



Original Article

Dynamics of Chinese Muslim Development in Medan City, 1965-1998

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Abstract:

This research examines the dynamics of Chinese Muslim development in Medan City in the period 1965-1998. Using the historical method and literature review approach, this research analyzes the development and changes that occurred in the Chinese Muslim community in Medan during the New Order period. The results show that the position and role of Chinese Muslims underwent significant changes during the period, from post-G30S/PKI stigmatization to a more positive portrayal of their contributions in the social, economic and religious fields. The formation of the Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia (PITI) in 1961 and its transformation into Pembina Iman Tauhid Indonesia in 1972 were important milestones in the development of this community. Despite facing various challenges such as discrimination and negative stereotypes, Chinese Muslims in Medan managed to build their dual identity as Muslims and Chinese through a complex process of cultural assimilation and social interaction. This research reveals that the socio-political dynamics of the period affected the public perception and integration process of the Chinese Muslim community into the wider Medan society.

Keywords: Chinese Muslims; Medan City; Cultural Assimilation; PITI

Introduction

Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, particularly in Medan City, have become an important part of a society rich in cultural and religious diversity. Their presence has contributed significantly to the social, economic and religious development of the region. The period between 1965 and 1998 was one full of political and social dynamics in Indonesia, which also impacted the Chinese Muslim community. This study aims to analyze the development of Chinese Muslims in Medan City during this period, and its impact on their identity and social integration.

The period from 1965 to 1998 encompassed many important events in

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Indonesian history, including the New Order period under President Soeharto, which was known for its policies that impacted various ethnic and religious groups. During this time, various policies of the New Order government affected people's lives, including minority groups such as Chinese Muslims ([Hill, 2011](#)). This study will examine how Chinese Muslims in Medan faced changes and how this affected their position in society.

Chinese Muslims in Medan City have a long history filled with dynamics and changes. Medan City, as one of the major cities in Indonesia with high ethnic diversity, has been home to the Chinese community for centuries. Since the beginning of their arrival, the Chinese community has adapted to the local social and cultural environment, including through religious conversion to Islam. The period between 1965 and 1998 was a crucial time for the Chinese Muslim community in Medan, where the political and social changes taking place in Indonesia significantly affected their lives ([Suryadinata, 1986](#)).

During the New Order period, various government policies had a significant impact on people's lives. As stated by Sen and Hill, government policies during the New Order often affected the lives of certain ethnic groups ([Sen & Hill, 2007](#)). This study will analyze how the dynamics of Chinese Muslim community life in Medan City during the period 1965-1998, and how this affected their social integration and identity.

This study is important because it provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of minority community life and its impact on their social life. In addition, this study also contributes to the existing literature on the history and development of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, which has often received less attention in previous studies. Abdullah asserts that social dynamics have a very important role in shaping the lives of minority groups, including the Chinese Muslim community. This research seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the developmental dynamics of Chinese Muslims in Medan City during this period of change. This research will make a significant contribution to our understanding of how the Chinese Muslim community in Medan navigated the social and political changes that occurred during 1965-1998 ([Abdullah, 1981](#)).

Literatur Review

There have been many studies on Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, but studies that specifically discuss the dynamics of Chinese Muslim development in Medan City are still limited. Here are some previous studies that are relevant to this topic: Tan (2008) in his book *"Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia: A Collection of Writings"* provides a comprehensive overview of the history and development of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia ([Tan, 2008](#)). Although it does not specifically address Chinese Muslims in Medan, this work provides an important context for understanding the social and political dynamics affecting the Chinese community in Indonesia. Hill in *"The Press in New Order Indonesia"* analyzes the socio-political situation during the New Order era ([Hill, 2011](#)). This research provides valuable insights into how government policies affect the lives of minority groups such as Chinese Muslims.

Hoon in his research entitled *"Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Hybridity: The Dilemmas of the Ethnic Chinese in Post-Suharto Indonesia"* discusses the identity dilemmas faced by ethnic Chinese after the New Order ([Hoon, 2006](#)). Although it focuses on the period after 1998, it provides insights into the complexities of Chinese Muslim identity. Perret in *"Colonialism and Ethnicity: Batak and Malay in Northeast Sumatra"* provides historical context on ethnic dynamics in Sumatra, including Medan

([Perret, 2012](#)). While not specifically addressing Chinese Muslims, this work helps to understand the ethnic background of the region.

In her research entitled “*Islamization of Ethnic Chinese in Medan City, 1961-1998*,” Annisa Sabrina (2020) discussed how ethnic Chinese in Medan converted to Islam and adapted to the local community. This research is relevant for the study of “*The Dynamics of Chinese Muslim Development in Medan City, 1965-1998*” as it provides an overview of the factors that encouraged religious conversion among ethnic Chinese as well as the role of organizations such as PITI and Mualaf Center Medan in helping them integrate. Sabrina found that many ethnic Chinese embraced Islam not because of coercion, but because of personal conviction after comparing Islam with other religions. They also feel peace after embracing Islam. This research shows that religious guidance conducted by related organizations is very helpful in strengthening their identity as Muslims and facilitating interaction with the Muslim community in Medan ([Sabrina, 2020](#)).

This research is important to consider in the study of the dynamics of Chinese Muslim development in Medan in the period 1965-1998, and how various socio-political factors affected the community. Sabrina's findings help provide historical and social contexts that enrich the understanding of the dynamics of Chinese Muslim development in Medan City. While the above studies provide valuable insights into various aspects related to this topic, there is no study that specifically analyzes the developmental dynamics of Chinese Muslims in Medan City during the period 1965-1998. This study aims to fill the gap by analyzing the development of Chinese Muslims in Medan during a crucial period in modern Indonesian history.

Methods

There have been many studies on Chinese Muslims in Indonesia, but studies that specifically discuss the dynamics of Chinese Muslim development in Medan City are still limited. Here are some previous studies that are relevant to this topic: Tan (2008) in his book “*Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia: A Collection of Writings*” provides a comprehensive overview of the history and development of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia ([Tan, 2008](#)). Although it does not specifically address Chinese Muslims in Medan, this work provides an important context for understanding the social and political dynamics affecting the Chinese community in Indonesia. Hill in “*The Press in New Order Indonesia*” analyzes the socio-political situation during the New Order era ([Hill, 2011](#)). This study provides valuable insights into how government policies affect the lives of minority groups such as Chinese Muslims.

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Results

History of Chinese Muslim Presence in Medan

The presence of the Chinese Muslim community in Medan has strong historical roots, dating back to the 14th century through the path of da'wah led by Sunan Ampel's disciples. This development shows that the Chinese Muslim community has existed for a long time in the region, blending with the local community in various aspects of life. One of the earliest examples of this blending was during the time of Panembahan Sumolo in 1762 AD, where some Chinese settled and married into the local population. This interaction showed the Medanese community's acceptance of the Chinese immigrants, which then continued to develop in the form of deeper cultural assimilation.

The process of cultural assimilation between the Chinese Muslim community and local communities in Medan takes place through complex social interactions, depending on the historical and sociological context. Chinese Muslims in Medan show high adaptability, not only in terms of architecture as shown by the work of Lauw Pia Ngo, a Chinese architect who designed buildings by accommodating Chinese, Medanese and Arabic cultural elements but also in daily life. They are known as a group that easily adapts to the local culture, different from the common stereotype that the Chinese community tends to be exclusive ([Siregar et al., 2024](#)).

The interaction between the minority Chinese Muslim community and Medan's Muslim-majority society has grown stronger over time. This blending was strengthened by marriages that were no longer endogamous and by the Chinese community's involvement in strategic economic sectors. Chinese Muslims in Medan are known as reliable traders, controlling important economic sectors that make them an integral part of the social structure of Medan society. Economy is one of the main capitals that enable them to establish wider social relations and influence the cultural and social dynamics in Medan city. In the context of majority-minority relations, the cultural blending that occurs shows that the identity and role of the Chinese Muslim community is increasingly accepted and integrated into the Muslim

majority culture in Medan. For example, their involvement in the world of santri and pesantren signifies that they have entered into one of the core of Medan's culture, known as the santri community. This shows that this community has opened up a space for deep interaction with the essence of Medan's culture, while strengthening their position in the broader social structure.

The period 1965-1998 saw significant social dynamics for the Chinese Muslim community in Medan. During this period, the Chinese assimilation policy implemented by the Indonesian government greatly influenced the way this community interacted with the wider society. Various policies and socio-political situations during this period shaped public perceptions of the Chinese Muslim community, both in the context of social relations and their ethnic and religious identities.

The development of the Chinese Muslim community in Medan City in the period 1965-1998 showed complex dynamics, especially in the social, political and religious contexts. In those decades, issues related to Chinese identity and Islam became an often sensitive topic in society.

In 1965, the political situation in Indonesia was very turbulent, especially after the G30S/PKI incident, which was then followed by restrictions on the Chinese community. In this context, the Chinese Muslim community experienced pressure to assert their Islamic identity as a way to assimilate and avoid the negative stigma attached to ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The New Order government's policy of encouraging assimilation led the Chinese Muslim community to emphasize their religious identity over their ethnicity ([Coppel, 2002](#)).

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Chinese Muslim community in Medan began to gain more public attention as they became more involved in social and economic activities. This increase was largely driven by government policies that encouraged economic integration and the removal of restrictions on people of Chinese descent, including those of Muslim faith. This period saw the active role of Chinese Muslims in the economic development of Medan city, as well as their contribution in socio-religious activities such as the construction of mosques and Islamic schools ([Reid, 2005](#)).

However, this dynamic did not always run smoothly. Challenges faced by the Chinese Muslim community, such as discrimination and negative stereotypes, still arise frequently in daily life. For example, there are still views that focus on aspects that reinforce negative stereotypes, such as the relationship between ethnic Chinese and economic practices that are considered unfair or exclusive. This shows that despite efforts to display positive integration, ethnic and religious biases persisted in society during this period ([Chua, 2004](#)).

Entering the 1990s, the public's view of the Chinese Muslim community in Medan began to change. There began to be greater recognition of the diversity within the community. The daily experiences of Chinese Muslims, the challenges they faced, and their attempts to construct a dual identity as Chinese and Muslim in Indonesia began to be better understood. This transformation was partly driven by socio-political changes in Indonesia that led to more openness and pluralism, although overall, the integration journey of the Chinese Muslim community in Medan still faces various structural challenges ([Suryadinata, 1986](#)).

Thus, it can be concluded that the period 1965-1998 showed significant dynamics in the development of the Chinese Muslim community in Medan. From

1965 to 1998, there was an evolution in acceptance and integration that reflected the broader socio-political dynamics in Indonesia. Despite progress in the community's acceptance, the challenges they face, including discrimination and negative stereotypes, are still issues that need to be addressed in the context of a more inclusive society.

Organization of Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia (PITI) in Medan City

The establishment of PITI (Indonesian Chinese Muslim Association) in Indonesia is inseparable from the dynamics of Chinese Muslim community life that has colored the archipelago's history. The presence of the Chinese Muslim community in Medan City itself has deep historical roots, aligned with the city's development as one of the important trading centers in Sumatra.

In its early developmental stages, Chinese citizens who embraced Islam in Medan faced various challenges, both from within the Chinese community and in the process of integration with the local Muslim community. These conditions prompted the formation of an organization that could accommodate their interests, particularly in religious and social aspects. PITI emerged as an organization bridging these needs. This organization not only played a role in religious guidance but also assisted in the socio-cultural adaptation process of its members. The developed programs encompassed various aspects, ranging from Islamic religious education and worship practices to community social activities.

Throughout its journey, PITI Medan experienced various developmental phases that reflected the social-political dynamics of its time. During the New Order era, for instance, the organization had to adapt to government policies regarding the assimilation of ethnic Chinese. Nevertheless, PITI remained consistent in carrying out its role as a platform for the development and empowerment of Chinese Muslims.

PITI's contribution to building social harmony in Medan deserves recognition. Through its various programs and activities, this organization has successfully built bridges of understanding between the Chinese community and other Muslim communities. This is reflected in the active involvement of PITI members in various social and religious activities in Medan City.

PITI Medan's key figures have also played an important role in developing Islamic da'wah (religious outreach) among the Chinese community. They have not only focused on internal development but have also actively fostered dialogue with various elements of society. These efforts have contributed to creating a better understanding of the Chinese Muslim presence within the community.

In terms of institutional aspects, PITI Medan continues to develop its organizational structure and work programs. The establishment of various activity divisions demonstrates this organization's commitment to serving the increasingly diverse needs of its members. These range from da'wah, education, and social services to economic empowerment.

The contemporary challenges faced by PITI Medan include efforts in leadership regeneration and adaptation to modern developments. The organization is required to continuously innovate in its methods of da'wah and development while maintaining the fundamental values that formed its founding principles.

PITI's presence in Medan has made significant contributions to Islamic development and inter-ethnic harmonization. The organization's experience in managing dual identities - as Muslims and as Chinese - provides valuable lessons for building an inclusive society.

Da'wah activities among the Chinese community began showing significant improvement around 1930, although statistical data regarding significant movements during this period is difficult to find. The Indonesian Chinese Islamic Party (PTII) emerged in the early 1930s with two main objectives: inviting the Chinese community to embrace Islam and improving their social status. Meanwhile in Medan, Haji Yap Siong, also known as Haji Abdussomad, established the Chinese Islamic Union (PIT) in 1936 with several followers. Through this organization, they sought to express their dual identity as both Muslims and Chinese. After Indonesia's independence, the headquarters of the Chinese Islamic Union was relocated from Medan to Jakarta, with Abdul Karim Oie Tjeng Hien as its leader ([Sabrina, 2020](#)).

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Conclusion

This study has analyzed the dynamics of the development of Chinese Muslim communities in Medan from 1965 to 1998, focusing on their representation in various information channels and its impact on their social integration and identity. During this period, the Chinese Muslim community, which was initially stigmatized following the G30S/PKI incident, experienced a significant shift towards a more inclusive perception that recognized their positive contributions in social, economic, and religious spheres. This shift in perception was not solely driven by internal factors within the Chinese Muslim community but was also influenced by government policies that promoted their social integration.

Between 1965 and 1998, various information channels played a crucial role in promoting ethnic and religious integration while mitigating social tensions arising from ethnic and religious differences. However, significant challenges, such as discrimination and negative stereotypes, persisted in media portrayals despite efforts to suppress them. Organizations such as the Indonesian Chinese Islamic

Association (PITI) played an instrumental role in fostering social integration and strengthening the identity of Chinese Muslims. PITI contributed to enhancing mutual understanding between the Chinese community and the broader Muslim society through various social and religious activities and actively engaging in Islamic outreach (dakwah).

Despite facing numerous challenges, PITI has strengthened the position of the Chinese Muslim community within Medan's social structure and facilitated the development of their dual identity as both Muslims and Chinese. Overall, although issues concerning the portrayal and acceptance of the Chinese Muslim community remain, this study demonstrates that various information channels have played a significant role in shaping a positive narrative that reinforces their social integration. Thus, fostering a more inclusive representation and deeper understanding of the Chinese Muslim community in Medan is a crucial step toward achieving a more inclusive and harmonious society in Indonesia.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the Chinese Muslim community in Medan continue to strengthen their social relationships with the wider society, both in religious and socio-economic aspects. This can be achieved by increasing participation in social activities that involve diverse groups, fostering mutual understanding and tolerance among different communities. Furthermore, organizations such as the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (PITI) should expand the reach of their developmental programs to further support their members in reinforcing their dual identity as both Muslims and Chinese. In addressing challenges related to discrimination, a collective effort from the government, society, and social organizations is essential to create a more inclusive and harmonious environment. Such efforts will facilitate better social integration, ensuring a more cohesive and accepting society.

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