

Bio

Yong Chen received his PhD in religion from Vanderbilt University, USA, in 2005, and joined the Center for Asian and African Studies of El Colegio de Mexico in 2009. His research focuses on the contemporary transformations of Confucianism in Chinese communities worldwide. He has published widely in English, Spanish, Chinese, and other languages. His representative publication is: *Confucianism as Religion: Controversies and Consequences*, Brill, 2013.

Title

Indonesian Confucianism: An Ethnographical Observation

Abstract

The fact that Confucianism is practiced as a religion in Indonesia is barely known to outsiders. Very few scholars have ever dived into this realm and developed academic passion toward such a research subject. Charles Coppel from Australia, Leo Suryadinata from Singapore, Wang Aiping from China, and Yumi Kitamura from Japan are the only known scholars who have worked on this topic, but their scholarships—sporadic, isolated, and rarely discussed—are far from giving a coherent and comprehensive picture of something called Indonesian Confucianism.

From November 3rd to 29th of 2011, I travelled to Indonesia to conduct field research on the Confucian churches (called *litang* in Bahasa Indonesia) on the islands of Java and Bali. During my 28 days spent there, I travelled to more than 30 cities, visited about 50 Confucian litangs and Chinese temples, attended dozens of Confucian religious services, and met with ordinary practitioners and important figures of the Confucian religion. My discovery not only gives me a first-hand experience on the Confucian religion as practiced in the local communities, but also reveals the dynamics between religion and politics in Indonesian society as well as a sense of co-existence and mutual-tolerance among religions that is gradually taking hold of the public consciousness.

My presentation is based on my ethnographical observation of the Confucian religion in Indonesia which could be summarized in several points. First, Indonesian Confucianism has manifested a highly institutionalized feature that is unseen in other Confucian societies in East and South East Asia and is attributable to Indonesian constitutional foundation—

Pancasila—in which “belief in one and only God” is held as the steering principle. Second, Indonesian Confucianism has cultivated a good relationship with Islam that would otherwise be unimaginable outside Indonesia. This relationship has survived the social and political turmoil during Suharto’s regime and is partially responsible for Confucianism’s rectification as an officially recognized religion in post-Suharto times. Third, the Confucian religion as practiced in the local communities in Java and Bali appears to be syncretic in nature, integrating teachings, rituals, and practices from Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and folk religion that are prevalent in Chinese communities throughout South East Asia. And finally, Confucianism has emerged as a crucial variable upon which the native born Chinese construct their cultural identity while their communities in general are rapidly evangelized amid the social and political complications in recent decades.

My research on Indonesian Confucianism is preliminary and experimental at the present moment and is intended to incite academic interest in and debate about this rich subject matter. It is hoped that a more sophisticated and more comprehensive scholarship on Indonesian Confucianism would eventually give rise to a better understanding of the religion, the community, the political and social dynamics, and the nation as a whole.