

# Eastern Turkestan

## A Muslim State Never a Part of China

*Dr. Mozammel Haque*

**T**he Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China claimed through the letter column of the Jeddah-based English daily, *Arab News*, on 21 June 1994 that "Sinkiang is part and parcel of China since time immemorial as acknowledged by the international community." This is distortion of facts and, therefore, it needs to be rectified in the light of historical facts and figures.

China's hold on the region, known today as the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, has always been troubled. In recent times, Beijing's authority was re-established over the territory only in the 18th century, but the People's Republic of China has followed the Manchus, and Republican era leaders in claiming that Xinjiang has "always" been "part of China." Like the ancient Chinese emperors and other Chinese leaders who regarded themselves as "sons of Heaven," and as such considered all countries of the world as their actual or potential domain, the Chinese Consulate General echoed their claims, which has no historical foundation.

In order to justify their domination of Eastern Turkestan, the Chinese claim that it has been a part of China since the Stone Age, and that Chinese habitation there established Eastern Turkestan as an indivisible part of China. This

argument, however, distorts historical facts.

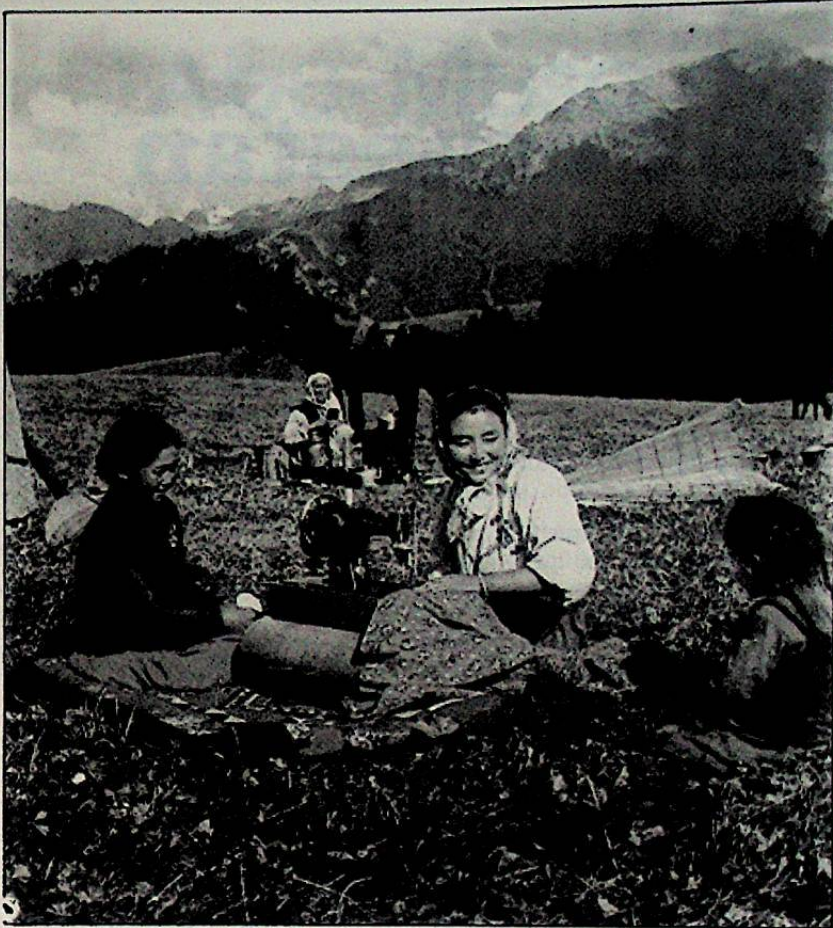
It is historically true that the Turkic peoples are the indigenous natives of this area and their homeland is Turkestan, which, in Iranian language, means "The Land of the Turkic peoples," dating from the 7th century. It is also true that the western part of Turkestan had been gradually conquered by Tsarist Russia by 1865, when it became known as Western Turkestan. In the 1920's after the formation of the former Soviet Union, Western Turkestan was divided into five republics, called Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The eastern part of Turkestan was invaded by the Manchu rulers of China in 1876. Subsequently, Eastern Turkestan was called Xinjiang or Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region by the Chinese.

It should be remembered that the historical name of Xinjiang or Sinkiang is Eastern Turkestan. The Manchu rulers of China renamed it "Sinkiang" and annexed it the territory of the Manchu Empire, on 18 November 1884; and in 1955, it was called "Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region." The word "Sinkiang" or "Xinjiang" in Chinese means "New Land." Thus, it signifies that this territory was not a part of China prior to its annexation in 1884. Eastern Turkestan covers an area

larger than Alaska and approximately three times the size of France, 1.6 million square kilometers, about one-sixth of the total area of China, including other Chinese colonies like Tibet, Eastern Turkestan bordering Western Turkestan to the northwest, the Mongolian Peoples Republic to the northeast, Afghanistan to the southwest, Pakistan, India and Tibet to the south and China to the east.

It is also a fact, sociologically, that unlike the Chinese, the people of Eastern Turkestan, have a complete different history, culture and a language recognised from early times. Most of the indigenous peoples of modern Central Asia, including the non-Han population of Eastern Turkestan, are of Turkic stock and speak languages comprehensible to modern Turkish speakers. The majority of modern Eastern Turkestan's 14 million peoples shares ethnic ties with Central Asia: Kazakh, Kirghiz, Tajik, Uzbek and Tatar nationalities are among Eastern Turkestan's 13 ethnic groups.

Pan Ku, the great historian of the Han dynasty wrote: "As for clothing, costume, food and language, the barbarians are entirely different from the Middle Kingdom...Mountains, valleys and the great desert separate them from us. This barrier which lies between the interior and the alien was made by heaven and earth.



A Muslim family of Eastern Turkestan is relaxing in the country-side.

Therefore, the sage rulers considered them as beasts and neither established contact with them nor subjugated them...the land is impossible to cultivate and the people are impossible to rule as subjects. Therefore, they are always to be considered as outsiders and never as citizens... have never reached their people..."

Geographically, Eastern Turkestan is completely separated from China. One of the western gates of the Great Wall, facing Eastern Turkestan, is called Yu Min Guang ("Jade Gate"). Eastern Turkestan is famous for its jade." *The New China Atlas*, published in Shanghai in 1939, clearly states that during the Ch'in, Han and Tang dynasties, the Jade

Gate was accepted by the Chinese as their westernmost border.

Besides this cultural and geographical separateness and distinct different identity, the Turkic peoples of Eastern Turkestan, historically, have a distinct independent political identity, which keep them separate from the Chinese. A long history of separate political identity of Eastern Turkestan falsifies the claim of the Chinese leaders and diplomats.

Thomas J. Barfield's meticulous study (*The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 B.C. to A.D. 1757*, Cambridge, M.A.: Blackwell, 1989) of China's relationships with nomadic empires should be sufficient to dispose of any histor-

ic Chinese claim to Eastern Turkestan other than by conquest. The Chinese control over Eastern Turkestan was temporary and incomplete. The frequency of invasions and sporadic revolts suggests that the indigenous peoples never accepted Chinese hegemony over their territory. Between 104 B.C. and 751 A.D., China staged six different invasions of Eastern Turkestan. The total period of Chinese occupation during these 855 years was only 157 years. During the remaining 698 years of this period, Eastern Turkestan remained an independent country. After the repulsion of the Chinese occupiers by the Arab, Turkic and Tibetan forces in 751 A.D., Eastern Turkestan enjoyed an independent sovereign status for a long period of thousand years, before it was invaded by the Manchu rulers of China.

The Mongols, who ruled during the Yuan dynasty from 1270 to 1368, already controlled Eastern Turkestan, when they finally consolidated their control over China. Under the Mongol brotherhood, Lillian Craig Harris observed in his article ("Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implications for China's Policy in the Islamic World"), published in *The China Quarterly*, No. 133, March 1993, pages 110-129). "Eastern Turkestan was incorporated into Mongolistan and administered by Jagatai and his successors from Aksu and later Kashgar. In no way the area was considered a part of China." Moreover, during this period, the Uighurs voluntarily became a part of the Mongol empire, where they maintained their sovereignty and played an important cultural and political role.

The Manchus, after having established a huge empire in China, proceeded to subdue independent Eastern Turkestan, invaded it in 1759, but this and subsequent invasions achieved no long-term success until 1876. On November

18, 1884, the Manchu invaders annexed the territory under the name of "Xinjiang" to the Manchu Empire. First of all, Eastern Turkestan thus became a part of Manchu, and not a Chinese empire. Secondly, the Manchu occupation of Eastern Turkestan between 1759 and 1863 cannot be viewed as an assertion of Chinese dominion, because the Manchus were not Chinese. Thirdly, this period of occupation had not gone unchallenged. The Turkic peoples of Eastern Turkestan revolted 42 times against their Manchu rulers with the aim of regaining their independence. In 1863, they were successful in expelling the Manchus from their motherland where they founded an independent state under the leadership of Yakup Beg Badavlat, which lasted 16 years. This state was recognised by the Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia and Great Britain.

In 1911, Manchu rule in China was overthrown by the Nationalist Chinese movement under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, who established a republic in China. Dr. Sun Yat Sen, founder of Nationalist China, in Article Four of the National Development Programme, which he presented to the first Congress of the Kuomintang Party in 1924, admitted that there were Turkic peoples living in China, and that these peoples were aboriginal inhabitants of Eastern Turkestan. He stated that these peoples had the right to self-determination and that this right should be recognised.

After his death, however, power passed into the hands of Chiang Kai Shek and his clique. This group not only abrogated Article Four, but also pursued a policy, actively dividing and assimilating the Turkic peoples of Eastern Turkestan, in order to create a "Great Chinese Nation." During the Republican Era (1912-49), central control over Eastern Turkestan was loosened. The Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turke-

stan, who wanted to free themselves from foreign domination, staged several uprisings against the Nationalist Chinese rule during this period. Twice, in 1933 and again in 1944, the Turkic Muslims were successful in setting up an independent Eastern Turkestan Republic. But these independent Republics were overthrown by the military intervention and political intrigues of the Soviet Union.

In 1949, the Nationalist Chinese Government was, in turn, overthrown by the Communist Chinese Revolution. After that, Eastern Turkestan fell under Chinese Communist rule.

Turkic Muslims declared Eastern Turkestan independent on the following three occasions in the modern period of history:

- i. Emirate (1865-1877)
- ii. Muslim Republic of Eastern Turkestan (1933-1934)
- iii. Eastern Turkestan Republic (1944-49)

In the latter part of the 19th century and the first seven decades of the 20th, the Turkic Muslims have had a difficult time. The Muslim Republic (1933-34) was invaded by the Chinese with the active support of the Russians, whose forces carried out a large scale massacre of the Muslims. The last Republic (1944-49) was about to gain international recognition, when, again the Russians colluded with the Nationalist Chinese, and ultimately the Republic fell to the Communists in 1949.

Thus, it can be seen through the historical facts that Eastern Turkestan was never a part of China. Until the mid-18th century, Chinese attempts to control Eastern Turkestan were sporadic and never resulted in the establishment of permanent Chinese authority there. Neither the Mongols nor the Manchu rulers were Chinese and during this period the territory not part of Chinese empire. Even during the "Feudal," or

"Reactionary" or "Progressive" Chinese occupations, the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan did not and do not accept the Chinese occupation of their motherland. Resistance and revolts continued. The fact of historical invasion and present forcible occupation are not alone sufficient to establish a territorial claim of the present. Nor do historical periods of subjugation invalidate a people's claim to sovereignty in their own land. Long before the Chinese, both Iranians and Greeks had invaded Eastern Turkestan and twice, in the seventh and eighth centuries, Tibetans had invaded it. If past invasion justifies today's territorial claims, not only would China have many competitors for Eastern Turkestan, but Tibetans and Mongols of today would be justified in claiming vast territories of China itself.

Since occupying the country in 1949, Chinese authorities have pursued a policy of the assimilation of the peoples of Eastern Turkestan, eliminating their culture and exterminating their belief.

Today the Turkic peoples of Eastern Turkestan are waging a life and death struggle for survival. Fundamental human rights and freedoms, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights continue to be violated by the Chinese authorities. Eastern Turkestan people, seeking only to live with dignity continue to be killed, tortured and imprisoned. This fact has been documented by international organisations, such as, Amnesty International, Asia Watch and the Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker.

Despite policies of political oppression, the cultural genocide and economic exploitation, the peoples of Eastern Turkestan, with the support of the international community, are determined to continue their struggle for democracy, respect for human rights and self-determination through non-violent methods.

# Image of Islam and Muslims Among Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia

*Yunus Jahya*

**A**lmost five years ago on September 3, 1988, I was invited by RISEAP (Regional Islam Da'wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific) to speak at a symposium in Kuching, Sarawak. I presented a paper under the title "Indonesian Muslims of Chinese Descent."

As you probably know, there are approximately 5 million ethnic Chinese in Indonesia which at present has a total population of about 185 million. 4.7 Million of those people are now Indonesian citizens and only 300,000 are still alien, viz. nationals of PRC or Taiwan. These citizens of Chinese descent or ethnic Chinese play a very important role in the economy of my country. In fact, people of Chinese descent have similar dominant positions in the economic field all over Southeast Asia qq. the Asean countries. They are economically well off, but unfortunately only a handful of them is Muslim. I wonder why our Da'wah movement in the Asia-Pacific region has not given special attention to this group of such great potential. In contrast, other religions, especially Christianity, have systematically approached them with remarkable results. I am therefore grateful to

the Almighty that these three days we are convening to discuss Da'wah Islamiyah among my fellow-ethnic Chinese in the Asia-Pacific region where the group numbers about 20 million people.

The paper I am asked to present at this conference should deal with "The Image of Islam & Muslims in the Eyes of the Chinese in Indonesia." I hope the following will more or less enlighten us on the matter.

Divide and rule:

Dutch colonial policy divided the population in three categories.

- At the top: the Europeans,
- In the middle: the so-called Foreign Orientals, mostly Chinese and
- At the bottom: the Inlanders, i.e. the indigenous or natives.

These groups lived strictly separated from each other and had different economic roles in life. On the economic ladder the natives were at the lowest level, while the others were far above.

This Dutch - divide et impera - policy instigated one group against the other creating continuous animosity, especially between the Chinese and the people at

large: natives. The Dutch have now left our country and the majority of Chinese are now Indonesian citizens, but the animosity still exists, although it is less intense than in the past. We are at present trying to bring both groups closer to each other through a policy of assimilation. However, this needs time to materialize. Communication, social intercourse and contacts between both groups are further handicapped by religious differences.

The majority of our people (90%) are Muslim, while ethnic Chinese still adhere to traditional religions, beliefs and customs, which comprise a mixture of Buddhism,

Confucianism, Taoism or Christianity. And, especially since 1966, the latter has been gaining in importance: many ethnic Chinese turn Protestant and their elite become Roman Catholics. To be frank, only a small number have converted to Islam (between 50,000 to 100,000), although the quality of our new converts is much better now.

The question arises as to why this is so. Why do these people turn to Christianity instead of choosing Islam, which is the grassroots religion of the country?

One of the main causes lies, in my view, in the past. Dutch "divide and rule" policy had systematical-ly created in the minds of Chinese an extremely bad and distorted picture about Islam and its followers in Indonesia.

The Muslims are, in the eyes of many ethnic Chinese, hypocrites, not to be trusted, dirty, fond of having many wives and divorcing them, anti-Chinese, etc. The wife of Chinese taipan in the automotive industry complained: "Who are crying Allah Akbar at riots against us? Who are the thieves, asking bribes, squeezing us? Who does not repay when borrowing from us? Who are always discrediting us? They are all Muslims!"

Turning Muslim could easily lead to an economic setback or downfall since fellow-Chinese will distrust you and discriminate against you in business upon conversion. And belonging to the community of Islam means stepping down to a "lower" social level resulting in loss of prestige since Muslims are still left far behind economically.

These perceptions and images were nurtured for centuries in the past creating a "mental block" in the minds of ethnic Chinese. Only intensive contacts between indigenous Indonesians, especially the Muslims, and ethnic Chinese, in general, can destroy this block. Apart from the historic factor, quite a number of ethnic Chinese, considering conversion to our religion, are hampered by various psychological factors. Will conversion to the religion of the majority not be seen as an opportunistic attitude? As you know, ethnic or overseas Chinese already have the stigma of being "chameleons." This could possibly be the reasoning in the case of my friend's daughter. This schoolmate of mine is one of Indonesia's top Chartered Accountants. His daughter at that time in

Junior High School – came home and told her parents that she was seriously considering embracing Islam. The parents were somewhat upset.

Liem (my friend's Chinese surname) told his daughter that she and her parents should always be one and united in matters of religion. "If we turn Muslim, we should do it together." Liem asked for books on Islam from me and I even contacted Mr. Soedarpo Sastrosatomo, Indonesia's shipping magnate, to approach Liem (with whom he is very close). It was hoped that Darpo, as we call him, would assist Liem to make the proper decision. The daughter has meanwhile been sent to California, USA for further studies and I have not heard any further news about Islam as an alternative choice in the life of my dear friend Liem and his family.

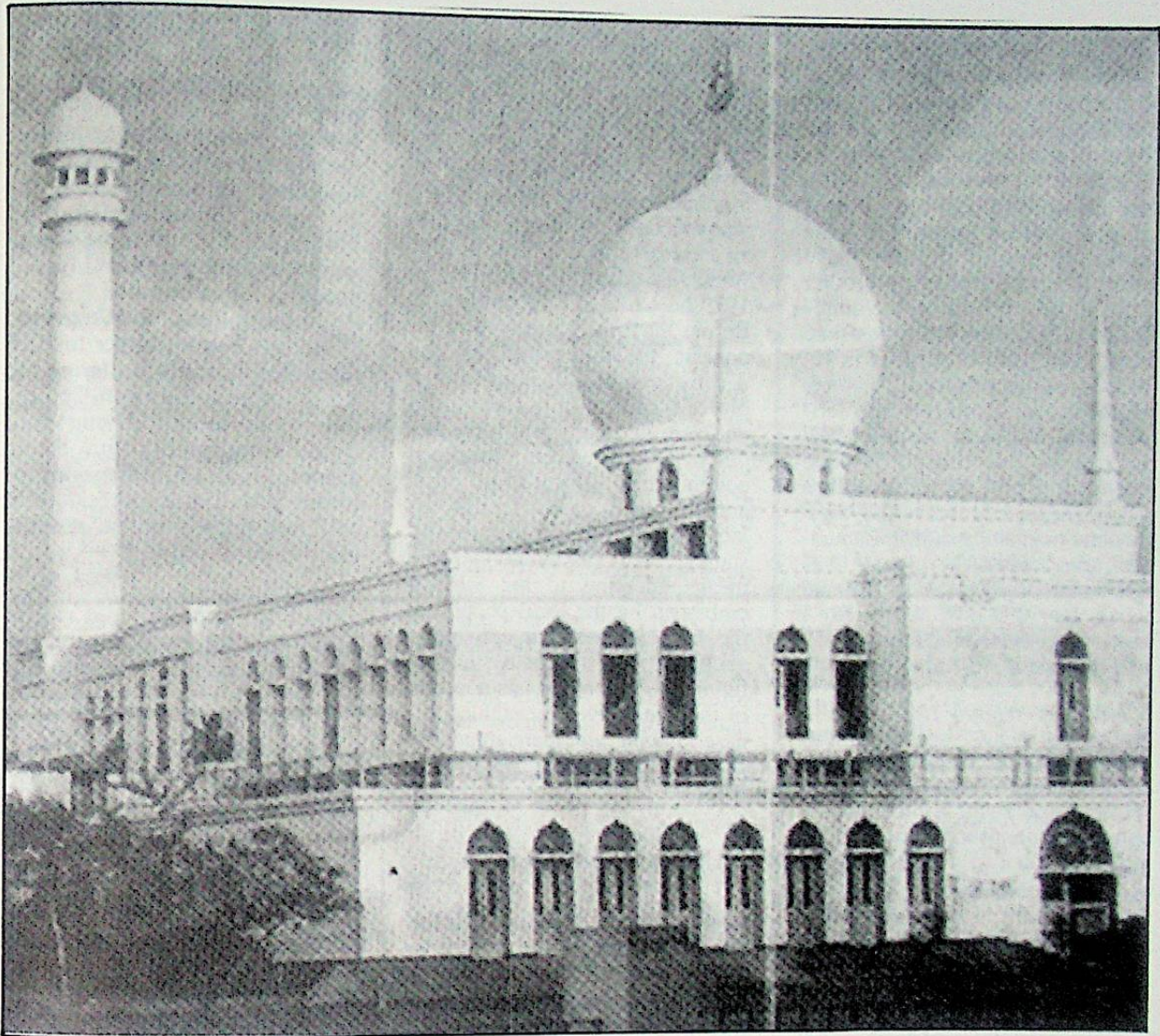
Another complaint among ethnic Chinese is that our religion is too complicated with too many prohibitions (abstaining from pork, alcohol, etc). In this connection let me tell you another story. Mr. Mar'ie Muhammad, our Director-General of Taxes (now Minister of Finance), gave a copy of the Holy Qur'an to Mr. Anthony Salim, the heir-apparent to our famous Taipan Mr. Liem Sioe Liong (Sudono Salim). Some time later Anthony said to Mr. Muhammad: "Pak Mar'ie, Islam is indeed a good religion, but it would be very hard to follow you whom I see praying at least five times a day. You even perform extra prayers during the day. How could I match that?"

The notion that Islam is only an extra heavy burden to life is shared by other ethnic Chinese. Life as immigrants in the past for their forefathers (and offspring) has contained so many hardships and so much suffering that the later generations want to "enjoy life" and take it easier. I have been informed by my good friend

Ustadd Yunan Helmy Nasution, a top *Aalim* in Indonesia, that Anthony as a young boy played daily with his children since the Liems and Nasutions were neighbours. If there were Quran-reading classes at his house, Anthony often listened in, so that he knows the Al Fatiha by heart. But why was there no follow-up? Why is Anthony often seen frequenting a traditional Chinese temple in Jakarta's Chinatown? Is it because the rites there are very simple and easy to grasp? Where the knowledge of Chinese is not required while Islamic prayers are in Arabic? In view of above illustrations, I would, therefore, conclude that, in the eyes of most ethnic Chinese in my country, Islam has the following "peculiarities:"

- It is not too friendly to ethnic Chinese.
- It is difficult to comprehend since you have to master Arabic.
- It contains too many "musts" and "no's" to adhere to.
- It hampers economic advancement of the new converts who face the risk of being discriminated against by fellow-Chinese in business.
- It is not easy to convert to Islam, since that would be considered "opportunism" by the people at large in Indonesia and elsewhere. Moreover, are not religions in principle the same?"

In this respect it would also be interesting to listen to a non-Muslim Indonesian scholar of Chinese ethnicity, Dr. Ong Hok Ham. He is a well-known historian with a Ph.D. from Yale, USA. Ong presented a paper at a discussion at University Nasional Jakarta, on 25 February 1992, titled "The Views of Peranakan Chinese on Islam." Dr. Ong said that ethnic Chinese are very practical people. Due to their history and experiences in these regions, they are now mainly interested in uncomplicated and "down to earth" matters also with regard to religion. They want to have a pleasant life and enjoy as much as possi-



Al-Azhar University in Jakarta, Indonesia.

ble. Islam is good, but hard to practise due to the many strict rules and prohibitions. What they urgently need are schools, hospitals and other institutions of high quality for their families and children. The Church provides these facilities. If Islam could also give such services, many ethnic Chinese will certainly look to Islam as an "alternative," especially for their offspring.

I think, from the points mentioned the main features are sufficiently clear. To solve the "problem," I would suggest that we

discuss the matter intensively and then embark on a well-programmed Da'wah movement. As a contribution, let me share with you my experiences in introducing Islam to ethnic Chinese since my conversion in 1979.

### My Conversion to Islam

On 23 June 1979, at the age of 52, I turned Muslim. This is in principle a matter of hidayah (Guidance) from Allah only. We all know that even our Prophet was not in a position to bestow this hidayah upon his beloved un-

cle Abu Thalib. But many friends are nevertheless curious and insist on further explanation.

In my case the story is not complicated. I was (and am still) close to three schoolmates from my student days in the Netherlands. They are all indigenous Indonesians. One is a devout Protestant, another is a devout Muslim, while the third is a very "pragmatic" Muslim or, in other words, "nominal." They still have high positions in government. I was a "nominal Protestant" and, having reached the age of more than half

a century in 1979, I thought it urgent to be more serious in religious matters. My devout Protestant friend is a remarkable person, but, nevertheless often too "pragmatic" in his job and daily life, not infrequently ignoring principles, if deemed appropriate. The same "pragmatic" features have also characterized my other schoolmate, who is a "nominal" Muslim. Since I had all this time been "nominal" as well as in religious matters, my only choice, to become more sincere and serious, was to look to the third person as a "role model." I have known him for 30 years and he has never missed his five prayers a day and his fasting during Ramadhan, even when the climate was not so favourable (as in Holland when he was a student). So I made my choice on 23 June 1979 and became a Muslim.

My conversion was heartily welcomed by the Muslim community. *Tempo*, the country's leading magazine even wrote a feature on the occasion about "Chinese Muslims in Indonesia." I further received letters of congratulations from Muslim friends and non-Muslims alike. I even received a deluxe edition of the Holy Quran from my dear friend (a non-Muslim) Prof. Dr. P. Sidharta (Sie Pek Giok), now a famous neurologist. And with my "Islamisation" I have experienced many of my "most unforgettable" happenings in life.

### Spreading Islam among Ethnic Chinese

Not only the Muslim community (the ummah) but also friends from other beliefs have insisted that I should be active in giving proper information on Islam to fellow-ethnic Chinese, who have not made any firm choice yet with respect to religion. President Soeharto has also been very encouraging. In 1982 our Head of State commented that he was happy with the conversions of ethnic

Chinese to Islam since this means "automatically assimilating within the majority of the people" (*Berita Buana* newspaper; 26 May 1982). And my comrade-in-arms in the assimilation movement K. Sindhunatha (Ong Tjong Hay), who is a devout Catholic, has given me his support whenever possible. Just after my conversion in 1979 he wrote in a brochure: "... Before the Dutch appeared in Indonesia, the immigrants from the Asian continent looking for a place in the sun in our archipelago, were definitely and spontaneously assimilated into the local communities. They did this, among other ways, through Islam!" He further elaborated by stating that assimilation also means adapting to the religion embraced by the local people on the basis of personal conviction about the truth taught by that religion. He welcomed Islam as one of the alternatives for ethnic Chinese making up their minds in choosing the proper religion to embrace.

Also the *Panji Masyarakat*, an Islamic magazine with the biggest circulation, gave an analysis on ethnic Chinese turning Muslim (15 April 1980). It stated that in the teachings of Islam the obligations of a Muslim are clearly stipulated; how he should protect and love his religion and his country as well. By turning Muslim and so joining the Islamic world in Indonesia (90% of the population), all doubts about the credibility and loyalty of the Chinese disappear. Therefore, they are now fully accepted as true brothers, sisters and compatriots having the same commitments towards Indonesia.

Muslim leaders were apparently very happy with my conversion and spontaneously appointed me in 1980 a member of the prestigious Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI or Indonesian Council of Ulama, an assembly representing prominent Muslim organizations

and leaders). Through this body I came into close contact with many prominent Muslims, who have access to the entire population at grassroots-level. Indeed, we now belong to the "in-group." It is therefore not surprising that we, ethnic Chinese-turned Muslims, could sometimes be instrumental in bringing pribumi (indigenous Indonesians) and *nonpribumi* (non-natives especially ethnic Chinese) closer to each other. As an example, during the first quarter of 1980 anti-Chinese riots took place in Ujung Pandang. Some non-Muslim ethnic Chinese friends asked me to approach Buya Hamka, President of MUI, and request that he ease the tension.

During the beginning of December of the same year there were again anti-Chinese riots, this time in Central Java. Without further ado the MUI issued a statement on 10th December 1980. The conclusion was that the Chinese problem easily gives way to movements of an explosive nature, without disclosing the true background of the outbursts or the main aims behind them. Thus, as long as this sensitive problem is unsolved, such racial disturbances may occur again and again, especially, during these socio-economic or socio-psychological situations, when people's aspirations strive for an outlet.

The problem should be solved definitely as soon as possible, by both the government and the community in line with the state's policy of assimilation. The MUI stressed that this would be nothing new, in as much as assimilation is something quite natural for Muslims. Islam does not recognise differences of race or tribe or skin colour. And in daily life, Muslims of Chinese descent are fully accepted by indigenous Indonesians, since they are regarded as equals. Buya Hamka's statement, on 12 December 1980, was published by *Kompas*, the daily

with the biggest circulation in the country.

In this context, I am reminded of an event on 5 June, 1988, at the Press Club in Jakarta, attended by the Deputy Governor of the City, Mr. Basofi Sudirman. The meeting commenced by reading a Qur'anic-verse. This was performed by Surya Madya (former name: Lie Sin Tiong), a young university-graduate engineer, who had turned Muslim a few years before but well-versed in Qur'an-reading. The Governor was much impressed and said:

If anything happens in my village against the Chinese, I will bring Surya to my place, and for sure, everything will become quiet and normal again.

He then put forward the question of how the state could make good use of ethnic Chinese turned Muslim like Surya Lie Sin Tiong.

### Present Situation

Before World War II, spreading Islam among ethnic Chinese had already been done by one of our pioneers Mr. Oei Tjeng Hien, later known as Haji Abdulkarim or shortened to Haji Karim Oei. He was born in 1905 and died in 1988. The late Oei was, together with late Haji Yap A Siong, a founder of PITI. (Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam, formerly Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia or Indonesian Chinese Muslims Association) in 1963. PITI was actually the result of a merger of 2 Da'wah organisations among ethnic Chinese before World War II. Oei was for many years a Consul of Muhammadiyah for South Sumatra, known as a true Indonesian nationalist and a freedom-fighter, who was very close to President Soekarno. He was famous for his statement given to *Tempo*-weekly (3 February, 1973). When asked about his views on the pribumi or indigenous Indonesians, he said: "A true Muslim should love his country and the pribumi population!" But how is it now?

During the last 10-15 years, quite a number of ethnic Chinese have converted to Islam., about 1 to 2% or 50,000 to 100,000 people. This is not too many, but there is an interesting feature. Previously, those entering Islam were usually economically poor, but the converts now are young people and intellectuals including some businessmen.

This process of Chinese conversion to Islam is the logical result of assimilation, i.e., the increasing social contact and intercourse between ethnic Chinese and their indigenous compatriots. This results, among other things, in inter-marriage. Since 90% of the indigenous group is Muslim, many Chinese marrying into the indigenous group convert to Islam. Besides that, many new citizens, especially the young generation of ethnic Chinese, due to increasing daily social contact at school, would like to know what Islam is the religion of his indigenous school, playmates and friends. This gets a number of them involved in Muslim traditions and customs; and, knowing Islam better, converting.

There is furthermore another positive phenomenon, viz. the emergence of a new prosperous middle class consisting of indigenous Indonesian government officials, entrepreneurs, bankers, professionals etc. Ethnic Chinese businessmen are automatically attracted to this new phenomenon.

They come into close contact with this new breed of well-to-do Indonesians and with ...Islam! Indeed, ethnic Chinese are now aware that Islam is not as bad as pictured by the colonial powers for many centuries. This new environment helps a lot in convincing them that Islam is a universal belief for all races, including Chinese. And it is now increasingly disclosed that Islam has many followers in China and that it was introduced in China (since 652 AD) even be-

fore it was brought to our region.

As pointed out, Dutch colonialism systematically cultivated the idea that "Islam is inferior" and, therefore, unfit for Chinese. Recently, Dr. Karel Steenbrink (a Dutch scholar) in his book *Beberapa aspek tentang Islam di Indonesia abad ke-19* (Some aspects on Islam in Indonesia in the 19th century published in 1984, page 87), stated that in the 18th century the VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or Dutch East India Company) several times "issued regulations prohibiting Chinese to embrace Islam or assimilate into the indigenous population."

To counter all these we have been trying to disclose that in history the relationship between China and Islam has been very close. As an example, we bring forward the figure of Admiral Cheng Ho of the Ming dynasty who, as a Muslim, had visited our Asia-Pacific region from 1405-1433 AD spreading Islam in our archipelago. In this context, we always refer to the famous Cheng Ho or Sam Po Kong-temple in Semarang, Central Java, daily visited by ethnic Chinese and indigenous Indonesians as well.

Information on Islam for ethnic Chinese is urgent to counter the many centuries of propaganda of the colonial powers. Among other things, the idea that a Muslim usually has four wives, is inclined to marry frequently and divorce frequently etc. But fortunately our Muslim-community has made remarkable progress during the past decades so that we are now more able to provide proper information. Therefore, ethnic Chinese no longer swallow all this nonsense since they see with their own eyes that in daily life only a relatively small number of Muslims practise polygamy or are fond of divorcees.

### How far can Islam be attractive to ethnic Chinese

Other religions are incessantly





A mosque in Indonesia.

ment cannot compete in huge financial investments to build expensive educational and social institutions since, in general, the Muslim community is not that rich. But fortunately, Islam has some other features, which are very interesting for ethnic Chinese here. Besides being a religion, which is not inferior to others, by embracing Islam, young ethnic Chinese experience that immediately they are fully accepted as fellow-Muslims and compatriots by the people at large, who are 90% Muslim.

All kinds of hostility and con-

making studies on the "world" of ethnic Chinese and then setting up appropriate missionary programmes. They have made huge investment to attract ethnic Chinese in our country, among other things, by providing attractive educational and social facilities from kindergartens to universities of high quality, scholarships, hospitals and other financial support in many forms. It is essential that we also set up a scientific "research centre" studying the relationship between Islam and ethnic Chinese to back up our programmes. Of course, at the present time, our Da'wah move-

trovery, as an inheritance of the past, disappear. Upon conversion to Islam, they are heartily welcomed and totally integrated within the community. So, they have at last a true "place in the sun."

This is exactly what ethnic Chinese have been looking for so long. In my opinion, attraction to Islam for ethnic Chinese will go upwards since its followers here are also making progress in the economic field. And this reminds me of Dr. The Siauw Giap now working at the Institute of Sinology in Leiden, Netherlands. When writing in *Revue du Sud-Est Asia-*

*tique II* in 1965, page 67-83, he put forward this futuristic analysis:

When the legacies from the colonial past, which still tend to impair group relations in contemporary Indonesia are wholly removed, and an economic development takes place, which affords a fair share to both ethnic Chinese and Indonesians, it is not impossible that Islam will again attract Chinese converts, and the parallel in the history of religions in Thailand and Java will be restored.

I am therefore very optimistic. The negative image, created by enemies of Islam, will slowly but surely evaporate. Ethnic Chinese turning to Islam (with support and encouragement from the Ummah) will be a normal phenomenon in our country and this brings me to a voice from the People's Republic of China.

There is an article in *Asian Culture* (Singapore), a bilingual magazine, appearing in English and Chinese, dated 10 October, 1987, by Prof. Zheng Renliang from the Jinan University in Guangzhou, China. The title was "Approach on Assimilation and Islamisation of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia." He prophesied that "the ethnic Chinese will experience fading in culture, and their view towards China's culture will thin out gradually. Someday the development will strengthen positive feelings towards the Indonesian culture, which also will spread." He further stated:

Islam is the dominant religion in Indonesia. Thus, efforts of the Chinese in converting to Islam, are not different from what their fellow-beings do in Thailand where Buddhism is the dominant religion. In Europe and America, ethnic Chinese also embrace the religions that are dominant, becoming Christian Protestants and Catholics.

### A Mosque in Chinatown

On 9 April 1991, a number of persons belonging to the major Da'wah movements like Muhammadiyah, Nahdhatul Ulama, Washliyah, ICMI (Ikatan Cende-

kiawan Muslim se-Indonesia or All-Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals) and ethnic Chinese Muslims set up a new foundation under the name "Yayasan Haji Abdulkarim Oei Tjeng Hien," shortened Yayasan Haji Karim Oei. The main purpose of the foundation is to spread Islam among ethnic Chinese creating as many Karim Oeis as possible, i.e., ethnic Chinese, who are devout Muslims and true Indonesians. Mr. Karim Oei (1905-1988) turned Muslim in the 1930s and was very close to President Soekarno. He was a prominent leader of Muhammadiyah and a pioneer in Da'wah among ethnic Chinese since before World War II. He is acknowledged as a true Indonesian nationalist, freedom-fighter and devout Muslim.

We started by renting a three-storey shop-house in Lautze street, the centre of Pasar Baru's Chinatown of Jakarta. Here, in the Chinese business and residential area, we opened an Islamic Information Centre, especially to attract ethnic Chinese. We also hold Friday prayers here so that it is well known as the "Lautze Mosque!" On Sunday mornings, we give English lessons (also mathematics) to children irrespective of their religion. There is also, once a month on Sunday, a lecture on Islam for women, coordinated by the well-known ustazah Mrs. Qomariah The Giok Sien. And during the fasting month there are also various activities.

A place such as our Islamic Centre in the Jakarta Chinatown appears to be very effective. Our sign-board mentioning the name Oei attracts ethnic Chinese, so that they can meet fellow-Chinese to ask about Islam. Our institution further acts as a special training centre. Ethnic Chinese, just turned Muslim, who are not yet at ease learning from indigenous Indonesians, can now study the religion together with fellow ethnic Chinese who are also beginners and

new in their belief. Here they are introduced to the very first steps in Islam, namely, how to pray and read short verses of the Holy Qur'an. For those who want to lead prayers as an imam, there are special courses. We even give them the opportunity to practise their knowledge. Such as at Friday prayers, on Islamic holidays and in the fasting month performing as Bilal (*muazzin*) or *imam*. Being among new converts, making errors is not such a big deal and would not be laughed at. For the more advanced converts, we also organize courses for da'i (preachers, missionaries).

We have been able to collect some funds and give scholarships to 30 primary school-children in the neighbourhood, 50% of whom are non-Muslim ethnic Chinese. In this way we are exposing the fact that Islam is really beneficial to the whole universe: *Rahmatan lil'Alamin!* We have also published several books and brochures, among others my book *WNI beraqama Islam or Ethnic Chinese Indonesian Muslim*, containing stories about fellow-ethnic Chinese from all parts of Indonesia who have converted to Islam. Our Haji Karim Foundation has also worked together with universities such as IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta and the Universitas Nasional, Jakarta on Da'wah Islamiyah among ethnic Chinese by presenting papers on the subject.

As mentioned above, we did not own our place but have it on rental basis. We were, however, fortunate that ICMI, which is under the chairmanship of Prof. Dr. B.J. Habibie, is ready to purchase the building and allow us to use it without any charge. This gives us the possibility to continue and even expand Da'wah Islamiyah among ethnic Chinese. We now have a unique "Mosque in Chinatown," probably the only existing one in the world, which has been started on a rental basis! In this context, it is interesting to know

that, on Christmas Day 25 December 1992, which by chance fell on a Friday, we obtained God's blessing by the conversion through our services of two young people to our religion. Quite a Christmas present, indeed!

This "Chinese Mosque" entering Chinatown is a first step. We are facing fierce competition from other religions and beliefs. In our Chinese area, there is either a Sunday school, a church or a Chinese temple at every corner. Consequently, there is still a long way to go. My friends and I although very pleased with our latest progress - are praying that there will be an increasing understanding among the Ummah of what we are doing now and for what we are striving.

A single Islamic Centre or mosque is hardly worth mentioning compared to what other religions are doing. To be able to catch up somewhat with the progress of others, we wished that we had five premises instead of one in Jakarta's Chinatown to serve the Chinese community, who are now becoming attracted to Islam as an alternative for their peace of mind. The other day, Mr. Fadlulah Wilmot, Assistant to the Rector of the International Islamic University in Malaysia, visited us. He asked how much we would need for our Da'wah expansion. It is hoped that Brother Wilmot is also present at this conference so that he could give his impressions on what he has seen. I hope that the ummah represented here considers supporting us in concrete form. I believe that what we are striving for, i.e., the introduction of Islam to ethnic Chinese in this region, especially Indonesia, is sufficiently worthwhile to obtain substantial funding.

### Research Centre on Islam and ethnic Chinese for Southeast Asia

Overseas or ethnic Chinese in this region numbering to about 20

million and playing a dominant role in the economy should also be a target of our Da'wah movement. Since the colonial past has created pictures in their heads that Islam is "inferior", not appropriate and hostile to Chinese, we should start by continuously studying and analysing the complexities and intricacies of communicating our faith to them. For this purpose the establishment of a scientific research institution is necessary. The body should collect data and make in-depth studies on "Islam and ethnic Chinese" in the region resulting in well-defined Da'wah concepts and policies to be implemented in the various countries. Such a "brain-trust" should be managed by full-time professionals, who are truly committed to the cause. Since "competition" from other religions is fierce and Islam rather late in approaching the ethnic Chinese population groups, we should start as soon as possible. For such a "Research Centre on Islam and Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia", the city of Kuala Lumpur is, in my opinion the right choice. In a later phase, the opening of branch offices in each country is to be considered.

### Who Is Junus Jahja?

Junus Jahya (to be pronounced Yunus Yahya) was born on 22 April 1927, in Jakarta, under the Chinese name of Lauw Chuan Tho. He graduated as an economist in 1959 from the Nederlandse Economische Hogeschool, Rotterdam (Rotterdam School of Economics) and worked for various government institutions in Indonesia and lately as a representative in Jakarta of a German bank. Since 1952, as a student in the Netherlands, he has been active in promoting ethnic Chinese assimilation with the Indonesian people. Due to his activities in this field, Junus Jahja is more known as a pioneer for assimilation. In 1979 he turned Muslim and then embarked on a Da'wah Islamiyah

movement among ethnic Chinese.

Charles A. Coppel, an Australian expert on Overseas Chinese in his book *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (1983) disclosed that there are four ideas living among ethnic Chinese to solve their problem in Indonesia. The first proposed by Siauw Giok Tjhan was to "develop an Indonesian socialist society." The second, sponsored by Yap Thiam Hien, through "eliminating prejudice and protecting human rights." The third idea to solve the Chinese problem is backed by Sindhunatha (Ong Tjong Hay): "Assimilate and the ethnic Chinese as a separate group will disappear." Since 1979 a fourth solution came to the surface as stated by Junus Jahja: "By entering Islam the Chinese gain full acceptance." Junus Jahja has been appointed member of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (1980-1990) and is now a member of the Advisory Board of ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia or All-Indonesian Organization of Muslim Intellectuals). He is also on the Board of Bakom-Pkb (Badan Komunikasi Penghayatan Kesatuan Bangsa, a semi-Governmental Advisory Board to promote ethnic Chinese assimilation).

Junus Jahja is an Advisor to PITI (Pembina Iman Tauhid Islam, the former Chinese Muslim Association in Indonesia) and Director of the Institute of ethnic Chinese assimilation in Indonesia. In 1990, he set up the Haji Karim Oei Foundation together with prominent persons from Muhammadiyah, NU, Washliyah, ICMI and ethnic Chinese Muslim intellectuals/businessmen. The objective is to spread Islam among the ethnic Chinese young generation. They have introduced the first ethnic-Chinese-managed mosque in Jakarta's Chinatown. Junus Jahja is also the author of various books on assimilation and Islam - conversions among ethnic Chinese.