Review: Islam, the Chinese, and Indonesian Historiography--A Review Article
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Islam, the Chinese, and Indonesian Historiography—A Review Article

ANN L. KUMAR

In 1984 two publications appeared that were designed to make available little-known source material—archaeological and paleographic in one case, textual in the other—important for the historiography of the eastern Islamic world over the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. These publications are based on relics from port cities on the northern and southern shores of this world—Quanzhou (Zaitun) on the China coast, Semarang and Cirebon on the north coast of Java. Along with many other emporia old and new, these cities were incorporated into an extensive and thriving network of maritime exchange in the fields of commerce, religion, and civilization. The continued development of this network was threatened and ultimately forestalled by the antagonism of the conservative inland states of both Java and China on the one hand and the hostility of European maritime power on the other. But its legacy is not a trivial one.

The two works reviewed here treat very different evidence in very different ways. The first, Chen Dasheng’s Islamic Inscriptions in Quanzhou, deals in a straightforward, uncontroversial, and well-organized way with the archaeology and paleographic legacy of the Muslim community of Quanzhou, complete with exceptionally clear photographs of the tombstones and other remains and transcriptions of the inscriptions. The second, H. J. de Graaf and Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud’s Chinese Muslims in Java, is a textual study of a text that no one has seen, a text that is alleged to provide evidence for the revisionary and controversial claim that the founding fathers of Islam on the north coast of Java were in fact Chinese Muslims. Neither of the books develops to any significant extent either a historical or a historiographical context, so that it is very difficult for the reader (especially in the case of the second work) to make an informed estimate of the real importance of their material. This review attempts therefore to develop a general historical context for Chen’s volume, and for de Graaf and Pigeaud’s three other, interrelated contexts in addition: the history of the book itself, including the prior history of the ghostly text on which it is based; the historiographical context of the subject broadly defined (the Chinese and Islam in Java); and the political context, heated by conflicting attitudes toward ethnic and religious

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issues, within which the testimony of the text has been addressed in contemporary Indonesia.

Chen Dasheng’s compilation of the archaeological and paleographic legacy of the Muslim community of Quanzhou presents a large and interesting corpus of material that has no equivalent elsewhere in China. The oldest of Quanzhou’s mosques, the Ashab mosque, was built in the first decade of the eleventh century and the most recent inscription comes from a tablet recording the restoration of sacred tombs in 1871. Most of the graves that have dated inscriptions are from the fourteenth century. Although the book has a brief introduction dealing with Quanzhou’s history, it is best to read it in conjunction with an account of the trade and economy of the region at this time.¹

In the last quarter of the eleventh and throughout the twelfth century, a number of developments, including the commercialization of agriculture and the development of local industries, led to a much greater degree of economic integration in Fujian and a flourishing overseas trade. After a setback in the first three-quarters of the thirteenth century, overseas trade revived and flourished to an unprecedented degree. The prosperity of the region surpassed any other in Yuan China, and Quanzhou became China’s most important seaport, its affluence eloquently described by the famous traveler Ibn Battuta, who also journeyed through Southeast Asia. Both the trade and the administration of the region were dominated by foreign Muslims, most notably the Pu family (So 1982:217–20). It was common practice at this time to appoint Muslims to positions in government, particularly in financial administration, and Kublai’s edicts and regulations were often translated into Persian and Arabic, indicating that Muslims played an important role in government. Muslims promoted trade with the rest of Asia and served as tax collectors and financial administrators. As a minority, they were considered more easily controllable and more loyal to (because more dependent on) the government than the majority Chinese population; ironically, this was a role closely parallel to the one ethnic Chinese immigrants later came to fill for the Dutch government of Java. Kublai was also eager to use Muslim advances in astronomy, medicine, architecture, and military technology, although Muslims were generally not allowed to bear arms or command military expeditions (there was a similar well-founded fear of armed Chinese on the part of the Dutch in Java).² That the fear behind this policy was not an idle one was demonstrated by the notorious Persian garrison rebellion of 1357–66,³ which completely devastated the economy of south Fujian and of Quanzhou. The city was replaced as the commercial center of the region by Yueh-kang under the Ming and then by Xiamen (Amoy) in the seventeenth century.

The inscriptions translated here are thus the legacy of a foreign Muslim community with considerable economic and political power and with strong overseas connections, at least up until the end of the 1350s. Some of the mosque inscriptions are long and give quite detailed information about Islam and its reception in China: see for instance the re-erection of the stele of the Qingjingsi mosque in 1507, a copy of the 1350 stele, which gives an account of the land, people, and literature of Arabia (Tadjik) and of Islamic rules of behavior (fasting, pilgrimage, etc.), written by a non-Muslim who also commends the contribution of Confucian scholars to the work of

¹ For example, So 1982, which also contains a section on economic developments under the Yuan and Ming dynasties.
² On the Yuan-Muslim relationship, see Rossabi 1981:257–95.
³ Which may have been connected with Muslim sectarian conflicts; see Chen 1984:xvii.
restoration (Chen 1984:13–18). A tablet (also written by a non-Muslim) recording a later restoration of the same mosque, in 1609, gives a comparative account of the Buddhist and Islamic (i.e., non-Chinese) scriptures and of differing Confucian, Islamic, and Buddhist ideas about “fate” and “inborn nature.” The inscription concludes, “Either Buddhism or Islam will do us good, if we learn it in the correct way,” and deplores the extremist attitude shown by Confucians who would like to burn Buddhist books and ruin the monasteries (Chen 1984:20–22). This attempt to evaluate and defuse the (in many ways antagonistic) Indic and Islamic imported religious traditions offers an interesting comparison with attempts at syncretism in Indonesia, particularly Java.

The gravestone inscriptions are also interesting: many are dated both in the Chinese and in the Hijrah eras (in the case of Javanese tombstones, both the old Saka and the Hijrah eras are used), and occasionally the two do not correspond. It is striking how often the saying attributed to the Prophet, “Whoso hath died a stranger hath died a martyr,” recurs as the text on these graves. Persians made up the majority of the Muslim community, but the inscriptions show that there was intermarriage and Chinese influence.

In architectural form too the tombs testify to the development of a mestizo civilization: in some cases they represent a marriage between a strict Islamic style and the traditional Chinese altar-shaped tomb, and in others a Chinese development of the Persian “cupola” form whose earlier history runs from the Seljuqs and Timurids through the Mongols and the Moguls in India. From the fifteenth century on, many tombs of this type were built in northwest China.

There is little direct evidence of connections with Southeast Asia in this volume, except for a tablet that briefly records that the imperial envoy, general, and eunuch Zheng He offered incense here on the sixteenth day of the fifth month of the fifteenth year of Yongle (May 30, 1417). The translator’s note tells us that Zheng He was descended from an immigrant from the western countries, had had the surname Ma, and was the second child in his family. His native place was Kunyang, Yunnan, and he was given the surname Zheng when he became the eunuch of Zhu Li, the king of Yan (Chen 1984:96–97).

Zheng He, who led a number of extremely important expeditions to Southeast Asia in the early fifteenth century, reappears (under the old spelling Cheng Ho) as one of the Chinese heroes of the text presented in de Graaf and Pigeaud’s Chinese Muslims. This text first saw the light of day in 1964 as an appendix, some twenty-two pages long, to a work by Mangaradjia Onggan Parhindungan, Tuanku Rao. De Graaf and Pigeaud present it in English, preceded by an editor’s introduction by M. C. Ricklefs and a preface and introduction by the authors, and followed by nearly ninety pages of comments, thirty-five pages of notes on the comments, and a short recapitulation, all by the authors, and finally four pages of editor’s notes at the very end. There is no conclusion as such, and the authors make no clear judgment on the reliability of this source as a historical document: one has to infer their views from remarks made here and there throughout the discussion. Making sense of the materials presented in this book is like trying to navigate a particularly convoluted maze with the aid of haphazard and ambiguous signposts. That the authors have been unable to provide a clearer path for the reader must be seen in the light of their own difficulties: de Graaf did not live until the completion of the book, and Pigeaud’s eyesight failed before he could complete it.

4 It is thus the last publication of two scholars who separately and together have made a unique contribution to their field. Little of their work has been reviewed in JAS: only de Graaf’s catalogue

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The veiled and labyrinthine presentation of the material and the total lack of context naturally suggest to the reader that this is a work of interest only to a small group of highly specialized scholars. In fact, it is also a contribution, even if this is nowhere apparent between its covers, to a controversy that has featured prominently in Tempo—the Indonesian equivalent of Time magazine—since 1971, a dispute that touches on sensitive issues of race and religion and has led to the banning of a work by one of Indonesia’s best-known historians. If we accept the evidence of the material contained in this text, a number of the wali—the nine great apostles of Islam in Java—were Chinese, as were the first Sultans of Demak, the first significant Muslim principality in Java. This claim has led the Indonesian minister of religion to speak of an attempt to “sinicize” the history of Islam in Indonesia.

With such a controversial revision of the early history of Javanese Islam resting on this one text, which de Graaf and Pigeaud somewhat misleadingly refer to as the “Malay Annals”5 of Semarang and Cirebon, its provenance and pedigree become matters of great importance. They are strange indeed. As remarked above, the text first appeared in Mangaradjad Onggago Parlingdungan’s Tuan ku Rao, published in 1964. Parlingdungan claimed that the translator and first editor of the “Annals” was a Dutch colonial official called Poortman, who subsequently gave the manuscript to him. De Graaf and Pigeaud say that this claim “has neither been verified nor disproved so far” but also that ‘his statements about the ‘Annals’ provenance are misleading and obviously inspired by hatred of the Dutch, a propensity for mystification and a fondness for mischievous jokes” (pp. 2–3). Ricklefs comments in his introduction that attempts by Dutch scholars to identify Poortman, whose life Parlingdungan describes in some detail, have come to nothing, “somewhat remarkable in the light of Poortman’s supposed high official rank” (p. iii). Not so much remarkable as incredible: even the most humble colonial officials led well-documented lives, and if Parlingdungan gives any details of Poortman’s career it must be a relatively simple matter to look them up.

of the Western manuscripts of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde (JAS, vol. 24); Pigeaud’s monumental descriptive and analytical catalogue of Javanese manuscripts, (1967–70, 1980; JAS, vol. 27); and their joint work (Pigeaud and de Graaf 1976), which is a concordance to eight earlier books and articles written in Dutch by de Graaf (JAS, vol. 36). Two of Pigeaud’s most valuable works appeared on the eve of World War II: a Dutch-Javanese and Javanese-Dutch dictionary (1938a), still for many purposes unsuperseded; and a work of unparalleled ethnographic richness (1938b), the only work of colonial scholarship to deal comprehensively with the literary and theatrical expression, and through this the religion and culture in general, of the nonliterate majority of the largest ethnic group of the Indies; even in the post-colonial period, Western scholars in general have been very slow to look beyond the literary preferences of a small Westernized elite. Pigeaud’s five-volume postwar publication (1960–63), his first work addressed to an English-language readership, set out to reconstruct the world of fourteenth-century Java around one of its most important texts, the Nagarakrtagama. His minor publications, notably a number of long articles in Dutch, also repay the reader by their sensitivity to political realities and to conditions beyond the limited circle of the elite.

Although de Graaf’s doctoral thesis was published in 1935, most of his major works are postwar. First to appear was his history of Indonesia (1949), followed by a series of scholarly works on the reigns of the early kings of Mataram: the controversial Senapati, seen by C. C. Berg as a purely mythical figure (de Graaf, 1954); Sultan Agung (1958); and Mangkurat (1961–62). De Graaf also produced a number of other, smaller works, and in 1974 he and Pigeaud published their joint work De eerste Moslimse vorstendommen op Java, significantly advancing our understanding of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. De Graaf’s work was pioneering in its use of both Dutch and Javanese sources to write one sort of “Javanese” history, rather than following the previous almost exclusive focus on the history of the Dutch in Java.

1 Not only is the term “Malay Annals” already in currency as the English title of the best-known Melakan Malay history, the Sejarah Melayu, its use here also obscures the fact that the most remarkable feature of this text is that it is supposed to be a Chinese account of the Islamization of Java.
My curiosity was sufficiently aroused to check Parlindungan's account of Poortman in the relevant volumes of the *Regeringsalmanak voor Nederlandsch-Indie* [Netherlands Indies government gazette]. I was extremely surprised to find that in fact a C. Poortman was *contrôleur* of Si Pirok in the Tapanoeli region (see 1905:277; 1906:216, 281; 1907:217, 283) and later rose to be *resident* of Jambi (see 1924:253; 1925:257), as Parlindungan had claimed. The *Regeringsalmanak* does not take Poortman's career up to the crucial period when he is said by Parlindungan to have confiscated the Semarang temple records during the 1926 Communist revolt (which Parlindungan dates as 1928–30!); and I have not been able to follow his subsequent career in the Netherlands, where Parlindungan claims to have met him in 1937 and 1941.

Parlindungan's account of Poortman is not in fact characterized by any disapproval of his interest in collecting historical documents from out-of-the-way places—rather the reverse—and it would be very hard to argue that his account of Poortman's activities can be seen as a subtle attempt to blacken the name of the Dutch. Such indirection would be entirely uncharacteristic of Parlindungan, whose tirades against those of whom he disapproves pull no punches. Nor is the confiscation of a few old manuscripts likely to stand out as a particularly dark example of colonial oppression: one would have to forge something more sensational than that to warrant going beyond the public record. In his introduction, Ricklefs states:

In my view, much of these Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon could have been concocted by someone with a reading knowledge of Dutch and access to the edition of the *Pararaton* by Brandes (first edition 1896, second 1920), Groeneveldt's *Notes . . . compiled from Chinese sources* (1877) and Djaudiningrat's *Sadjarab Banter* (1913), and who could either read Javanese and had access to the 1874 edition of *Babad Tanah Jawi* by Meinsma or to a MS of the babad stories, or who had a copy of Olthof's 1941 Dutch translation of the Meinsma text. (p. v)

Yet it is hard to see why Parlindungan should have put in all this hard work of collation to produce a short, dry, and austerely factual chronicle—in striking contrast to his own sensationalist historiography—of an area of Indonesia in which he had no apparent personal interest. And in fact, Pigeaud and de Graaf do assume, in their subsequent discussion of the text, the intervention of a “Dutch colonial officer” in its transmission: “His most important contribution was probably the introduction of the European chronology . . . It seems possible that the records from Jambi mentioned by Parlindungan belonged to the Dutch colonial officer’s collection of Chinese papers” (p. 7).

Certainly the Javanese historian Slametmulyana believed Parlindungan's story. He included the “Malay Annals” material in his *Runtubnya keradjaan Hindu Djawa dan timbulnya negara-negara Islam di Nusantara*, published in 1968 and banned in 1971 for “disturbing public and legal order.” The Djaksa Agung (attorney general) subsequently refused to elucidate this vague charge although the ban followed an attack by the minister of religion (K. H. A. Dahan) on a revision of the history of Islam in Indonesia that, he said, attempted to turn the *kiblat* to Beijing or at least make Indonesians feel indebted to China (*Tempo*, July 31, 1971). Slametmulyana claims to have had frequent talks with Parlindungan until 1974 and to have been convinced by him of the veracity of his claims about the Poortman material, but he does not say what proof of the authenticity of his source material Parlindungan adduced.6

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6 After Parlindungan’s death, there were calls for his heirs to produce the material, apparently without success, although they did join in the *Tempo* controversy: see issues of Feb. 16 and May 10, 1980.
So we are still, unfortunately, in the realm of unsubstantiated claims and rumors with the Poortman story, although there seems no reason why a proper investigation should not be made. In a letter to Tempo of March 29, 1980, Nia Kurnia Sholihat claimed that a number of historians had investigated the matter, and particularly Parlindungan’s claim that the Poortman manuscripts had been deposited in the “Ge-dung Rijswijk,” an archival store that apparently does not exist. To my knowledge, none of these historians have published the result of their investigations. Yet something can be said about the “Annals” without waiting for an investigation of the Poortman-Parlindungan connection. First, even if we assume the best possible case—that Parlindungan acquired and did not fabricate the text—still it is clearly not contemporaneous or nearly contemporaneous with the period it describes. As de Graaf and Pigeaud point out, there is almost no possibility of an original chronicle’s having survived four hundred years in the physical and political climate of Java’s north coast. They see the earliest possible date for the original of Parlindungan’s text as ca. 1740, when a Chinese resident of Semarang may have translated older Chinese material into a Sino-Malay version. They hypothesize that this text was edited first by a “Dutch colonial officer” (i.e., Poortman or someone else) who supplied the Christian-era dates and then by Parlindungan, who added his own comments under the heading of “Supposition . . .” following the passage concerned. Like the presence of the unnamed “Dutch colonial officer,” the status of the eighteenth-century composition and translation of the text shifts from a purely hypothetical possibility to an assumption as the authors proceed.

Whatever their antiquity, the “Annals,” now available only in Parlindungan’s translation, have certainly undergone an unverifiable process of transmission and edition, not least alarmingly by Parlindungan himself, whose ability to reproduce dates accurately has already been seen to be strikingly unreliable. Furthermore, the mid-eighteenth-century text is not of superior antiquity to extant Javanese versions of the events it describes (both may of course incorporate older materials), although it may be closer to the locality concerned. De Graaf and Pigeaud examine the information the “Annals” provide in great detail, comparing it with Javanese accounts—and outside sources where these are available—to try to establish (if I read them correctly) whether the “Annals” can be said to have a superior plausibility to the Javanese accounts, either inherently or by virtue of the confirmation of other sources. This examination makes up the major part of Chinese Muslims and places great demands on the reader. Because the “Annals” is a chronicle mainly concerned with personal and genealogical relationships and because de Graaf and Pigeaud compare its version of these relationships with information from other sources such as Javanese histories and Tome Pires’s genealogy of Javanese kings, a set of tables would have been of enormous help here.

The authors’ overall evaluation of the text can perhaps be inferred from the following: its reliability as a historical source “can hardly be doubted” (p. 68); it is inaccurate regarding the regnal periods of the first rulers of Demak (although de Graaf and Pigeaud accept its general claim that the Demak royal family was Chinese) and regarding non-Chinese or purely Javanese matters generally (pp. 107–8); its account of the fall of Majapait in 1527 is in the main consistent with the authors’ own reconstructions in their earlier work De eerste Moslimse vorstendommen op Java (1974:111) a fact that not only makes it more reliable than traditional Javanese accounts dating this event to 1478 but also, as Ricklefs points out, militates against the theory that the “Annals” is a twentieth-century fabrication by Parlindungan. The authors also consider the “Annals” account of the life of Kin San, regent of Semarang, to be more

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plausible than Javanese accounts of Ki Pandan Arang, although they all “must probably be regarded as referring to one historical personage” (p. 114): an all too typically meager reward for this type of investigation into Javanese history. Finally, the authors conclude that the absence from the text of any mention of Sunan Kali Jaga and Sunan Giri, the most revered saints (wali) of central and east Java, around whom an extensive hagiographical literature has developed, “can be regarded as enhancing the historical reliability of the text” (p. 161).

In general, the authors seem to consider the “Annals” as more reliable than traditional Javanese accounts such as the “Books of Tales” (evidently a translation of the Javanese Sêrat Kanda, although its identity is nowhere made clear, nor is there any discussion of the age and transmission of the Sêrat Kanda themselves). It seems useful to point out here that the fact that Javanese histories do not identify a man as Chinese or give him a Chinese name cannot be taken to mean that he was not, in fact, Chinese: when a foreigner rose to a position of importance and entered the service of, or a formal tributary relationship with, a Javanese ruler, he was given the Javanese title appropriate to his rank and was henceforth, in accordance with Javanese practice, known by that title rather than by his personal name. After the Dutch arrival in the seventeenth century, Dutch East India Company records identified as Chinese men whose ethnicity is not mentioned in Javanese records, and there is no reason to suppose that this was not equally the case in preceding centuries, with many a Chinese identity hidden behind a Javanese title.

The authors also use events recorded in the “Annals” as a point of departure for a more general treatment of Chinese influence. Thus the statement (p. 20) that the mosques established by the Hanafiite Chinese were later converted into Sam Po temples (for example, at Semarang, Ancol, and Lasem)7 leads into a discussion (unfortunately split up between comment 8 and note 14) of the origin of the Javanese mosque. De Graaf had already attributed the characteristic multi-tiered roof of the Javanese mosque to Chinese influence in an earlier publication (1947–48), and no mention is made here of the contrary opinion of G. F. Pijper, who, although told by a senior Islamic official and member of the Banten royal family that the local form of the mosque roof owed its origin to Chinese influence, still preferred to attribute it to the influence of the Hindu-Javanese mera roof (1977:22). Both these theories about the origin of the mosque roof were put forward in the Tempo exchanges (see Slametmulyana’s letter of April 26, 1980, and Nia Kurnia Sholiha’s rejoinder of June 28).

In the recapitulation, which actually goes beyond the material treated in the text and commentaries, the authors summarize Chinese influence in general. Under the heading of material culture, they list the introduction of certain rice and citrus varieties, Chinese influence on cuisine, and the use of bricks and city walls. Under art, language, and literature, they note Chinese influence on Javanese and Balinese decorative art (curiously enough, there is no mention of batik) and the popularity of certain Chinese “romantic tales” in Bali. Chinese influence on wayang and gamelan and on the Balinese barong dance is tentatively suggested in the section on plays and

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7 Sam Po is another name for Zheng He, from the title San Pao t'ai-chien. He became a major cult figure of the non-Muslim north-coast Chinese, and up to the Second World War there was an association in Semarang dedicated to the maintenance of his cult. He also became a major figure in Javanese (and Balinese, Sumatran, Kalimantan) legend—according to Pigeaud and de Graaf, becoming identified with the authochthonous sky-god Dampu Awang (1984:51–54, 135–39). For a long time religious boundaries were hazily drawn, with Chinese adopting Islam and indigenous religious cults, and Javanese frequenting Chinese temples as well as mosques and indigenous holy sites, as eighteenth-century accounts reveal.
games, which also notes that Chinese card games have acquired considerable popularity throughout the archipelago; there is also a brief account of Chinese trade.

There is no doubt that Chinese influence made a major contribution to the culturally variegated north coast, where the inhabitants of certain areas were noticeably “foreign” in their ways because of Arab and South Indian as well as Chinese influence, even in the late nineteenth century. In the east especially, many of the high-ranking families of the Javanese bureaucracy were of Chinese descent. Yet this discussion is based on sources already known to us, whereas the “Annals” special claim to attention lies in the new perspective it opens for the history of Javanese Islam.

As we have already seen, the most controversial element of the “Annals” for Indonesians is its claim that Chinese numbered among the revered figures in the early history of the spread of Islam in Java. This claim is not entirely confined to this one text: in 1956, long before Parlindungan published his material, a Javanese prince gave a lecture in which he reported a Chinese tradition (Budiman 1979:18–20) that made very similar assertions: he named Sunan Bonang as a Chinese wali—the very same wali whose father Sunan Ngampel (Raden Rahmat) appears in the “Annals” under the Chinese name Bong Swi Hoo. Given the lack of contemporary evidence (for example, inscriptions), these claims are at present unverifiable. They are no less controversial for that, especially when put forward by those outside the Indonesian Muslim community. Western scholars might reflect on the likely reaction to a Muslim’s putting forward a similarly revisionary view of Saint Peter’s antecedents.

A claim not pursued by the authors although it is of more general interest is the depiction in the “Annals” of the first Chinese Muslim settlements as Hanafi in legal orientation and Yunnanese in origin. This contrasts with Ma Huan’s account, which says that the Chinese in Java were “from Kuang tung, Chang [chou]; Ch’uan [chou] and other such places” (Ma 1970:93). It is strange that the authors do not comment at all on this difference, which is mentioned only in an editor’s note at the end of the book. The Hanafi is the mazhab (law school) of Chinese Islam, but the claim that the first Chinese settlements were of Yunnanese origin surely deserves further examination, or at least comment. This is, I think, the first evidence put forward for Yunnanese migration to Java, and it raises some very interesting questions about ethnicity.

Under the Yuan and the Ming, Yunnan was definitely a frontier province. The Tai kingdom of Nan Chao was based here until Kublai encouraged the Muslim occupation of the region to bring it within the purview of the central government. In 1274 a Muslim governor, Saiyid Ajall, was appointed, and Muslims held more influential positions than Chinese did. Ajall developed agriculture, irrigation, and trade in what had been a backward area. Yunnan was the one area under the early Yuan where Muslim power was virtually unchecked, although a policy of general conversion was not followed. The other notable characteristic of Yunnan is its retention well into the Ming of an overwhelmingly non-Chinese ethnic identity: Edward L. Dreyer describes its population as aboriginal and tribal (1982:109–14). Perhaps the specific claim in the “Annals” that the Ming ambassador to the Hindu-Javanese kingdom of Majapait during the period 1424–47 was a certain Haji Ma Hong Fu, son of the

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8 The way in which the wali are represented is not only a matter for academic debate: in recent years much publicity was given to a proposed film on the wali for which finance was to come from the Chinese businessman Mas Agung (of Gunung Agung publishing house), which now seems to have been postponed indefinitely, apparently for political reasons.

"war lord of Yunnan," should be investigated by sinologists.\(^{10}\) But the question remains, given this highly individual blend of foreign Muslim and "tribal"—some would say Southeast Asian—elements, how Chinese were the Chinese whom the "Annals" claimed settled on the north coast of Java? The geographical boundary between China and northern Southeast Asia at this period is by no means easy to draw, and in the "Chinese" Muslim community's ethnic mix, one may hazard a guess that the Se-mu (foreign Muslim) element was still dominant.\(^{11}\)

In fact, the controversy concerning the claims made by this text arises not out of the shifting kaleidoscope of ethnic patterns in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but from the development of larger, more self-consciously delineated ethnic blocs since then, particularly in the high colonial period with its hierarchical, legally enshrined divisions into European, Foreign Oriental, and Native. The Tempo correspondence centered on a debate begun during this period by Western scholars: Which ethnic or national group brought Islam to Indonesia? Slametmulyana attacked the "Dutch theory" that Gujaratis brought Islam to Indonesia and castigated its continuing acceptance as a product of a slavish colonial mentality.\(^{12}\) Nia Kurnia Sholihat put forward evidence for the claim that Arabs had been much more important at an earlier period in the propagation of Islam than either Gujaratis or Chinese (Tempo June 28, 1980).

It is clear that the Indonesians have inherited the terms of this debate from their colonial past, in which much that was written on the subject of Islamization addressed the subject from an extremely narrow view of historical accident. Earlier scholars were looking for a small group of men—were they Gujarati traders, or Arab missionaries, or something quite different?—who had lighted a fire that became a conflagration. Engaged in an often acerbic debate to demonstrate their scholarly exactitude vis-à-vis their opponents, they could conveniently ignore the powerful interior dynamics of Islamic expansion and consolidation. Yet these dynamics had already created a whole world, racially extremely heterogeneous, around structures whose universality would be reaffirmed by their progressive transformation of Indonesian societies. Is it too difficult for us, as Westerners, to recognize that in scope and (even worse) in type there are close analogies between Islamic and Western expansion and consolidation? Indonesia's gradual absorption into the world of Islam involved wide-ranging transformations in areas—education, law, commerce, and agriculture—in which the West has long considered its own innovative capacity unparalleled. In such a long and profound transformation we must expect to see the work of different professions and ethnic groups: because Arabs were present at an earlier period does not lessen the impact of, say, the Gujarati contribution to the Islamization of certain parts of Indonesia (Aceh, Java) at a later period.

From this consciously detached viewpoint, the claim of the "Annals" is fairly modest: a Hanafite Muslim community, a by-product of Muslim expansion into China, was important for a time on Java's north coast before the Sjafi'i school, the

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\(^{10}\) 1984:7, 16. Ma is a common surname among Chinese Muslims.

\(^{11}\) On the use of the term Se-mu for the non-Chinese Muslims, see Rossabi 1981:259. Conversely, many "Cham" traders active in Southeast Asia must have had Chinese blood given the intensity of trading contacts between China and Champa, whose port was for a long period the sole channel of Chinese trade with Southeast Asia.

\(^{12}\) See Tempo, June 26, 1980. In fact, not all Dutch scholars accorded the chief role in the Islamization of the archipelago to the Gujaratis: Drewes (1968:433–59), for example, favors a South Indian rather than a Gujarati origin on the grounds that the Sjafi'i, the dominant mazhab in Indonesia, is also dominant in South India but not in Gujarat.
mazhab of the Indian Ocean littoral, achieved its lasting dominance. In the Tempo debate, however, it began to appear that the minister of religion, K. H. A. Dahlan, was unable to accept that the Chinese had any place in the history of Javanese Islam, a situation of which his opponents took full advantage. Professor H. M. Rasjidi, a Catholic, accused the minister of attempting to suppress freedom of thought by his support of the ban on Slametmulyana’s book. He went on to say that Dahlan was racist, in contravention of Muhammad’s teachings, and that some learned ulama “with slant eyes” knew more Arabic and more about the Koran than Dahlan (Tempo July 31, 1971). Two recent articles help us to understand why the minister of religion was clearly expected to take the suggestion that any Chinese might know more about the Koran than he did as a particularly grave insult.

The first, “Islam et sinité,” by Denys Lombard and Claudine Salmon (1985), is written in an explicitly polemical tone to combat the assumption that the Chinese are somehow intrinsically unassimilable, both religiously and ethnically, that they invariably retain their own religion and culture and form an endogamous community. The article provides examples of both types of assimilation in different regions of Indonesia from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. In the religious field, the most striking examples are the presence of Chinese within Sarekat Islam (Muslim Association), an organization that grew out of the Sarekat Dagang Islam (Islamic Traders’ Association), founded to pool and strengthen the resources of Javanese traders against Chinese competition; and the existence of a Sumatran Persatuan Islam Tionghoa (Chinese Muslim Association), which became a national association after Indonesian independence. These are, however, examples of an assimilation of Chinese to the majority religion at a period when most Chinese were moving in the opposite direction, toward a rescincification of family and community. The authors seem to see this rescincification as a phenomenon of the nineteenth or the second half of the nineteenth. They conclude that the ahistorical assumption that everything “Chinese” is foreign impedes our understanding of the greatness of the merchant cities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, cosmopolitan societies based on a marriage of Islamic ideology and Chinese techniques, and that “in the 19th century the Europeans without doubt dealt a much more serious blow to local economies in destroying this ‘holy alliance’ than in levying the batigslot [repatriated budget surplus]” (p. 89).

The second article, “Changing Javanese Perceptions of the Chinese Communities in Central Java, 1755–1825” by Peter Carey (1984), covers a much smaller period and geographical area in much greater detail. Carey’s major conclusion is that the Java War was a “clear watershed” before 150 years of communal polarization: during the war years cooperation between the Javanese war leaders and the Chinese did occur, but it was the exception, and the insurgents conducted terrible massacres of isolated Chinese communities during the early months of the war (pp. 1–2, 41). He believes that the humiliating British attack on the kraton (palace complex) of Yogyakarta in 1812 had persuaded the Chinese community that their interests lay with Europeans (p. 32), whereas two years earlier Pangeran Rongga had found it worthwhile to appeal to the wealthy, long-established Chinese Muslim communities of the north coast to support his rebellion (p. 22). Carey thinks that although there is evidence of anti-

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13 In fact, A. H. Johns (1961:17–18) had already suggested in 1961 that Indonesia and China—even the western interior—were linked by the apostolic work of the Sufi orders. In considering the reaction the “Annals” aroused, however, the fact that they are undoubtedly much more specific in personal and ethnic terms than any earlier material must be taken into account.
Chinese feeling at an earlier period, it did not become general until the last century and a half, at least in central Java; the situation may have been different in areas like Cirebon where there was already extensive leasing of land to the Chinese in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (p. 4). Yet Carey’s own background material strongly suggests that the seeds of nineteenth- and twentieth-century anti-Chinese feeling were already present in the economic dominance and consequent legal privilege that the Chinese had acquired as early as the second half of the seventeenth century. Already in 1653 the “incompetent” ruler of the central Javanese kingdom of Mataram found his projected blockade of Bali aborted by the refusal of the Chinese to halt their rice trade with the island; while the Chinese were developing this economic grip over Javanese rulers, they were also moving into an alliance with the Dutch East India Company, acting as middlemen to corner the pepper trade of Banten (p. 5). In addition, the Chinese seem to have been largely responsible for the partial monetization of the Javanese economy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: they had a monopoly of the manufacture of lead pici (cash), which were widely used in central and east Java until well into the eighteenth century, when they were replaced by Dutch East India Company copper coins (p. 10).

Although it is true, as Carey says, that there was an economic partnership between the Javanese ruling class and the Chinese, its economic strength and expertise lay predominantly, it seems, with the Chinese moneylenders and tax-farmers. Furthermore the Chinese were at the same time moving into another alliance, with the Dutch: here they appear not only as middlemen and traders in a large range of commodities but also as artisans, shipbuilders, and manufacturers of armaments (p. 9). There is no doubt that the Dutch did deliberately try to keep the Chinese a separate “nation” (as official documents refer to them) both by discouraging conversion to Islam as far as they could and by instituting a plural legal system. As early as 1677, Chinese and other foreigners living within Mataram’s territory were brought under Dutch jurisdiction, and eventually, in 1855, the Chinese were formally accorded the privilege of trial under Dutch law in all matters exclusive of family and inheritance (p. 6).

Carey’s valuable data enable us to discern in outline the economic role of the Chinese in eighteenth-century Java, and it should be possible to quantify this more exactly. In an approach that could fruitfully be applied to Java, a computer analysis of shipping lists from eighteenth-century Makassar shows a discernible development toward displacement of native traders by Chinese with the patronage of the Dutch East India Company. The relatively easy access that Western scholars have to the expertise and equipment required for quantitative analysis suggests that this approach is likely to prove more profitable in the future than participation in heated debates about the ethnicity (or historicity) of revered figures from the Indonesian past.

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14 The 1740s, the decade of the “Chinese War” when the central Javanese court allied itself with this Chinese-led uprising for a time (Carey 1984:4).
15 Other areas—significantly, the strongly Islamic Banten region—remained closed to Chinese immigration until the early years of this century.
16 Not that the upper hand was invariably with the Chinese; because Javanese rulers had the political advantage, they sometimes sacrificed their Chinese business partners when anti-Chinese feeling reached dangerous levels.
17 The effect on the peasantry and the economy generally of the presence of no less than three partly competitive, partly allied elites—the Javanese aristocratic and military elite, the Dutch commercial and military elite, and the Chinese commercial elite—is certainly a question that deserves further attention.
18 Personal communication, Professor Heather Sutherland, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
But it would be wrong to assume that a quantitative analysis of the economic position of the Chinese would be sufficient to define them in strict class terms and that their religious status is merely epiphenomenal, even though statistical material on religious affiliation and its changes over time is much less ample than economic statistics. (Dutch policy statements concerning the Chinese do however sometimes give us interesting hints of changing trends. In the aftermath of the 1740 Chinese uprising against Dutch rule, for example, there seems to have been both considerable interest in maintaining Chinese religion by the construction of temples and a large number of conversions to Islam [Salmon and Lombard 1977:xiv–xv].) There is no doubt that the nonconversion to Islam of a large part of the Chinese community, reinforced by continuing immigration, interacted with economic activity in a peculiarly explosive way during the nineteenth century, when Islam was generally strengthening its hold and demanding that its followers become more orthoprax. Anti-Chinese sentiment owes much to the involvement of the Chinese in activities—the marketing of opium and alcohol, gambling dens, usury (riba), brothels—that are illicit for Muslims even though at least partially tolerated in Chinese culture. These activities do not encompass the whole range of Chinese business and professional activities, but they are certainly the ones that have contributed most to anti-Chinese feeling, a fortiori in the circles to which the minister of religion belongs.

Yet the lines of religious division in present-day Java are complex and do not neatly coincide with ethnic divisions. It should not be assumed that the non-Chinese majority rallied solidly behind the minister of religion. The Islamic establishment’s attempts to increase the influence of Islam are resisted both by the small but relatively privileged Christian community (which cuts across the Chinese/Javanese ethnic boundary) and by the large community of abangan Javanese, whose religious life has elements of a cultural nationalist resistance to orthodox Islam. Thus in the absence of a clear indication of the reason for banning Slametmulyana’s book,19 unofficial sources claimed that it was actually a plot on his part to discredit Islam by giving support to the suggestion that some of the revered wali were, in Rasjidi’s stinging phrase, “slant-eyed.” They argued that Slametmulyana was lending support to the point of view—sufficiently widespread already in Java—that Islam is a foreign religion.

The present-day position of the Chinese is very similar to their eighteenth-century situation: they supply capital and expertise in partnership with a Javanese military-bureaucratic elite that has a monopoly of political power. Individual Chinese—the cakong—involved in partnerships with powerful generals have received a good deal of unfavorable attention from student critics of the government and from “indigenous” (prihumi) businessmen, who tend to look to Islam for support. The crucial question is whether the needs to preserve this relationship and to reduce the momentum of popular anti-Chinese sentiment, suppressed but ever present, will lead to a sub-

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19 Slametmulyana in fact got off relatively lightly; in 1960 Indonesia’s best-known and most historically oriented novelist, Pramudya Ananta Turs, was imprisoned after the publication of his book on the Indonesian Chinese with People’s Republic citizenship, Hua Kin di Indonesia. This book was based on a series of articles published in the weekly Bintang Minggu in response to a presidential decree of November 1959 banning aliens from engaging in retail trade, a ban supported by the Masjumi and P.S.I. Muslim parties. Pramudya argued that even foreign citizens were entitled to earn their livelihood in trade and that the real enemy of indigenous Indonesians was not the Chinese but Western imperialist-industrialist activity. Nor is it only in Indonesia that the ethnic sensitivities of the politically dominant group are making themselves felt in historiography: in Malaysia a similar process of desinicization is taking place, while in Singapore the historical role of the non-Chinese minorities is being downplayed.
The emergence of the distinctive Chinese identity within the majority identity, including Islam.

The last major outbreak of anti-Chinese violence, after the failure of the attempted coup in 1965, saw the Chinese community divided in its response to the need to establish a protective religious identity (it had been similarly divided in the second half of the eighteenth century, although the options were then somewhat different). Some Chinese did convert to Islam, but there was also large-scale conversion to Christianity. A later outbreak of violence—the riots on the occasion of Japanese Premier Tanaka Kakuei’s visit in January 1974 that quickly turned to attacking Chinese businesses—raises another question. There is no doubt that the Chinese have developed the same sort of relationship with the great Japanese firms that they once had with the Dutch, although the nature of the economic activity they service has changed. I will leave it to others who are more qualified than I to predict the future of the triangular relationship of Javanese military/bureaucratic elite—Chinese businessmen—Japanese and international capitalist enterprises in a climate of persisting if fluctuating popular and Islamic resentment. Undoubtedly, the Chinese are situated at the fulcrum of a very delicate balance of economic, ethnic, political, and religious interests whose maintenance or breakdown will determine the shape of Indonesia in the future, and much in the attitudes that Indonesians develop toward their past.

List of References


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