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Hew Wai Weng. *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2018. Pp xxvi + 305, glossary, map, figures, bibliog., index, GBP£22.50 (Pbk.), ISBN 978-87-7694-211-3.

In the current era of proliferating scholarly literature and increasing intellectual specialisation, rarely does an academic author write *the* book on a particular topic. Nonetheless, this is precisely what Hew Wai Weng has done in *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia*. Weng is the first to attempt a comprehensive ethnographic monograph about the ethnicity and religiosity of ethnic Chinese Muslims in post-1998 Indonesia. 1998 is the year that Indonesia's repressive New Order regime gave way to political liberalisation, opening new possibilities for public expressions of Chinese identity. The empirical ground covered by *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim* guarantees that it will be, for years to come, a useful reference for scholars, students, and anyone else with interest in Chinese-Indonesian Muslims. While the theoretical and thematic framing of the book is somewhat limited, this does not detract from its overall value.

*Chinese Ways of Being Muslim* uses ethnographic field research, predominantly in the Indonesian cities of Surabaya and Jakarta, to describe the identity and representational politics of Chinese-Indonesian Muslims in the late 2000s. Each chapter focuses on a different field in which this representational politics takes place: historical narrative (Chapter 2), cosmopolitan imaginaries (Chapter 3), Islamic preaching (Chapter 4), organisational life (Chapter 5), the contestation of religion and culture (Chapter 6), and conversion narratives (Chapter 7). The wide range of topics that are the foci of these chapters illustrates the breadth

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of the study. This should not suggest, however, a lack of depth. Quite the contrary, the book is rich in fascinating examples of the diversity of Chinese-Indonesian Islamic practice and expression.

Consider Chapter 4, in which Weng describes the life histories and preaching styles of five Chinese-Indonesian preachers and a Chinese-Indonesian Islamic pop band. Here the reader learns of the radically different ways in which these preachers and entertainers cultivate religious authority through configuring particular constellations of Chinese clothing and dance, religious politics, and audience. Weng's treatment makes clear the fraught symbolic political economy in which these preachers and entertainers carry out their work. He does similar analysis in Chapter 5, describing four Chinese-Indonesian Islamic organisations, with attention to how each fills a different niche in debates over how ethnic Chinese Muslims should orient themselves towards assimilation, Chinese cultural practices, religious conservatism, and related issues.

Within these broad analyses, one finds ethnographic details worth savouring. My favorites are the periodic descriptions of the Surabaya Cheng Hoo Mosque. Through these descriptions one learns that Chinese Muslims of all kinds congregate there, albeit not always interacting directly. These include, among others, liquor-drinking businessmen and young people who claim to align with conservative Islamic political movements. Indeed, even groups of non-Muslim Chinese also attend events, taking the mosque as an emblem of the entwining of Chineseness, Islam, and indigeneity in Indonesian history. Further, on any given day, one might find the majority of those attending prayers are not Chinese.

These details serve as iconic representations. The book's cover is, after all, a photograph of the Cheng Hoo Mosque with worshipers spilling into the complex's garden. They evocatively illustrate Weng's central argument, namely, that '[d]espite the self-essentialization of Chineseness and the subscription to conservative religious understandings among some Chinese Muslims, I suggest that Chinese Muslim cultural identities, especially as manifested in their mosques, promote religious and ethnic diversity' (p. 2). This is no Pollyanna-ish celebration of pluralism. Weng wrestles honestly with the limits, possibilities, and

contradictions of ethnic Chinese Islamic identities. Each of his chapters can best be thought of as a field-specific map of these limits and possibilities. They provide the uninitiated reader a nice sense of the range of expressions of Chinese Islamic identity one is likely to encounter in Indonesia today.

On the surface, such an argument could pass as banal. I suspect most readers who pick up *Chinese Ways of Being Muslim* will already expect to find such diversity among Indonesia's ethnic Chinese Muslim minority. The account Weng offers is so fully developed, however, that this would not be a fair criticism. The value of the work is not the fact that it makes this argument, but in how it does so through its detailed attention to the matrix of possibilities for representing oneself as Chinese and Muslim in contemporary Indonesia.

A less satisfying aspect of the book is its emphasis on representational identity at the expense of other ways of approaching ethnicity and religiosity. In some respects, this is a manifestation of classic problems in identity studies. Weng so well develops the matrix of possibilities for representing oneself as a Chinese Muslim that he loses sight of anything but the politics of representation. Mosque architecture becomes a narrative of Chinese and Islamic history, liquor drinking a sign of one's pre-conversion identity, and Chinese New Year a symbol of ethnic heritage. Weng does an excellent job showing the reader how all of these representations are contested, but here I am suggesting that these contested phenomena are not simply representations. Mosque architecture is not only a story, alcohol drinking is often the result of a cultivated palate or addiction, and celebrating Chinese New Year might best be understood through the logic of the gift rather than identity politics.

This shortcoming is most apparent in the final chapter, which is about Chinese Muslims' conversion narratives. Unlike in the chapter about Chinese Islamic preachers, the reader finds no extended life histories of particular people. Instead, what Weng offers are ideal types, illustrated by quotations or anecdotes from multiple interlocutors. It is telling that in the earlier chapter, which deals with a group more explicitly in the business of self-representation (that is, Chinese-Indonesian preachers) the reader encounters individuals and the complexities of their lives. In contrast, when turning to seemingly more ordinary and personal

representations, where one might expect to find traces of understandings or experiences of being ethnically Chinese and Muslim that are not reducible to the afore-sketched matrix of representation, the author fragments and reorganises his interlocutors' responses in ways consistent with this matrix.

While this reader would have appreciated more consideration of less explicitly representational aspects of Chinese Muslim life, this does not distract from the empirical wealth found in the text, or the thorough way in which it sketches the range of possible ways of representing oneself as a Chinese-Indonesian Muslim. The book is written in an accessible style, making it suitable for readers from the undergraduate level up. I recommend it to anyone with an interest in Chinese-Indonesians, religion and identity politics in Indonesia, and the representational politics of ethnic and religious minorities in general.

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