



# The spiritual experience of Chinese Muslim minorities post-1998 reformation: A study of Chinese Muslims becoming Indonesians



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This article describes a new method of viewing a historical phenomenon based on its social significance. This method enabled the classification and analysis of a group in a context simultaneously and chronologically. Using historical phenomenology, the authors found a polarisation of Chinese Muslims' thoughts and practices in the Indonesian context. As an example, the technique of classification of Islamic thoughts is illustrated to discover Chinese Muslim figures' religious activities. This method allows an improved social investigation to probe deeply into Chinese Muslims' formal religious life. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the new method is confirmed by the calculation of the polarisation of Chinese Muslim religiousness, leading to the fragmentation and diversification of Indonesian Chinese Muslims in the realms of politics, economic practices or Islamic rituals. New research results improve the understanding of how a social history of an ethnicity could grow and assimilate in a context. The assimilation could contribute to religious harmony in such a pluralistic country such as Indonesia and can be used for making better social decisions, especially related to the lives of minorities, who urgently need policymakers and stakeholders to accommodate the rights of those who are still in the process of gaining fairer recognition.

**Contribution:** Using historical phenomenology, this article tries to classify and study a group in a setting concurrently and chronologically. An in-depth social inquiry into the formal religious life of Chinese Muslims discovered a calculation of religious Chinese Muslims' polarisation, which led to the dispersion and diversification of Indonesian Chinese Muslims' politics, economic practices and Islamic rituals. New policy proposals can be made by evaluating religious polarisation.

**Keywords:** Indonesia; Chinese; Muslim; moderate; liberalism.

## Introduction

The Chinese way of being a good Muslim is one of the interesting themes to be noticed in the era of millennial disruption. As a minority within the Muslim minority, the Chinese Muslim community in Indonesia has not given up their various customs, strategies and forms of media literacy in the process of being a good Muslim. From the past until today, the Chinese ways of being Muslim has experienced contestation, sustainability and change. In the past, the Chinese way of being Muslim was through the family line, marriage and friendship. Now, the Chinese ways of being Muslim use quite a lot of approaches, strategies, relations, networks and media. Chinese Muslims in contemporary Indonesia are getting familiar with information technology (IT), because those who embrace Islam are not only from older generations, but also from the younger generation of Chinese Muslims (Rahmawati et al. 2018).

This can be understood from the development of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia through magazines and media websites, Instagram and Facebook accounts owned by the Chinese Muslim community. It can also be noted that through various ITs and social media, a number of religious teachers (*ustadz*) from the Chinese Muslim community have been creative and innovative in conveying the messages of Islam as part of the practice of preaching (*da'wah*) in the global era. Some of the *ustadz* who have actively presented in the study of Chinese Islam with the use of IT media include Ustadz Haryono Ong, Felix Siau, Ustadz Syaokani Ong, Ustadz Hasan and others. This is done through YouTube videos, Instagram and television. Evidently, the digital era brings tremendous, significant changes. There are different nuances compared to the previous years (Rahmawati et al. 2018).

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The existence of the Chinese minority in Indonesia has returned to heated discourse after some violence, property destruction, looting and expulsion occurred, causing many concerns around the relationship between communities in Indonesia, as happened in Jakarta in 1998 (Panggabean 2018; Suryadinata 1998). This incident is reminiscent of a similar incident in 1912, when ethnic Chinese people rioted in Indonesia. In Indonesian society, battles between ethnicities, races and religions are quite open if they are not carefully managed (Anggraeni 2017). Ethnic Chinese people have played an essential role in political and even religious life in Indonesia. The role of Chinese ethnicity is present in almost every element of social structure (Blackburn 2013; Purdey 2003). However, negative stereotypes and prejudice against them have continued (Marista 2014). Issues related to Chinese ethnicity are not dim but are becoming stronger are being included in national, and even international discourse regarding their rights as citizens and nation.

Chinese Muslims in Indonesia are a minority within a minority. In this context, the Chinese Muslim community's development is a crucial area of study within Islamic minority studies in contemporary Indonesia. Since the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, Indonesia's Chinese Muslim community has enjoyed greater cultural and religious freedom, but negative perceptions and assumptions persist and therefore require better understanding (Mahfud 2018).

Many Chinese Indonesians embrace Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Adherents of Islam from the Chinese community, however, form a small minority. They are scattered throughout various cities in Indonesia; the absence of a legitimate nationwide survey means that the exact number of ethnic Chinese Muslims in Indonesia remains unclear. In Indonesia, the Chinese community's umbrella organisation is the Chinese Muslim Association of Indonesia (Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia – PITI). This organisation has branches in more than 16 major cities in Indonesia, including Jakarta, Surabaya, Semarang, Yogyakarta and Pontianak (Mahfud 2018).

The study of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia is arguably still lacking. Studies related to Chinese Muslims are generally still a 'reactive' record to political events because of conflict and are usually followed by acts of riots and violence against ethnic Chinese (Panggabean 2018; Raharjo 2005; Titulanita, Sumardiati & Endang 2015). Because of too much emphasis on historical studies, what was revealed by previous studies was about tragic social events such as conflicts in society (Alfarabi 2010; Chin & Tanasaldy 2019; Coppel 1994; Panggabean & Smith 2011). Phenomenological studies may bring up other things besides incidents of conflict, such as the conversion of Chinese people, the assimilation of Chinese culture into Indonesian culture, and the like (Purdey 2010; ed. Suryadinata 1978; Wulansari 2015). But with this phenomenological historical study, all events can reveal themselves so that they can speak to the public. This is the aim of this article, namely to expose phenomenologically what

happened to the history of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. With this aim, it is necessary to openly read history from the viewpoint of this phenomenon, which is not always political, group-related or structural but can also be ethnic, personal or cultural.

It is important to conduct a study on the Chinese Muslim ethnicity in Indonesia, considering that the Chinese ethnicity is an ethnic group in the territory of Indonesia which is often the target of mass riots when people are disappointed with government policies. Regarding the various cases that have occurred, such as the incident in 1946, Malari in 1974 and finally in May 1998, the question arises as to why ethnic Chinese people became the target of the community's disappointment (McClymond 2022).

Thus, a presentation of what happened to the Chinese people entering Islam, as the religion of the majority of the Indonesian nation, is important to reveal the existence of this in Indonesian history. With the phenomenological disclosure of history, the inevitable fact will be opened up that the Chinese have become part of the Indonesian nation from a cultural perspective, and not merely from an economic perspective (Booth 2011; Die 1981; Karmela & Pamungkas 2017; Mackie 1993; Mahfud 2014; Musianto 2003).

## Methodology

This research is based on the paradigm of qualitative research methodology with deductive analysis (Filius et al. 2018). The purpose of this research is also qualitative in the sense that it is to understand certain situations, events, groups or social interactions of Chinese Muslims in Indonesian milieu (Lane et al. 2018). This is an investigative process in which researchers gradually understand social phenomena by differentiating, comparing, reproducing, cataloguing and classifying research objects (Malik, Abd Jalal, Rahim and Kahal 2020). The nature of the problem itself requires the use of qualitative research (Thirsk & Clark 2017). Here, knowledge and interpretation of the meaning of relevant facts can be obtained through literacy, observation and documentation (Rahman & Saebani 2018). Research objectives to be achieved are to gain an understanding of the meaning of the local community and its current application. Historical phenomenology provides a systematic view of the phenomena, which in this case is the Chinese Muslim community in Indonesia (Mitchell 2020; Wassler & Kirillova 2019).

## Results

The political attitude of the ethnic Chinese population, in the sense of a political movement, came to the fore when they carried out 'defiance' against the Dutch colonial government in Jakarta, which was known as *geger pacinan* (Blackburn 2013). They were more focused on business, although this had implications for politics. The ethnic Chinese population's general political strategy is bottom-up in the context of politics and culture and not the other way around, or at

least it is 'hybridised'. Anti-Chinese sentiment, which was dominated by accumulated political factors, erupted in May 1998 and the Chinese ethnic group was affected (Hutahaen 2014). They had to rebuild from scratch, including the renovation of shopping buildings and restoration after the traumatic aspects of the riots. Referring to the latest findings, the Chinese ethnic group's economic activities have been around for a long time. They have become part of the financial group in the archipelago. They are hardworking and have a positive, disciplined and pragmatic attitude (Kahn 1974; Hch'ng 1995). Some experts suspect their religious beliefs contribute to their economic activities, namely, Confucianism (ed. Suryadinata 2002).

They have various businesses, large and small, such as trading, grocery, wholesalers, pawnshops and mobile debtors (Faber 1931). They have a positive attitude and therefore their economic activities have social and political implications in economic life, as happened in Surabaya (Musianto 2003). Their tendency to take part in business activities does not occur casually but is inherited continuously, which then forms the character of a high work ethic (Faber 1931; Sulistiowati & Komari 2019).

Ethnic Chinese Indonesians received recognition through a long process, which was especially mentioned in the public area during the reign of Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur (Wahid 1991). This moment was an entry point for the Tionghoa ethnic group's political change, which had been culturally long, including Chinese Muslims (Freedman 2003). The Chinese identity was increasingly visible and freely expressed in the public arena after the 1998 reform and the Soeharto regime's fall (Turner & Allen 2007). This momentum was a response to democratisation and freedom for the Chinese minority, who were previously locked up. Regulations pertaining to foreigners and the political will are subject to change by the government and are claimed to be an effective way to develop ethnic Chinese (Maulana 2011).

Other studies related to Chinese ethnicity focus more on the strategic process of how Chinese people may become 'Indonesian' as a whole, such as via the assimilation strategy. The politics of assimilation to integration are carried out through various methods and approaches by ethnic Chinese minorities, such as assimilation through religious belief, politics and cultural practices (Maulana 2011; Purdey 2011). Even the political activities of ethnic Chinese Muslims existed before independence through Kho Tjeng Bie in 1913 via Sarekat Islam (SI). Sarekat Islam is a social and political organisation which has close ties with the Muslim Chinese ethnic group. Personal Chinese Muslim political activities are concentrated at the national level, such as Jakarta. Chinese Muslim businessman Budi Sarwono has advanced to become the regent of Banjarnegara. Mochamad Anton in Malang, East Java, is also a Chinese Muslim who is active in politics (Muzzaki 2010).

The political reforms in Indonesia in 1998, which ended the New Order regime, had opened wider opportunities for the Indonesian people to aspire to politics. The participation of

ethnic Chinese Indonesians in politics, in the case of the election for the Governor of Jakarta, for example, exceeded 41.9% (Hew 2017). There is no 'Chinese way to become Muslim' in Indonesia according to Hew. Chinese identity and Islamic religiosity need not imply racial segregation and religious exclusion. Chinese Muslims have spread to various socioreligious organisations and political parties (Hew 2018). Hew's study helps to better understand the cultural politics of Muslim and Chinese identity in Indonesia and offers a unique insight into Muslim cultural politics and Chinese identity in Southeast Asia today. Hew's (2018) study goes beyond the previous analysis regarding transnational connections, translocal imaginations and local Chinese Muslim identity negotiations in contemporary Indonesia (Hew 2014).

## Discussion

Chinese Muslim leaders have forged a distinctive translocal identity through transnational relations with Muslims in China. The global imagination attempts to redefine Chinese Muslims. There has been a polarisation of the understanding of Chinese Muslim both within and outside the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association. The symptoms of polarisation and fragmentation need to be addressed. The 'older generation' and the current generation of Chinese Muslims on a different side.

Chinese Indonesians are immigrants from China and have been around for a long time. They have lived in Java since around the 1600s. They work as traders, travellers and farm labourers and manage small businesses, such as coffee, cocoa, tobacco and rubber (Hew 2014). The colonial government controlled every community activity by breaking and creating strict rules. The Governor-General of the Netherlands in 1825 divided the population into non-Asian, ethnic Chinese, European, Indian Arab and native groups (Bailey & Lie 2013), separating native from non-native. Non-Asians are prohibited from living in Java, including ethnic Chinese people in their native environment. This racial classification lasted until after Indonesian independence. Indigenous or not, differences occurred until the next generation during the Old Order period, until the new regulations in the 1950s.

In general, ethnic Chinese Indonesians adhere to Chinese culture. The Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in the last population census shows that Indonesia consisted of 1128 ethnic groups. The ethnic Chinese group is one of those ethnic minorities, totalling around 11 million people. Their ancestors came from mainland China, especially from the Guangdong, Hokkien and Hainan areas, who later settled in Indonesia through marriage.

In 1628, the number of ethnic Chinese residents in Batavia was only 3000 people. Then in 1739, it increased to 10574. Of the total population in Java in 1815, namely 4615270 people, there were 94441 people (2.04%) who were ethnically Chinese. In 1999, the number increased by 3.0% of the total

Indonesian population at that time to 209 255 000, or around 6278000 who were of Chinese descent divided into several subgroups (ed. Suryadinata 2002).

Based on dialect, ethnic Chinese people are divided into Hakka Chinese, Hokkian, Tiochiu, Cantonese and Hainanese Chinese, mostly from four ethnic groups, namely, Hokkian, Hakka or Kheh, Tiu-Chiu and people from Cantonese cities. The Hokkian group generally lived on trade, while the Cantonese were also active in carpentry and technology as well as trade. Hakka groups worked in mining, and therefore many of them live in mining areas, such as Bangka Belitung and Palangkaraya. The Tiochiu group was generally active in the plantation business (ed. Suryadinata 2002).

Based on their domicile area, ethnic Chinese Indonesians are divided into Medan Chinese, Javanese Chinese, Kalimantan Chinese, Bangka Chinese and others. Based on the origin of their ancestors or clans, Chinese people are divided into Cia or Tjia family; the Gouw or Goh clan; the Kang or Kong clan; the Lauw or Lau clan; the Lee or Lie clan; the Oey, Ng or Oei clan; the Ong clan; the Tan clan; the Tio, Thio, Theo or Teo clan; the Lim clan and others. From their dialects, domicile areas, ancestral origins or clans, each subgroup's culture, customs, characteristics and noble values are reflected. Ethnic Chinese names generally consist of clan and name. Marga is located at the front, and the name is located behind the clan. In 1996, the total number of Chinese families was 11 969, while in 2007, there were more than 22 000 clans. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Chinese Marga Social Association recorded 160 Chinese families in Jakarta and 320 Chinese clans throughout Indonesia (Christian 2017).

The fragmentation of the Chinese ethnic group, in general, did not make them separate themselves, let alone carry out 'separatism' from Indonesian territory, including fragmentation in adhering to the religion. On the contrary, they integrated themselves into being part of the Indonesian nation and adhering to various faiths. The form of their activities as part of Indonesia's citizens and the nation is evidenced in social and political activities. The Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) was founded in 1932 as a form of declaration of Chinese ethnicity as part of the nation and supporting Indonesia's independence. Chinese Indonesians reject Chinese nationalism. This fundamental decision increasingly shows the existence of Chinese ethnicity to be part of the Indonesian nation and participate in the movement's history until Indonesia recedes (ed. Suryadinata 2002).

The minority of the Chinese community in Indonesia is only around 3.6%, which is still dynamic and continues to grow, so their numbers are debatable. A historian mentioned that only about 2% – 3% (6–8 million people) of the approximately 260 million Indonesian population are ethnically Chinese (Azra 2019); some say the number is around 11 million inhabitants. According to Info Tionghoa, of that number, about 2832510 people (or 1.20%) are Muslims. However, referring to the latest religious census

published in the media, the majority of Indonesians are Buddhist (around 45%), Protestant (35%), Catholic (9%), Confucian (7%), Muslim (3.6%) and of other religions (0.4%). Islam as the religion practised by some ethnic Chinese Indonesians is small compared to, for example, Protestantism. Historical factors and teaching pragmatism in life seem to be among the reasons. Apart from the accuracy of the number of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, what is clear is that they will continue to grow and spread, as will the spread of other ethnic Chinese religious communities, such as Chinese Christians, Buddhists and Catholics.

Regarding Chinese Muslims, Yuanzhi said, they have been around for a long time. One of the central leaders is Cheng Ho (Zheng He) from Yunan. He is claimed to be the Prophet Mohammad's 37th descendant through Ali bin Abi Talib, and he has been a Muslim since childhood (Kong 2000). According to these claims, although denied by Yu Ke because no convincing facts were found, Cheng Ho had come to Semarang, then Cirebon in Indonesia. The relationship and expansion of commerce is still an essential motivation in his goodwill. The Islamic style that Cheng Ho brought was Hanafiyah, which was considered more rational. Meanwhile, in general, the Indonesian population is characterised by Shafi'i in fiqh, Ashari in theology and Al-Junaid and Al-Ghazali in Sufism (Kong 2000).

On this basis, Chinese Muslims tend to adopt a traditional Islamic religious attitude, as is often attached to traditions among the Nahdatul Ulama (NU) (Kong 2000). It means that Chinese Muslims, as can be seen in their diverse life, tend to be traditional-moderate. Their moderate attitude is not only limited to religious issues but also extends to Islamic economic and cultural issues. Islam is tolerant of Chinese culture. Recognition of their culture can foster solidarity in the relationship between ethnic Chinese Muslims and non-Chinese Muslims (Rosmini & Haniah 2016).

Although their existence is long-standing in Indonesia, the debate over Chinese Muslims still raises a need for historical evidence. Some findings indicate the presence of Chinese Muslims in Singkawang, such as Chinese jars, drums and the Eight-Sided Mosque roof (Hasanah 2014). They are Chinese from the Hakka clan, who tend to be more independent-minded. They are more free to adopt Western ideas compared to other Chinese groups (Murtadlo 2013). The difficulty in revealing how Chinese Muslims got to Indonesia is because of the weakness of scientific evidence. Religious conversion and marriage are still the most traditional ways through which ethnic Chinese people become Muslims (Hew 2018; Fachrurrazi 2019).

Becoming a Muslim was a strategic decision for the acceptance of Chinese people as whole citizens. Also, Malay, Minangkabau, Javanese and Sundanese groups, who are generally Muslim, will accept Muslim Chinese Indonesians more than non-Muslim Chinese people. A similar situation distinguishes it

from the interaction of Chinese Muslims in Malaysia, who are more enthusiastic about benefiting despite their different beliefs. Chinese Muslims' image seems to have various tendencies within the Chinese ethnic group in general and within the group of Chinese ethnic Muslims. Here, Chinese Muslim identities are not singular, so their diversity is very diverse (Afif 2012; Azra 2019; Ngeow & Hailong 2016).

Indonesian Chinese Muslims are divided into several Islamic tendencies and orientations, which can be observed in their preferences of religious understanding and attitudes. Fragmentation of religious understanding and practice occurs with mutual acculturation, and with identification strategies such as changing identities in names (Eko Putro 2015). The politics of changing names among Chinese ethnic groups has become a booming trend, and it is not limited to Chinese Muslims. Ethnic Chinese groups in general adapted to the general public. This was a response to the New Order politics that suppressed Chinese ethnicity (Bailey & Lie 2013; Chua 2004). These strategic decisions in communication are categorised as acts of formative communication (Schoeneborn, Morsing & Crane 2020).

The change in the identity of the Tionghoa ethnic group is clearly based on ideas that also influence the pattern of diversity, such as what happened to Chinese Muslims who were members of the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association, which was founded on 14 April 1961 and became more popular with the title Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam. Although it does not have a direct relationship with social or political organisations, there is a non-homogeneous religious style (Lindsey & Pausacker 2020). In fact, the change in the organisation's name has shown that there is a difference in orientation related to its strategy to become Indonesian Muslims. There is a view to remain a Chinese Muslim 'without merging' with the native; there are those who argue that being a Chinese Muslim 'merges' with the natives (Afif 2012).

Is the assimilative demonstration of the Chinese Muslim community a whole religious direction and orientation or a strategy? A more explicit approach of cultural politics so that the Chinese community's culture is accepted or so that the Chinese Muslim minority has another orientation that is considered more modern? It is because the Chinese Muslim minority has made efforts towards a more serious direction in the spread of Islam by using literacy technology devices, thus allowing a different orientation with a description that puts greater emphasis on the old cultural traditions (Rahmawati et al. 2018). Chinese Muslims, as noted by Yunus Jahya (Lauw Tjhwang Thio), one of the Chinese Muslim leaders, are trying to assimilate the 'native' Indonesian Muslim community with all its tendencies and problems in the social life of Muslims (Mahfud 2014). Yunus Yahya's view tends to be 'moderate' or even modern in religious thought and understanding when viewed from a more inclusive Islamic perspective. Yunus Yahya's ideas and attitudes are open and realistic in breaking the deadlock regarding the

existence of the Chinese population in Indonesia and Islam. This attitude is one of Indonesia's Muslim modernists' characteristics (Ali & Effendy 1986).

In contrast to the tendency of Islamic understanding, Yunus, Yusuf and Felix Siauww prefer a version of Salafist Islam or 'Salafi-modernist'. Yusuf is active and affiliated with Jamaah Tablig (JT). Siauww, a dynamic Chinese preacher affiliated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), is also engaged with JT. Siauww has more 'extreme' and Salafist religious thoughts and passions, but his thoughts are still based on traditional Islamic values. Regarding the concept of Khilafah, for example, Siauww said that it is an Islamic idea that can be discussed. The democratic culture has provided room for the exchange of ideas, including the issue of the caliphate (Siauww 2013).

In the case of Basuki Cahaya Purnama, alias Ahok, related to 'Al-Maidah Gate' and the incumbent candidate for the Governor of Jakarta, Siauww was one of those who had an oppositional view of Ahok. He is a preacher who spreads textual Islamic understandings that tend to be ideological-Salafist. Publications of Siauww's Islamic thoughts were scattered on social media, such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and established publications, such as AlFatih Press (Hew 2017). Siauww, like HTI, rejects democracy, socialism, liberalism and secularism. On the contrary, he supported the caliphate, a global movement, and even became a central leader of Chinese Muslim internals (Siauww 2013).

Siauww's Islamic understanding and movement contrasted with Islam's choice and knowledge of his senior Anton Medan. The founder and leader of the Attaibin Bogor Islamic Boarding School took a more moderate understanding and movement; even in some instances, it was more 'pragmatic' and 'liberal'. In the DKI Pilkada, he supported Ahok, and naturally he did not mind non-Muslims becoming leaders. His view is more substantive in seeing the relationship between politics and religious attributes. This picture also shows that religion can be 'negotiated' with the development of the sociocultural life of society. Medan, as well as Siauww, further spread Islam through social media, in addition to managing the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). His position as chairman of PITI also gave Medan more space to balance the movement and textual Islamic understanding within the Chinese Muslim community (Hew 2018).

Anton Medan's views, as written in his letter to Basuki Cahaya Purnama (Ahok), are right in contrast to Siauww's understanding, particularly the opinions related to Islam regarding politics, nationality and tolerance between people of different religions. For Medan, Islam needs to be understood and lived in a just domain. Regarding Islam (in the meaning of 'guidance'), it is God's prerogative. Meanwhile, matters beyond that, such as brotherhood relations with others (*ukhuwwah insaniah*), relations as fellow Muslims (*ukhuwwah Islamiyah*) and relations as citizens of the nation (*ukhuwwah wathaniyah*), which he calls the Islamic

trilogy *rahmatan lil'alam*, are very dynamic (Hoerudin 2010). Furthermore, according to him, Islam as a religion must be contested or grounded, such as with a political approach. So, for Anton Medan, politics is a tool and means for successfully implementing religious values. Anton Medan also made brilliant breakthroughs in the field of *da'wah*. Reconceptualisation of the propaganda was carried out by Tabliq (Islamic Oratory). There were also solutive actions such as opening schools that are more oriented to improving the people's material and spiritual welfare. Medan's decision regarding the solution to the social problems above cannot be separated from his conception of *da'wah*. For Medan, *da'wah* is not only 'oral', as a lecture, but also a real action (*da'wah bi al-Hal*). *Da'wah bi al-Hal* is a *da'wah* approach that is oriented towards empowering people, especially in solving basic problems, such as the fulfilment of clothing, food and education (Aripudin 2012). Medan criticises *da'wah's* implementation, which has been going on for ceremonial tendencies and without a clear direction (Hoerudin 2010). The principle of Medan preaching to his students refers to the signs of Shaykh Abdul Qodir Zaelani, as follows: 'When you face the poor, the poor, don't open a book, but open a pot. Fill her stomach first then you take the Koran'. *Da'wah's* orientation in Medan is an Islamic approach practised by modernist Muslim Indonesia (Ali & Effendy 1986). The difference is that the concept and the *Da'wah* movement in Medan appear smoother because it is segmented, namely the marginal class Muslim community, former criminals and convicts. Meanwhile, modernist Muslims' concepts and movements were more institutional and political, covering a broader segment.

The polarisation of Islamic understanding is not only on issues of political Islam and national issues but also on religious rituals. Chinese Muslim leaders Holilullah and Ali Karim have different views regarding religious practices. The Chinese New Year celebration in the Chinese tradition by the head of the Haji Karim Oei Foundation is considered to have no foothold in the Qur'an or hadith. Although it must be admitted that many Chinese Muslims still practise Chinese New Year, Ali even replaced the celebration with a gathering. The cultural acculturation between Chinese and Islamic traditions by Chinese Muslims has been treated in various ways and refers to their respective views that show their tendency to understand Islam. Ali Karim's view is closer to the understanding of thought Salafist puritan in Islam, as is the current of similar arrangement among Muslim modernists (Ali & Effendy 1986).

The evidence that the Chinese Muslim opponents have entered into substantive Islam is represented by Syafi'i Antonio (Nio Gwan Chung). He is more concentrated on responding to the development of the Islamic economic system. Syafi'i responds to Islamic financial practice issues, such as establishing shari'ah banks, building theoretical solutions for Islamic Economics (IES) and founding the TAZKIA Islamic Economics College. Regarding the presence of Islamic banks amid problems with conventional banks

and the monetary and financial crisis, Syafi'i said that it was a very appropriate solution for Muslims (Muzzaki 2010a).

In other cases, findings related to Islam's relationship with the Chinese minority took various forms, down to fundamental issues. In the case of Chinese Muslims in Palembang, it tends to be a dilemma. Islamic identity is distinct from Chinese identity, and the two are in opposition to one another. Chinese culture seems incompatible with Islam. In addition to dealing with the custom of getting married to someone of the same race, Chinese Muslims also have to deal with the view that the Chinese community is not adherent to Islam (Pahrozi 2018).

Therefore, the religious attitude of the Chinese minority in some cases in Indonesia has a nonmonolithic tendency. Apart from these historical factors, it is also because of the sociocultural factors present or the 'where' factor. There is also the 'how' factor, that is, the factor with which they were first introduced to Islam and their tendency after converting to Islam. Referring to information from several informants and Chinese Muslim organisations, such as PITI, there are symptoms that Chinese Muslims are fragmented into several Islamic tendencies, in ideas, organisational affiliation and understanding.

A potent Chinese cultural background with a great tradition of its people *vis-à-vis* Indonesian Islam manifests itself in an emotional struggle. Therefore, Islam must accept a position as a secondary culture or little tradition. Islam and Chinese culture in Chinese Muslim religiosity in Indonesia are complementary; there is even a real cultural relationship, as the symptoms occurred in Makassar (Kunu 2018). However, in the context of Chinese culture, in general, it is subrelated to Chinese life.

The expression of Islam by Chinese Indonesian Muslims is not complete. They tend to see the general parameters of Indonesian Muslim life, which are already established. Chinese Muslims have their expression in the tremendous Chinese culture. The relationship between the three elements – (1) among Chinese culture, (2) between Chinese culture and Chinese Muslims and (3) within the archipelago – presents a breakthrough in a new cultural form that strengthens Islam in the archipelago. This innovation did not make them leave the spirit of Pancasila as the foundation of the national philosophy. The structure of Chinese Islam proves that Pancasila's spirit is welcome in accepting its citizens' diversity from various races and ethnicities of the world (eds. Fealy & White 2008).

The closeness of Chinese Muslims with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, the two largest socioreligious organisations in Indonesia, is also an indicator, although not wholly, of their general orientation of understanding and diversity in addition to the PITI organisation. PITI is considered more open, and the media effectively builds communication and relations among ethnic Chinese

Indonesians, especially Muslim ones, compared to other Chinese Islamic institutions. For its role as a bridge or link between Chinese elements, the existence of PITI is increasingly central as a social institution. As an organisation of the Chinese Muslim community, PITI tries not only to become a bridge but also to play a social and cultural role in the process of integration of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesian society, including non-Muslim Chinese, as happened in the regions.

In this context, this article contends that the development of the ethnic Chinese Muslim community in the digital era is inseparable from the use of IT, which is used to optimise the function and role of the ethnic Chinese Indonesian Muslim community on one hand. On the other hand, using more IT and other social media is also considered a challenge that can have a negative impact if not well controlled. Therefore, the role of all stakeholders is to advise and support each other and make various control and evaluation efforts to optimise and strengthen the role of the ethnic Chinese Muslim community development in Indonesia today and tomorrow.

## Conclusion

There is a stream of spiritual understanding that tends to be moderate as attached to Chinese Muslim leaders. They tended to be moderate by letting themselves be contextualised through imitation and assimilation. Some have opposing views without having to imitate the majority of Muslims in Indonesia. Here the Chinese tradition remains 'intact' with Islam as a religion, without having to be assimilated. The polarisation of Chinese Muslim diversity has led to the fragmentation and diversification of Chinese Indonesian Islam in the future. This polarisation and fragmentation of social life and Chinese Muslim religion in the future, adapting to the Indonesian context, are generally accepted.

What is new in this research is its historical phenomenological approach. From this it was found that the Chinese community, who were usually considered foreigners in Indonesia, have become part of the Indonesian nation. This is because now many Chinese Indonesians are embracing Islam, the religion of the majority of Indonesia's population. Also, Chinese Muslims have participated in the development of Islam itself to become Muslim public figures.

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### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed towards data collection, data documenting and analysis, and manuscript preparation. All authors critically reviewed and approved the final draft and were responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

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