabaya example. In July 2004, Muslims in Pandaan (Pasuruan), a southern area about sixty kilometres from Surabaya, started building a mosque influenced by Chinese architecture and design, both in its exterior form and interior decoration (see Figure 4, over page). Built on a two hectare block, the mosque building itself is 900 square meters and in future it will have a front gate, according to the mosque security official Siswaji, designed to resemble the shaolin dragon.\(^{37}\) The mosque, which is still unnamed at the time of writing this research report, performs similar functions to the Cheng Hoo mosque in Surabaya. This Chinese-influenced mosque in Pandaan is intended, according to its secretary Hafidlon, to perform two functions: to develop the spirit of assimilation (pembauran); and to support tourism in Pasuruan.\(^{38}\) Interestingly, this adds both a political and economic motive to the spirit and practices of social assimilation in the establishment of this second mosque of a Chinese design.

Viewed in a broader context, the establishment of mosques featuring Chinese architectural elements, such as Cheng Hoo in Surabaya and that of Pandaan in Pasuruan, tends to be inspiring ethnic Chinese Muslims with confidence to negotiate their identity through the practices of cultural indigenisation and social assimilation. Thanks to the lessening of state control and cultural repression, ethnic Chinese Muslims can create new spaces to negotiate and articulate their sense of identity in contemporary Indonesia much more freely than during the New Order era. Their dual identity as Chinese and Muslims can be strengthened simultaneously.

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Expediency, SEARC Working Papers Series, No. 54, November 2003 (Hong Kong: Southeast Asia Research Canter/SEARC, City University of Hong Kong, 2003), p. 2.


34 Muzakki, “Dari Muslim Tionghoa untuk Bangsa.”

35 Author interview with Burnadi, Surabaya, 9 February 2007.

36 Based on the author’s observation at the jum’ah prayer in the Cheng Hoo mosque, Surabaya, 9 February 2007.

37 Author interview with Siswaji in the Chinese mosque of Pandaan, Pasuruan, 20 March 2007.

38 Author interview with Hafidlon in the Chinese mosque of Pandaan, Pasuruan, 20 March 2007.
Conclusion
In conclusion, the post-Soeharto period has provided ethnic Chinese Muslims with valuable new opportunities for negotiating and articulating their identities in Indonesia. More specifically, the Cheng Hoo mosque has inspired ethnic Chinese Muslims with the confidence to express their socio-political, economic and religious identities in response to and in negotiation with state power. In the past, the restrictions of the New Order regime meant Chinese cultural identities could not be expressed publicly and ethnic Chinese, whether Muslim or not, were forced to limit their activities to the economic sphere. Now, however, the Cheng Hoo mosque helps pave the way for ethnic Chinese Muslims to express dual identities as Muslims as well as ethnic Chinese.

The enthusiasm of middle class Chinese Muslims in Surabaya for expressing their Islamic beliefs publicly through the mosque also suggests that the fact of its existence may have increased their confidence in articulating their evolving identities. Their ability to express their Islamic beliefs publicly is now occurring for the first time in decades. By comparison, even in the post-Soeharto reformasi period before the mosque was built, Chinese Muslims still felt much more comfortable worshipping or performing their prayers in their homes or in PITI buildings. Even though they had already sought to strengthen their pursuit of the three principles of brotherhood, acquaintance and social concern from the early 1990s, before the mosque was built, Surabaya’s Chinese Muslims articulated their identity as Chinese and as Muslims in very careful and selective ways due to the unresolved assimilation tensions between themselves and local communities.

Looking more specifically at the functions of the mosque itself, the Cheng Hoo mosque has broadened, or even gone beyond, the shari’ah (Islamic legal guidance) ideal of the conventional mosque. As Hisyam Mortada noted, in the shari’ah a mosque has two integrated purposes: religious and social. It should not only be the place to worship God in that congregational daily prayers that Muslims should undertake five times a day, but it should also help Muslims within the mosque community to strengthen their relationships with each other, in order to achieve social harmony and avoid
conflict. While the Cheng Hoo mosque has certainly carried out those two integrated functions, as shown above, it has done more than that. Surabaya’s ethnic Chinese Muslims have used the mosque as a way to strengthen their pursuit of the three principles of brotherhood, acquaintance and social concern and to involve themselves with local Muslim communities in a manner that has helped secure them from the sort of anti-Chinese resentment that fuelled fierce rioting over several days when Soeharto fell from power. As part of its pursuit of ethnic Chinese Muslim assimilation into the wider Muslim society, the Cheng Hoo mosque has also consciously followed a policy of inclusiveness for all Muslims while standing as a physical symbol of the Chinese desire to negotiate an acculturation of Chinese and local Javanese cultural identities through shared religious beliefs.

Because of these more complex goals, it can be said that ethnic Chinese Muslims perceive the mosque as not only a means for fulfilling their spiritual needs but also for actualising their social capital. For this reason the Cheng Hoo mosque acts, to borrow the terminology of Robert Putnam, to strengthen both the “bonding” and “bridging” elements of the social capital of ethnic Chinese Muslims in Java, enabling the building of greater cohesion within their own group (“bonding”) through the expression of Chinese cultural identities long banned in Indonesia, and by promoting greater mutual understanding between the ethnic Chinese Muslim minority and other communities, particularly the Javanese majority (“bridging”).