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SOCIAL THEOLOGY OF CHINESE MUSLIM: FROM ISLAMIC INCLUSIVISM TOWARDS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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Abstrak

Kata Kunci:

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Social theology

Studi ini mengkaji peran dan aksi komunitas Muslim Tionghoa di Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia yang diwujudkan melalui organisasi bernama Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia dan Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia. Melalui dua organisasi ini, Muslim Tionghoa menunjukkan ekspresi Islam yang anti mainstream. Mereka tidak begitu menonjolkan corak keislaman yang kaya akan ritual dan seremonial, tetapi mengartikulusikannya melalui gerakan-gerakan sosial agar dapat berbaur dan mendapatkan legitimasi dari Muslim lokal, serta menarik simpati non-Muslim Tionghoa mengenai Islam. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, studi ini menemukan bahwa dengan mempertabankan identitas budaya sebagai orang Tionghoa, komunitas ini memastikan bahwa menjadi Muslim yang baik tidak berada dalam oposisi biner dengan menjadi orang Tionghoa sejati. Pengalaman komunitas Muslim Tionghoa di Surabaya menunjukkan bahwa teologi bukan hanya masalah agama, tetapi juga masalah sosial. Artinya, bahwa teologi sosial Muslim Tionghoa di Surabaya merupakan ekspresi Islam kosmopolitan yang berhasil diintegrasikan dengan identitas Tionghoa yang inklusif. Teologi sosial menunjukkan dua dimensi yang beroperasi secara dialektis-integral, yaitu perpaduan yang harmonis antara inklusivisme Islam dengan partisipasi aktif dalam mengatasi berbagai persoalan sosial-kemasyarakatan.

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Abstract
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This study examines the roles and actions of the Chinese Muslim community in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, embodied through an organization called Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association and Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia Foundation. Through these two organizations, Chinese Muslims demonstrate anti-mainstream Islamic expressions. They do not overtly show Islamic style, which entirely dominates in the rituals and ceremonials. Still, they articulate Islam through social movements to adapt and gain legitimacy from the local Muslims and attract non-Muslim Chinese' sympathies on Islam. Based on the qualitative approach, this study finds out that by maintaining cultural identity as Chinese, this community ensured that being a good Muslim was not in binary opposition by being authentic Chinese. The experiences of the Chinese Muslim community in Surabaya determine that theology is not only a religious issue but also a social problem. Chinese Muslim social theology in Surabaya is an expression of cosmopolitan Islam and successfully integrated with an inclusive Chinese identity. Social theology demonstrates two dialectically-integral dimensions, the harmonious fusion of Islamic inclusivism and active participation in overcoming various social problems.

Introduction

Chinese Muslims are a socio-cultural entity that embraces two poles of social problems. Seeing this kind of phenomenon, Mahfud¹ and Muzakki² term them as a "*minority within a minority*" group, while Weng prefers the term "*double minority*".³ This reality triggers the community to be more thoughtful and wiser in expressing Islam publicly. Islam, they believe, does not lead to alienation within their ethnic community. On the other hand, most Muslim groups can also accept its existence.

¹ Choirul Mahfud, "The Role of Cheng Ho Mosque: The New Silk Road, Indonesia-China Relations in Islamic Cultural Identity," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 8, no. 1 (2014): 23–38, <http://jiis.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/JIIs/article/view/141>.

² Akh Muzakki, "Ethnic Chinese Muslims in Indonesia: An Unfinished Anti-Discrimination Project," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2010): 81–96, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13602001003650630>.

³ Hew Wai Weng, "Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity: Chinese Muslim Identities in Post-New Order Indonesia" (Australian National University, 2011). Sharon Carstens, "Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia by Hew Wai Weng," ed. Hew Wai Weng, *Indonesia* October, no. 106 (May 2018): 157–159, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5728/indonesia.106.0157>. Hew Wai Weng, "The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siau," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>.

In that position, for Chinese Muslims, it is necessary to articulate their faith more "down to earth" and "populist". Social theology can be understood simply as a manifestation of the faith that integrates Islamic understanding that is inclusive and on the other hand displays social participation with other communities.

Choirul Mahfud tried to trace through an academic text "*The Role of Cheng Ho Mosque: The New Silk Road, Indonesia-China Relations in Islamic Cultural Identity*". He was quite effective in tracing that Cheng Hoo Mosque is a place for cultural, social, educational and religious developments as well a medium to strengthen the relations between Chinese and non-Chinese ethnic. However, Mahfud's study was deeply concerned with "Chinese interests" nuances and appeared to use the bourgeois paradigm. As a socio-cultural movement, it was invisible because it tended to analyze with the perspective of the power of knowledge, through a network of entrepreneur-ruling elites.⁴

"*The theological existence as a Muslim*", a subsequent study of Chinese Muslims carried out by Rahmawati et al.,⁵ showed that this community manifested its existence by establishing a worship center for Cheng Hoo Mosque, educational facilities, and media literacy publications. Rahmawati was seen as nil in discussing the most crucial aspect of how this community tried to eliminate the negative stigma of its existential minority problem in society.⁶ Although this study has explained how Chinese Muslims channel an interaction between them and local Muslims and non-Muslim Chinese, theological articulation has not considered as a necessity to be displayed in the public sphere.

As for the discourse on social theology, a more recent study was

⁴ Choirul Mahfud, "The Role of Cheng Ho Mosque: The New Silk Road, Indonesia-China Relations in Islamic Cultural Identity."

⁵ Rahmawati, et.al, "Chinese Ways of Being Good Muslim: From the Cheng Hoo Mosque to Islamic Education and Media Literacy," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 8, no. 2 (2018): 225–252, <https://ijims.iainsalatiga.ac.id/index.php/ijims/article/view/2160>.

⁶ Rahmawati, et.al, "Chinese Ways of Being Good Muslim: From the Cheng Hoo Mosque to Islamic Education and Media Literacy,".

carried out by Azhar Ibrahim. He tended to interpret social theology as the antithesis of the religious revivalist patterns of Islam. Nevertheless, Azhar has laid an essential foundation for conceptualizing social theology that leads to participations and involvements, and furthermore to take on social roles and responsibilities to manifest one's faith. Thus, theology was not seen as an elite discourse of the "*priyayi Islam*," but also an expression of intellectualism.⁷ However, Azhar's study was still conceptual, so it had not yet considered on how certain factual groups manifested social theology.

The study of Islamic theology articulated on Chinese Muslims is relevant with their historical footsteps that colored by discriminatory, persistent, and intimidating treatment by certain groups of people and government.⁸ Even nowadays, racial groups are not entirely free from negative stigma. The Chinese community is still a "month-long" while the community is in a pejorative term (communist, fad, invaders, etc.). The phenomenon of Jakarta governor election in 2017 and the issue of a flood of Chinese labor in Indonesia helped to extend the series of social friction that contained racial sentiment over the existence of this ethnic group in Indonesia.

Conflicts aroused between ethnic Chinese and residents, according to Dahana, were caused by a lack of interaction between the two, resulting in attitudes that social scientists call stereotyping. If they agree to use this term, indigenous people in Dahana's view often generalize to the Chinese community because of their commercial activities as economic animals whose work is only profit-oriented. They do not have the spirit of nationalism and are non-social (exclusive). This interaction compounded the notion of Chinese people who also stigmatize the local population as

⁷ Azhar Ibrahim, "The Need for Discoursing Social Theology in Muslim Southeast Asia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 1–23, <https://oaji.net/articles/2015/2511-1445827707.pdf>.

⁸ Choirul Mahfud, *Manifesto Politik Tionghoa di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2013), 21.; Leo Suryadinata, "Kebijakan Negara Indonesia terhadap Etnik Tionghoa: Dari Asimilasi Ke Multikulturalisme?," *Antropologi Indonesia* 71, no. (2003): 1–12, <http://journal.ui.ac.id/index.php/jai/article/download/3464/2744>.

lazy, blackmailers, and other negative designations. These factors mainly cause the occurrence of anti-Chinese violence.⁹

On the other hand, the growth of Chinese people who embraced Islam, in turn, gave birth to its phenomenon, which made this ethnic group even more interesting to be studied. The indications of the growing number of Muslim Chinese communities are noticed from the increasing construction of Cheng Hoo Mosque in Indonesia. Hariyono Ong, who is the *ta'mir* of Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya, reveals that this mosque has a typical Chinese architecture. There are fifteen in Indonesia, five of which are in East Java: Surabaya, Banyuwangi, Jember, Pasuruan, and Malang (*Interview with Ong, May 09, 2019*). Interestingly, some mosques also adopt Javanese culture with drums and Arabic calligraphy. Weng commented on the phenomenon of religious conversion of this community as a form of assimilation to minimize the existential problems they have experienced so far.¹⁰

Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya is not only a center for Chinese Muslim rituals but also functions a social role. Cheng Hoo Mosque becomes the most intensive and massive religious institution in helping to alleviate social problems faced by the people in Surabaya. Activities, such as distributing free staple foods, compensation for orphans, inexpensive health checks are every day at this mosque. Connoisseurs of this activity are not limited to Chinese people, but also Muslims and even non-Muslims who need it.¹¹

Observing the Islamic phenomenon of the Chinese converts, expressed through social activities, is very relevant when examined using the perspective of social theology. This theory was allegedly first introduced by Linell E. Cady in a similar term, public theology.¹² This

⁹ Choirul Mahfud, *Manifesto Politik Tionghoa di Indonesia*, 21.

¹⁰ Hew Wai Weng, "Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity: Chinese Muslim Identities in Post- New Order Indonesia."

¹¹ An interview with Lim Fuk San & Sie Kim San (October 29, 2019).

¹² Linell E. Cady, "A Model for a Public Theology," *The Harvard Theological Review* 80, no. 2 (1987): 193–212, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1509607>.

concept conceives as a form of protest from the marginal phenomena of certain theological groups. Azhar Ibrahim introduces the study of social theology in the Islamic context as a theological discourse with a social vision. Social theology is understood as a form of counter-ideas to traditional theology such as revivalism, totalitarianism, and exclusivism in religion.¹³ The social dimension in this theology is also meaningful to the call of humanity based on religious spirit in alleviating social problems in society.¹⁴

Zeki Saritoprak writes an interesting article about the relationship between theology and social responsibility. According to him, theology is a faith that has three dialectical-integral components: belief in the heart (*tasdiq bi al-qalb*), oral pledging (*iqrar bi al-Lisan*), and action (*amalu bi al-arkan*). These three components can be a measurement of the Muslim theology. However, the lack of the deeds is not considered as a lack of faith. He believes that realizing the belief with factual deeds is an indication of the strength of one's faith. In other words, faith is doing.¹⁵ In Islamic theology, when someone does a good deed or has the drive to do well, it is not based solely on social demands but on an awareness of the deity.

The theoretical assumption that can be put forward from the explanation above is, how do Chinese Muslims in Surabaya show their existence amid their minority condition? Then, how do they maintain the Chinese tradition, so that it does not fade when they declare themselves to be Muslims? And furthermore what attitude do they choose in responding to radical religious understanding amid the dynamics of Islam in Indonesia?

This article aims to discuss the existence of Chinese Muslim groups in Surabaya that show their theological articulation through social roles

¹³ Azhar Ibrahim, "The Need for Discoursing Social Theology in Muslim Southeast Asia."

¹⁴ Azhar Ibrahim, "The Need for Discoursing Social Theology in Muslim Southeast Asia."

¹⁵ Zeki Saritoprak, "Fethullah Gulen and His Theology of Social Responsibility," in *Mistering Knowledge in Modern Times*, ed. Ismail Albayrak (New York: Blue Dome Press, 2011).

but are still conservative in upholding Chinese traditions. They have become Muslim and commonly show the arrogance style as an "ideal form" of representing Islam.

Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are unique in term of their socio-cultural entities. Despite being a minority, they do not feel unfettered politically, culturally, and socially in expressing their respective religions. However, their existence in Indonesia is not entirely well accepted, so they use many cultural strategies in conducting social interactions. Based on this phenomenon, this article employed qualitative research methods to reveal the theological articulation naturally, according to the socio-cultural settings of the Chinese Muslim community in Indonesia, and how they interact with their outsider.¹⁶

Based on an ethnomethodological approach, this study collected the data by observing, documenting, interviewing, and curing the Chinese Muslim community's life history.¹⁷ A social science perspective was used to analyze certain in-depth cases based on data findings that have been coded and mapped. Then conclusions were made thematically rather than chronologically based on events.¹⁸

Islamic Inclusivism and Chinese Muslim Social Movement

Sie Kim San, a convert who is currently the head of PITI (Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association)¹⁹ Surabaya revealed that the community felt the need to socialize with the general public. Chinese

¹⁶ Uwe Flick, "An Introduction to Qualitative Fourth Edition," *SAGE Publications* (2009): 506.

¹⁷ Matthew B Miles, Michael a Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, "Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook," *SAGE Publications* (2006).

¹⁸ R. Bogdan and S. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Practice, Alien and Bacon, Inc, New York.*, 1982.

¹⁹ It notes that PITI is an organization that accommodates ethnic Chinese who embrace Islam. With a focus on fostering Chinese Muslims in carrying out Islamic sharia both in their non-Muslim family environment and preparing to mingle with the local community in their neighborhood. As well as protecting those who have family problems due to converting to Islam. If PITI focuses on da'wah and Islamic development, the Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation is more oriented towards social activities. Such as blood donation, distribution of free staple food, cheap health checks, etc.

people are Confucian, but Islam is also a religious choice for their ethnicity. The construction of a mosque that is thick with the Chinese nuances and attributed to the name "Cheng Hoo"—an old-fashioned mariner of the Ming dynasty era—is a cultural strategy to campaign for the inclusion of Chinese Muslims²⁰. According to him, Cheng Hoo's figure is an inspiration needed to be nurtured because of his success in Islamizing the Archipelago with a non-confrontational and peaceful strategy.

Chinese Muslims campaign for inclusive Islam through inscriptions carved in front of Cheng Hoo Mosque. By using the Chinese language, Islamic values are articulated through worldview by perpetuating them through the motto of Cheng Hoo Mosque. The philosophy of success in the view of Chinese Muslims must fulfill the following requirements: piety and faith (*Geng Jing Wei Zhen Zhu Geng Jin Shou Jin Jie*), mutual respect (*Hu Xiang Zun Zhong*), communication (*Duo Duo Gou Tong*), unity (*Fa Yang Mr. Jie Jing Shen*), forgiving (*Duo Yuan Liang Bie Ren*) and open-minded (*Duo Jie Na, Bie Ren De Yin Jian*).²¹

Not only about thinking, but also an inclusive attitude are strongly emphasized by Chinese Muslims as contained in the above motto. The values of tolerance, respect for differences, and good communication are a series of values in the expression of Islamic Chinese Muslims.

It makes perfect sense if Chinese Muslim authorities maintain these norms through sermons, lectures, and reinforcement on the converts' beliefs. Hariyono Ong, *takmir* and Chairperson of the Da'wah and Education Division of East Java states that he will not hesitate to replace Ustadz who gives a lecture at Cheng Hoo Mosque with political overtones, demeaned other religions, and offended racial sensitivities.²²

One of the attitudes developed by Chinese Muslims to protect themselves from the snare of the majority-minority dichotomous is by elaborating the choices that arise from the facts and existing social

²⁰ An interview with Sie Kim San, (August 19, 2020).

²¹ Taken from the documentation of Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya, East Java.

²² An interview with Hariyono Ong, (May 09, 2019).

dynamics, then making the most positive decisions for their excellent. This competence can be seen at least from the choice of the Chinese Muslim community in choosing academic partners. By cooperating with Islamic organizations considered to have Islamic views following Muslim Chinese cultural characteristics, NU and Muhammadiyah.

Through this academic collaboration, Chinese Muslims have Islamic commitments that are at least the same as inclusive attitudes (*tasammul*), which are consistently campaigned by these two organizations. The Chinese Muslims' authority to reject and replace *ustadz* who delivers Islamic teachings with controversial languages has become a clear indicator of their inclusiveness.

The attitude of religious inclusion practiced by Chinese Muslims refers to a religion that does not legalize and legitimize violence as an expression of Islam. Violence in this context is limited to Islamic thought and said first action/behavior.

Aside from campaigning for Islamic inclusivism, Chinese Muslims in Surabaya also commonly carry out social movements as a form of their responsibility in society. One of their assimilation strategies is to carry out *da'wah* using financial power. Lim Fuk San, acknowledges that *da'wah* using money (*bil mal*)²³ is a proper strategy used to connect to those who face economic hardship and cannot be lectured

The form of social movements carried out by Chinese Muslims of Cheng Hoo Mosque and the donors including actions organized by Cheng Hoo Mosque in collaboration with PMI Surabaya succeeded in gathering 150 donors and distributing money to 2000 poor people. Then there was also a joint opening and compensation of 500 orphans by the Chinese Consulate General in cooperation with the Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia Foundation. Regarding health, the social role of Chinese Muslims was demonstrated by collaborating with the Surabaya Pacar laboratory by making inexpensive medical check-up activities attended by

²³ An interview with Lim Fuk San, (Agust 27, 2020).

900 people for two days. Through the PITI organization and Cheng Hoo Mosque Foundation, Chinese Muslims also collaborated with PT Matahari Sakti, Trekkers, Suramadu BC, and the Grand Elephant Company to distribute food in the form of rice, money, and other staple foods.²⁴

However, there is an urgency to understand that the above social concerns are not intended to reinforce the social identity of "you are weak" (inferior). At the same time, "I am superior," so generosity is interpreted as an attitude of superiority. Assisting in social care is driven by a motivational egalitarian attitude, that all human beings are equal, indistinguishable from social status and cultural background. Thus, helping each other and those in need, is the most concrete manifestation of the spirit of humanity.

The dedication of the Chinese Muslim community above is a part of their enthusiasm to campaign for their socio-cultural existence on one side and to assimilate with residents on the other side. Hence, it can be understood that some ethnic Chinese Muslims considered conversion to Islam as the final act of the assimilation process. Conversion, in turn, helps pave the way for the social assimilation of ethnic Chinese and local communities in Indonesia, one of which is manifested by social movements. Thus, Chinese Muslims become a subculture of the ethnic Chinese community in Indonesia.²⁵ Assimilation and acculturation are the best way and therefore they become the nature of Islam in Indonesia that accomodates local culture.²⁶

Assimilation is the choice of Chinese Muslims because the dark history they had experienced demanded that they be more intelligent in

²⁴ Documentation form of the last edition of Cheng Hoo Magazine 10, from June 15, 2017 til February 15, 2019.

²⁵ Akh. Muzzaki, *Cheng Hoo Mosque: Assimilating Chinese Culture, Distancing it from the State*, CRISE-Working Paper(Oxford,2010),<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b38ed915d3cfd000be0/workingpaper71.pdf>.

²⁶ Miftahul Huda, "Toward a New Theology for a Religiously Restless Region the Accommodation of Local Traditions into Islamic Law in Lombok," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, no. 1 (2019): 50–72, <http://jii.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/JIIs/article/view/774>.

socializing with local communities. For example, an illustration of discrimination and ethnic hegemony by the government can be traced since the old order era. On May 14, 1959, the government issued PP No. 10 of 1959, which did not permit small trading businesses owned by foreigners in the village. This policy triggered an exodus of 100,000 Chinese people out of Indonesia because these ethnic groups carried out many small trading businesses in the village.

In the New Order era, social discrimination towards ethnic groups showed a more massive and systematic escalation. Their space in both the social and political fields was limited. Even to ensure the development of China, several strict regulations and supervision were issued.

The Indonesian government issued at least eight (8) regulations to regulate the existence of Chinese citizens, including (1) instruction of the Indonesian Cabinet Presidium No. 37/U/IN/6/1967 concerning the Principal Policy on Chinese Problem Resolution; (2) Circular Letter of the RI Cabinet Presidium No. SE-36/Pres/Kab/6/1967 concerning the Chinese Problem; (3) Presidential Instruction No.14/1967 concerning Chinese Religion, Beliefs, and Customs; (4) Presidential Instruction No.15/1967 concerning Formation of Special Staff for Chinese Affairs; (5) Minister of Home Affairs Instruction No. 455.2-360 concerning the Arrangement of Temples; (6) Decree of the Head of Bakin No. 031/1973 about the China Problem Coordination Agency; (7) Decree of the Minister of Trade and Cooperatives No. 286/1978 concerning the Prohibition of Imports, Sales, and Distribution of Issues in Chinese Language and Literature; and (8) Circular of the Minister of Information No. 02/SE/on the Prohibition of Writing and Printing of Writing/Literacy and Chinese Language Ads.²⁷

The limitation of social space for Chinese in Indonesia also impacted on PITI organization. Following the issuance of a Government

²⁷ Cheng-tian Kuo, "Religion, State, and Religious Nationalism in Chinese Societies," in *Religion and Nationalism in Chinese Societies*, 1st ed. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 13–52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1zkjzkd.5>.

Instruction on December 14, 1972, banning organizations from using specific ethnic names, PITI changed to the Indonesian Association of *Taubid* Faith. This changing name is considered as a strategy to obtain a security guarantee following the strengthening of the anti-Chinese movement in Indonesian society at that time.²⁸

Slowly but surely, after the transfer of power from Suharto to a more democratic system of government, the country's infrastructure and superstructure began to change. One of the main agendas of this new regime was administrative reform. Although at that time, the government was still under the shadow of socio-political pressure to introduce human rights principles. However, convincingly, the Reform era has continued and gradual progress has been made in reducing state intervention in socio-political activities.

Meanwhile, the most respected figure in freeing ethnic Chinese discrimination is Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). While serving as President of Indonesia, he was the first to solve the problem of discrimination against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Through Presidential Decree No.6/2000, Gus Dur ended a problem of discrimination until they could celebrate Chinese New Year freely and openly.²⁹

More broadly, Gus Dur's policies directly made ethnic Chinese express their religious rituals, traditions, and culture freely. The regulation issued by Gus Dur automatically removed all racist and discriminatory regulations that were previously imposed in Indonesia. When Megawati replaced Gus Dur as president, the next post-reform government also issued regulations on Lunar New Year (*Imlek*) celebrations that serve as a national holiday.

More importantly, discrimination against certain social and ethnic groups has shown a decreased escalation. The Chinese and other Muslim

²⁸ Akh. Muzzaki, *Cheng Hoo Mosque: Assimilating Chinese Culture, Distancing it from the State*.

²⁹ Ali Mustajab, "Kebijakan Politik Gus Dur terhadap China Tionghoa di Indonesia," *IN RIGHT: Jurnal Agama dan Hak Asasi Manusia* 5, no. 1 (2015): 153–192, <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/syariah/inright/article/view/1293>.

groups, who have experience as parties affected by discrimination and state hegemony, have begun to benefit from the emergences of public policies. Consequently, during the reform period, Chinese Muslims increasingly gained much space in expressing their identity as Muslims and also Chinese.³⁰ On the other hand, the Reform era also fostered Islamic and fundamentalist movements that tended to campaign for Islam more exclusively and rigidly.

Meanwhile, commenting on this conversion phenomenon, Ong Mia Farao Karsono made an interesting identification that turned out to be a matter of social discrimination, but also cultural identity and commercial interests. For him, the Chinese became Muslim to avoid social discrimination and have a sense of security, especially in commercial activities. They wanted to reap sympathy from local people who were primarily Muslim or because their partner was Muslim. They also hoped that they could be fully assimilated and welcomed by the natives by becoming Muslim.³¹

The Chinese who embraced Islam were also exiled by some Chinese. For example, the experiences of YL and EM, two converts whom PITI Surabaya guided. Their relationship with their family did not work harmoniously since the two of them decided to embrace Islam. Some non-Muslim Chinese considered that by embracing Islam, they deny Chinese-ness and separate their relations from the Chinese community.³²

So Chinese Muslims felt they were not treated well by their relatives and even felt that their family hated them. However, this case was not always the case. Gradually, convert's existence will be accepted by both

³⁰ Akh. Muzakki, "Ethnic Chinese Muslims in Indonesia: An Unfinished Anti-Discrimination Project."

³¹ Ong Mia Farao Karsono, "Chinese Traditional Practices by the Chinese Muslim Community of Surabaya," *Humanity & Social Sciences Journal* 2, no. 2 (2007): 110–113, [https://idosi.org/hssj/hssj2\(2\)07/4.pdf](https://idosi.org/hssj/hssj2(2)07/4.pdf)

³² YL is a convert from the Confucian religion, while EM comes from a Christian family. Both are still reluctant to give out their Chinese names because they are still worried that they will not be accepted internally by their ethnic groups. An interview of YM and EM, Mey 10, 2019, PITI Surabaya Office.

family and relatives because many non-Muslim Chinese are open.

Chinese Muslims in Surabaya even join the celebration of Chinese traditions, which are allowed to be celebrated openly. Chinese Muslims show their colleagues that they are still Chinese by participating in Chinese traditions. The important message is that ethnicity and religion do not face each other. Being a devout Muslim is not in a binary position by being an authentic Chinese. Both can intertwine harmoniously without reducing ethnicity and religiosity.

Even the fundamental reason for establishing Cheng Hoo Mosque for Chinese Muslims as an indication of Chinese identity does not necessarily fade when embracing Islam, even they still hold on to Chinese traditions. Chinese Muslims try to show their identity as both Chinese and Muslim. Just like what is demonstrated by the Chinese Muslim community in *Imlek* celebration (Chinese New Year celebration). Even during *Eid-ul-Fitr* celebrations, Chinese Muslims often celebrate with the Lion Dance (*Barongsai*).

So, it is necessary to note that Cheng Hoo mosque is a religious-cultural destination that is not only functioned as a place of worship rituals but also as an area of cultural exchange both locally and internationally.³³ For the locals, this mosque is commonly used as a religious visit and a place to hold a marriage contract, both Chinese Muslims and residents. Meanwhile, international level cultural exchanges can be seen from friendly countries visits who are ambassadors or consulates general in Indonesia, as well as foreign journalists and other Islamic groups from Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and others.³⁴

Social Theology of Chinese Muslims in Surabaya

The writer needs to start the idea of Chinese Muslim social theology by presenting the values contained in the motto (*Zuo You Ming*) of Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation as previously written. In this motto,

³³ Akh. Muzzaki, *Cheng Hoo Mosque: Assimilating Chinese Culture, Distancing it from the State*.

³⁴ Cheng Hoo Magazine documentation

the teachings of Islam successfully contextualize the Chinese way of life. The community believes that mutual respect (*Hu Xiang Zun Zhong*), unity (*Fa Yang Tuan Jie Jing Shen*), and open-mindedness (*Duo Jie Na, Bie Ren De Yin Jian*) are indicators for one's life to be successful.³⁵ This view, in the perspective of Marshall Hodgson, is a phenomenon of Islamic doctrine that had succeeded in entering, absorbing, struggling, and engaging in local Chinese Muslim culture.³⁶

The above motto, which contains social responsibilities, is relevant to be examined from the perspective of social theology as developed by Chinese Muslims. Badiuzzaman Said Nursi lays the foundation for the concept of social theology in Islam through the monumental work of an-nur treatise. As quoted by Zeky, Said Nursi is a figure who starts the reconciliation of Islamic theology with his view that three great enemies of Islam must be eliminated: ignorance, poverty, and disunity.³⁷

Thus, the logical consequence is that faith whose perfection parameters measured through real action (*'amalu bi al-jawarih*) must be present in responding to the three social challenges experienced by the society. Based on Said Nursi's typology above, contextualized social theology of the Chinese Muslims' faith is the unit of analysis in this study.

Social Theology Issues: Ignorance and Poverty

The concept of Chinese Muslim social theology can be understood not only as a religious doctrine but also as a movement doctrine.³⁸ The most fundamental problem of contemporary Islamic theology is the indifferent attitude towards social reality faced by a large number of

³⁵ Observation at the Cheng Hoo Mosque in Surabaya.

³⁶ M. Amin Abdullah, "Islam as a Cultural Capital in Indonesia and the Malay World: A Convergence of Islamic Studies, Social Sciences and Humanities," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 2 (2017): 307–328, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323910192_Islam_as_a_cultural_capital_in_Indonesia_and_the_Malay_world_A_convergence_of_Islamic_studies_social_sciences_and_humanities.

³⁷ Zeki Saritoprak, "Fethullah Gulen and His Theology of Social Responsibility", 87.

³⁸ Michael Lowy, *Teologi Pembebasan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar dan Insist Press, 2000).

Muslim societies. In this context, Liem Fuk San comments that today, Muslims must devise a *da'wah* strategy that is sensitive to human needs in general.³⁹

As a form of concern, his party through Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Foundation was also actively involves in organizing social actions. For example, blood donations, compensation for orphans, health checks, benefits for the poor and orphans, cheap food, and assistance for victims of natural disasters. According to Lim Fuk San, today's people need *da'wah* and need food. For him, preaching must be adjusted to the contexts and conditions of society. The Chairman of Hajj Foundation of Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia admits that the social activities carried out by his community succeed in attracting the sympathy of donors who entrust their property to be donated regularly through Cheng Hoo Mosque Foundation.⁴⁰

All Chinese identities and movements during the New Order era were very limited. However, since 1998, Chinese Muslim identity has been very significant and could not be underestimated. The Chinese Muslims contribution could also be detected from the massive social movements of Chinese Muslims through PITI and Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo Indonesia Foundation (YHMCH).

The funding initiator of Cheng Hoo Mosque, HMY, Bambang Sujanto states that the building of Cheng Hoo mosque in several regions is a part of the mission of Chinese Muslims in this country to contribute, negotiate and strengthen their identity and role as civil society social movements.⁴¹

It should be noted that PITI as a place for Chinese Muslims is not an exclusive organization. However, PITI is an inclusive Chinese (Tionghoa) organization in Indonesia because it also accommodates local

³⁹ An interview with Lim Fuk San, (August 27, 2019).

⁴⁰ An interview with Lim Fuk San, (August 27, 2019).

⁴¹ Choirul Mahfud, "The Role of Cheng Ho Mosque: The New Silk Road, Indonesia-China Relations in Islamic Cultural Identity".

Muslims as its administrators. The characteristics of an inclusive PITI can be seen from its vision to implement Islam for all groups. Cheng Hoo Mosque tries to contribute to everyone. Haryono Ong says that Cheng Hoo Mosque had been used for cultural, religious and various social activities such as charity, social services, and blood donations. Ong states that PITI and Cheng Hoo Mosque stand for all groups. For example, this mosque accommodates two ways of worshipping mainstream Muslims such as NU and Muhammadiyah in turn.⁴²

Cheng Hoo Mosque, as a religious institution, plays a crucial function in the role of social life. As stated by Shanjendu Nath, one's faith has two characters, the individual dimension and the social dimension. The latter gives an understanding that the role of theology does not only contain elements of value but must also be able to give meaning to social life.⁴³

Because religion has the qualities and realities that are *sui generis*, it contains intellectual matters, feelings, and actions. Strictly speaking, religion as a social reality also comes from the nature of absolute dependence on others (*liyan*). Magnis Suseno says that humans had existed because of other human beings and can live and develop because of other people. For this reason, considerations of social problems are an essential part of expressing one's faith.⁴⁴

Theological reasoning that resides in the conscience of a believer, according to Durkheim, can provide individual encouragement when dealing with external reality. Thus, a person with divine awareness has a religious action that stimulates individuals to participate positively in social life and deal with individual tendencies to run away from social reality. Durkheim puts forward a thesis that religious representation is

⁴² An interview with Hariyono Ong on (May 09, 2019).

⁴³ Shanjendu Nath, "Religion and Its Role in Society," *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* 20, no. 11 (2015): 82–85, <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol20-issue11/Version-4/I.0201148285.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Franz Magnis Suseno, *Etika Politik: Prinsip Moral Dasar Kenegaraan Modern*, IX. (Jakarta: PT Gramadia, 2018).

constitutive to society through conception. Religion as a social fact function as an external control device, a social life.⁴⁵

Enemy of Social Theology: Disunity

Another social problem that challenges Islamic theology is the clash between faiths. It is triggered by the religious zeal that promotes the truth monopoly (truth claim). One religion denies another religion. So impressive, both cannot be united in human relations. At a specific epicenter, this kind of attitude widens the social diversity that thrives from the seeds of intolerance and exclusive religious views.⁴⁶

Avoiding this kind of thing, the authority of Cheng Hoo Mosque nurtures a norm for religious teachers to deliver sermons that avoid provocative language which can trigger and spread hatred. Islamic material taught in this community also prohibits alluding to racial sensitivity, political issues and debated issues among ulama (*kebilafiyah*).⁴⁷

Inclusivism which manifests through humanist values, becomes a factor of determination within the framework of Chinese Muslims' understanding which extrudes human values through Islamic teachings. In this humanist thinking, Chinese Muslims want to safeguard others' human rights, including the right to live harmoniously in public spaces. Chinese Muslims feel obliged to bring religion as a pendulum of peace and avoid harming others.⁴⁸

The inclusiveness of Chinese Muslims in Surabaya is evident from their commitment to accept all groups, both across schools and religions. Cheng Hoo Mosque is open to anyone, and any particular religious sect

⁴⁵ Robert Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (California: University of California Press, 1970).

⁴⁶ M. Tafsir, "Fiqh Relasi Sosial Antar-Umat Beragama: Keniscayaan Yang Sensitif," in *Fikih Kebinekaan: Pandangan Islam Indonesia tentang Umat, Kewargaan dan Kepemimpinan Non Muslim*, ed. Wawan Gunawan Abd. Wahid (Bandung: Mizan, 2015).

⁴⁷ An interview with Haryono Ong, (May 09, 2020).

⁴⁸ Sunhaji, "Between Social Humanism and Social Mobilization: The Dual Role of Madrasah in the Landscape of Indonesian Islamic Education," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 11, no. 1 (2017): 125–144, <https://jiiis.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/JIIs/article/view/259>.

does not behind this place. Hariyono Ong says that this mosque stands above all groups. However, with one particular note, in the pulpit and fig of this mosque, it is forbidden to talk about political, ethnic, and debated issues by the public because it can divide between Muslims and non-Muslims and between the Chinese community and the local population.

The Islamic social approach practiced by Chinese Muslims asserts that there cannot be "theological death" in social dynamics. In other meaning, faith must be able to become social control to create peace and cohesion in the public sphere.⁴⁹

This commitment makes this community provide the norm in every lecture and sermon not to adopt terms that can widen fragmentation among the people, especially non-Muslims. Because these materials are fertile ground for breeding irrelevant hate speech teachings taught in communities that are fighting for their minority presence in the local Muslim community⁵⁰.

On the other hand, the authority of organizations that facilitates Chinese Muslims is also committed to avoid religious fanaticism by ensuring that the religious views of this community can be accepted by Chinese non-Muslims. With this paradigm, theology is not only a religious problem. It can be a social problem, if someone has become exclusive in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society due to religious absolutism.⁵¹

As an influential person in the Chinese Muslim community, Sie Kim San emphasizes that his community participates in socializing actively. To the converts, he stresses that Islam is peaceful and is not allowed to do violence either in speeches, acts, or behaviors. For Chinese Muslims, inviting someone to the path of Islam must be done in three ways: appeals for good (*bil Lisan*), through examples of positive behavior (*bil hal*), and

⁴⁹ Shanjendu Nath, "Religion and Its Role in Society."

⁵⁰ Cliff Bird, "Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century," *Anthropological Forum* 24, no. 1 (2014): 86–88.

⁵¹ Masroer, "Religious Inclusivism in Indonesia: Study of Pesantren An-Nida and Edi Mancoro, Salatiga, Central Java," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1–23, <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/ushuluddin/esensia/article/view/191-01>.

wealth to help the needs of the community (*bil mal*). Liem Fuk San argues that it is not enough to preach with a call if faced with people experiencing difficulties in life: financial hardship, health problem, etc.

Therefore, in its presence and articulation in the public sphere, social theology as a religious discourse can no longer be within the single scope or monopoly of a religious figure. In other words, no particular group can claim and monopolize Islamic discourse. Social theology is a movement rooted in Muslims' consensus themselves to carry out collective social transformation.

It is interesting to note that scholars involved in social theology seldom take a posture as a theologian or identify themselves as scholars. They are more concerned about speaking to the Muslim public, rather than smaller circles, such as pulpit lectures or religious lectures. Thus, in turn, it prevents the struggle and monopoly on theological discourse that tends to be fundamentalist and revivalist-exclusive.⁵²

Traditional theology, which is primarily not articulated enough in social spaces, even tends to be in an excessive portion at the level of individual piety, not effective enough in overcoming the challenges of fundamentalist theology that are relatively more attractive. Primarily when there are few alternative ideas available. Thus the involvement of social theology in the public sphere means recognizing that theology or other religious discourse in this regard is too "risky" if it is only left exclusively to the role of religious leaders even though their participation is very significant.⁵³

Finally, the Chinese Muslims try to articulate social theology by orienting the function of religion in society: (1) religion is designed in such

⁵² Clive Beed and Cara Beed, "Theology as a Challenge to Social Science," *AEJT* 16, no. Augustus (2010): 1–32, https://acuresearchbank.acu.edu.au/download/200928ba1d8740a81b1d165ee59fcfbe5ea611ab526749bf6a5c4f2cb997e000/148456/OA_Beed_2010_Theology_as_a_challenge_to_social.pdf.

⁵³ Stanislaw Burdziej, "Sociological and Theological Imagination in a Post-Secular Society," *Polish Sociological Review* 186, no. 2 (2014): 179–193, <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=230943>.

a way to provide social cohesion to help maintain solidarity through the construction of inclusive religious understanding; (2) Islam is an instrument of social control to uphold religion-based morals and norms; and (3) through the concept of social theology, Chinese Muslims try to offer the meaning and purpose of religion to answer the problems of society through social roles. Thus, social theology is a fundamental idea in uniting modern society, which has complex social problems based on religion.

Hence, the social theology that stands out is the a priori attitude of Chinese Muslims towards the phenomenon of religious radicalism. They become very selective in providing Islamic understandings in their internal community. On the other hand, their intensive charity programs prove that theology is not just a belief. However, it must also positively impact others, whether religious or not.

Conclusion

This study successfully and conclusively demonstrates that Chinese Muslim social theology is practiced not only as a religious doctrine but also as a doctrine of the movement. Through social movements shown intensively by Muslim Chinese, Islam as a set of theological belief systems is not ignorant of the social issues faced by humans. The social responsibility shown does not depart from anyone's belief except the results of the actualization of the priesthood. On the other hand, the inclusive religious understanding expressed by Chinese Muslims indicates that religion indeed carries a glue of social solidarity. Islam is dialogical, accommodating, and open religion for anyone.

Thus, in this case, social theology discourse is a set of belief systems that represent faith through social aspects and do not tend to be a form of individualistic belief. As exemplified by Chinese Muslims, they succeed in the proliferation of more humanistic theological values by raising humanitarian issues, such as anti-discrimination, inclusivism, moderatism, community empowerment, poverty alleviation, and education services.

This phenomenon implies that the social theology showed by Chinese Muslims functions as an alternative, or at least complements to the doctrinal-mainstream theology, which tends to cult dogma in the belief system, so that it portrays that Islam is only a ritual religion that is absent from social problems. So, the social theology in this study is a form of concern about the theological discourse that tends to ignore contemporary issues.

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Interview

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