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Islamic Ethics and the Chinese-Indonesian Spirit of Capitalism: A Chinese-Indonesian *Kyai's* Business and Leadership

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Abstract

The economic culture in Max Weber's thesis of Protestant work ethic has been used by scholars to explain the Chinese diaspora's economic success. The Weberian thesis still inspires the study of how Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity influenced Chinese Indonesian entrepreneurs and their business activities. On the other hand, it appears that little attention has been paid to the ways in which Islamic values have impacted on diasporic Chinese entrepreneurship, or to what extent Chinese-Indonesian Muslims associate their commercial experience with interpretations of Islam. This study will shift from focusing on prominent Chinese Muslim entrepreneurs to focus on how a Chinese gang boss, Anton Medan, converted to Islam before becoming a famous Muslim preacher and eventually built his business and Islamic boarding school for the Muslim grassroots. This paper will employ Max Weber's thesis of Protestant work ethic to critically analyse this phenomenon.

Keywords: Indonesia, Chinese-Indonesian Muslim entrepreneurs, diasporic Chinese entrepreneurship; Protestant work ethic

Introduction

In the study of diasporic Chinese entrepreneurship in Indonesia, the economic culture described in Max Weber's thesis of Protestant work ethic has been applied to explain the economic success of the Chinese (Redding, 2013). However cultural theories are easily criticised as assuming an all-encompassing cultural homogeneity of overseas Chinese by ignoring their diverse ethnic

and geographic backgrounds as well as overlooking their culture that may have undergone intergenerational or interregional changes (Chuah et al., 2016). Despite that, the Weberian thesis still inspires the study of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity influence on Chinese-Indonesian entrepreneurs and their business activities (Koning, 2018). Nonetheless, not much attention is paid to whether Islamic values may have impacted diasporic Chinese entrepreneurship, or to what extent Chinese-Indonesian Muslims associate their commercial experience with their interpretations of Islam.

This paper does not aim to argue how Islamic ethics facilitate ethnic Chinese business. Instead, it will examine how conversion to Islam may become a social capital or symbolic capital for Chinese-Indonesian Muslims to express themselves freely among the indigenous Muslim community. The economic and religious mobility of Chinese-Muslim businessmen has shown that their conversion has raised their social and religious status and grant them access to participate in Muslim businesses, as well as charitable, political, and religious affairs. This two-way interchange between the economic and religious spheres have facilitated their social mobility beyond the typical social trajectory of ethnic Chinese, in which they are seen as a minority, only able to achieve success in commercial activities. As such, their conversion to Islam can be seen as a "two-way social kinetics." Their religious conversion can therefore be a form of social mobility between the economic and religious spheres, or what Pierre Bourdieu (2018) refers to as "conversion of capital." Muslim businessmen's commercial experience informs how they apply their pragmatic ideas and entrepreneurship to manage religious affairs; but their commercial experiences should not be simply attributed to their Islamic virtues. In some conditions, their Islamic virtues motivates them to engage in Islamic economic discourses and perform economic practices with an Islamic orientation. Nonetheless, it cannot be naturally assumed that Islamic virtues is the most fundamental factor facilitating business success, since many ethnic-Chinese Muslim businessmen were successful before they converted to Islam. By becoming Muslim, they actively involved in Muslim affairs and other activities, thus we need to consider how they expanded their influence outside of commercial activities through the legitimacy obtained from their Muslim identity and religious faith (Chiou, 2015; 2020).

This study intends to shift the focus from prominent Chinese Muslim entrepreneurs to explore how a Chinese gang boss, Anton Medan, converted to Islam, became a famous Muslim preacher, and eventually built his workshops and Islamic boarding school for the Muslim grassroots. This study employs Max Weber's thesis of Protestant work ethic in the analysis of this phenomenon.

From a Gang Boss to a *Kyai*[1]

Anton Medan (1957-2021) was born into a Chinese family in Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra in 1957.[2] When his family became poverty stricken during the anti-communist and anti-Chinese

movements of the 1960s, he was forced to earn his livelihood on the streets, and became a criminal at the age of 13.[3] He arrived in Jakarta in the 1980s, and soon became involved in a series of crimes, including robbing jewellery stores and banks. In 1986 he led a mob in burning down the Jakarta police headquarters to protest against the judiciary system. As for schooling, Medan only received some limited informal education while in jail.

Although Medan nominally converted to Islam in 1979 because he wanted to marry a Muslim woman, he did not become a practising Muslim until 1991. He was sent to jail several times, and when he was incarcerated in Cipinang Prison (LP Cipinang) he took an interest in various religions.[4]

In 1983, because of a conflict with another prisoner, he was moved to the minimum-security prison at Cianjur, which only held convicts who had committed minor crimes. When the month of fasting came, Medan closely observed for the first time how Muslims fasted. Cianjur was not a big city, so the prison was close to the people (Raharjo, 1997, IV). Every day, the loudspeakers attached to the top of the prison mosque announced *pengajian* (study sessions for learning Islam) were being held, and he recalled his talks with Tony Ardhie about the oneness of God or *tauhid* when he was in Cipinang.[5] One night, he heard the performing of *takbiran* (collective recitation of the Quran) and was so touched that he cried for only the second time during his adult life.[6] He was subsequently moved to Subang prison, and then Cirebon prison.

At Cirebon he met Azhar, Edy, Soni, and their fourteen friends, all imprisoned for attacking the Cicendo police station in Bandung. They were followers of Imron, who hijacked a Garuda Airlines flight and forced the airplane to land at Don Muang Airport, Thailand. In the prison they often read books on Islam, practised *zikir* (chanting the names of Allah) in the mosque, and counselled other prisoners. One day, Medan came to their cell, attracted by their calmness despite the difficult conditions in the prison. They told Medan about Jesus, who was calm even during the Crucifixion. They also told him stories about other saints; most of whom were persecuted by secular political authorities (Raharjo, 1997, IV).[7] Medan began to study the Quran and the Hadith and came to accept that the Quran is the only original word of God (Raharjo, 1997, IV). Although he was convinced that Islam is the only true religion, he felt that he was not ready to live according to Islamic law and its many prohibitions (Raharjo, 1997, IV).

Running the Casino Business

After two years at Cirebon Prison, following some incidents, he was moved to Kuningan Prison where he learned how to perform *salat* (Islamic worship) from a convict who diligently performed it every day. After being released from prison on 17 August 1986 under a general amnesty, Medan soon returned to his old livelihood in the Indonesian underworld. At the risk of his life, he struggled with and eventually displaced Hong Lie, who ran illegal casinos. News quickly spread among

casino owners, and Medan reached the peak of his power. Three days later, casino owners came to see Medan to pay their respects and offer tribute to their new boss. Some casino owners also asked Medan to manage their illegal casinos. All of this made him very happy because he could earn a huge amount of money and offer jobs to his jobless friends and relatives (mostly his brothers). Medan usually received 15% of the profits from every casino that he managed, and he also opened his own gambling den. Although it was not as big as the casinos that he managed, and it had to move to a new place from time to time, his casino was always full of gamblers (Raharjo, 1997, V). [8]

Becoming rich meant that he had to defend himself against his old enemy, Hong Lie, who was seeking revenge. He was also involved in unlawful debt collection and managed brothels (Raharjo, 1997, V).[9] Medan's extensive network included important government figures and lawyers. As more ex-prisoners approached him for jobs, he decided to start a grocery business.[10]

As senior police officers who had co-operated with Medan gradually retired, his unlawful enterprises encountered more difficulties. At the same time, Hong Lie, now under the protection of another gang boss, was growing stronger. One night, the police raided Medan's casinos and arrested him together with 366 gamblers. He was incarcerated at Mabes Polri Prison for four months before being moved to Salemba Prison where he used his wealth to arrange for luxurious facilities. He had a telephone, stayed in a luxurious cell, and his wife could visit him every night. After undergoing several trials and was given a nine-month jail term, the sentence was not served again as he had already completed it at Salemba and was subsequently released from jail (Raharjo, 1997, V).

By now, Medan felt tired and tried to get out of the gambling world by starting a legal business. He first tried but failed in the mineral water business. He then ventured into the traditional herbal medicine business but failed again. The next attempt was in sand mining on Rengat Island, Riau. The business went well initially but came to a stop when the government suddenly decided to turn Rengat into a tourist site.

Unable to sell the sand-mining heavy machinery that was smuggled from Japan, Medan went back to gambling as a player. He had lost money gambling in Genting Highlands, Malaysia, and Las Vegas. In 1991 and at age 34, he became bankrupt and resorted to borrowing from a *jangket* (a person who lends money to gamblers) (Raharjo, 1997, V).

Preaching Islam to Prisoners

Broke and dejected and out of work, Medan began to socialise and built good relationships with his neighbours. He and his wife met K. H. Zainuddin, a well-known preacher. The meeting led him to change himself to live as a good and honest person. Having embraced Islam again, he was actively involved in social events and attended talks given by Muslim preachers such as K.H. Noer Muhammad Iskandar, K.H. Dr. Manarul Hidayat, and Rhoma Irama. A year later, he decided to send his children to a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), and in 1992 he underwent circumcision

(Raharjo, 1997, VI). His decision was not endorsed by all his family members and he was even persuaded to go back to operating casinos.[11] But he was determined to leave the "dark life" behind and get closer to God (Raharjo, 1997, VI).

He later went on the *hajj*, received guidance from several *ustad*, and was inspired by the spiritual journey. He began to address to groups of people and proved to be witty. After his visit to Mecca, Medan experienced what he regarded as a miracle when a festering wound in his leg healed after he washed it with the water from the Zam Zam well in Mecca. He also received guidance from other preachers who willingly listened to his aspirations. The news about Anton's repentance and *hajj* spread among the prisoners and ex-convicts, many of whom contacted him for guidance. Eager to assist his former partners in crime, realised the need to create opportunities for them to repent and to turn themselves around (Raharjo, 1997, V).

On 10 June 1994, he established a centre providing temporary shelter, religious teachings, and occupational training for ex-convicts called Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin.[12] Medan served as the general chairperson and he also established five branches located according to the administrative districts of Jakarta. Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin also held open *pengajian* and religious sermons in areas frequented by ex-convicts. *Pengajian* were even held in red light districts and among the participants were prostitutes who were good at reading the Quran. Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin also held *dakwah* (propagation) in prisons. At-Ta'ibin means "people who repent" or "those who go back to the righteous path" (Raharjo, 1997, V: 55-65).

Medan also invited Ustad K.H. Zainuddin and *Kyai* Noer to give sermons in prisons. By observing how they preach, he learned how to be a *da'i* (Muslim preacher) and was always given a chance to get on the podium before the sermon started. At first, Medan spoke for about ten minutes, and only told the audiences about his life story and conversion experience. Then Zainuddin suggested that he integrate a few points of Islamic doctrine into his sermon. As he honed his public speaking skills, he took preaching in prisons as his goal. Practising in his bedroom, he would stand on his bed and give a speech. Although he tried hard, some *ustad* or *kyai* still did not believe that he was capable of preaching in front of a large group of people (Raharjo, 1997, VI).

A plan was proposed to establish a foundation known as Yayasan At-Ta'ibin Indonesia (YAI or At-Ta'ibin Indonesia Foundation) to promote the Majelis. But for various reasons the plan had to be abandoned and disagreements led some to leave Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin.[13] Despite a lack of funding, Medan kept preaching in prisons, and also began receiving numerous invitations to preach in other venues outside Jakarta.[14] Later, he began to receive invitations to give sermons at *pengajian* sessions (Raharjo, 1997, VI).

Medan preferred to preach outside the mosque because he thought that those who came to the mosque to hear his sermons were already pious Muslims. Instead of talking about such weighty theological ideas such as *ibadah* (religious obligation), heaven, and hell, he usually only shared his

experience of prison life and his subsequent conversion. He said he is neither a proselytiser (*juru dakwah*) nor an *ustad*, but was training to be a proselytiser (Raharjo, 1997, VI). Many journalists interviewed him, and he was often invited to preach to politicians, universities students, businessmen, company owners, and even policemen. When listening to Medan's speech, audience members often cried, protested, or laughed (Raharjo, 1997, VI).

Two years after Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin was established, Medan felt that he had not been able to solve its financial problems and went to visit *Kyai* Zainuddin and *Kyai* Noer to ask for help. Together they came up with a plan to make *gerobaks* (two-wheel vendor's carts), each with a label reading "Pembinaan Mantan Narapidana dan Tunakarya" (Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin Foundation for Former Prisoners and the Unemployed).

In 1997 Medan was included on a journalist's list of preachers who were unqualified to preach Islam. The report commented that because of his background as an ex-prisoner and violent criminal, he was not suitable to preach, especially on TV.[15]

During the anti-Chinese riots of May 1998, Medan was suspected of being an instigator, and was investigated by the Jakarta police; he denied the accusation.[16] In Kafil Yamin's book (2004) *Revolusi Kaum Napi: Catatan Kesaksian Anton Medan*, Medan claimed he was offered five billion rupiah by a high-ranking member of the military to have his subordinates provoke the riots, but he refused.[17] Knowing that trouble was brewing, he claimed that he sent his subordinates to protect various Chinese neighbourhoods, Chinese temples, churches, stores, and houses. On 13 and 14 May, he ordered his subordinates to cause the mob to attack alternative targets.[18] After the riots, protesting students gathered around the parliament building. After being informed that the army might slaughter the students, he decided to mobilise four thousand people to join the students to strengthen their rampart. He also invited his religious teacher, K.H. Zainuddin, to go to the scene and to express his support for the students.[19]

Rehabilitating Ex-prisoners

Medan is seen as an activist promoting the rights of prisoners and ex-convicts and had criticised corruption and ignorance in the prison administration of Indonesia. In March 2001, Tommy Suharto, ex-President Suharto's son, was about to be jailed at Cipinang Prison. To accommodate Tommy Suharto, the prison administration decided to renovate the prison and moved several prisoners to other places. This provoked a serious riot. Medan went to the prison to mediate, and criticised the privileges enjoyed by elite prisoners.

Medan was known for his religious education and for helping ex-convicts to re-enter the society. He later established an Islamic boarding school, and became a *kyai*. Yet, Medan's transformation from a former gang boss to preacher and *kyai* was open to doubt, especially in how he managed his business, the ex-convicts centre, and the Islamic boarding school.

The Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin Centre in Cibinong, approximately 80 kilometres from Jakarta, functioned as a residential centre which offered ex-convicts occupational training to assist them re-integrate into society by securing proper jobs. Medan claimed that he also arranged weekly *pengajian* for the programme's participants.

The facilities at the centre were very basic, featuring a large workshop where ex-convict workers manually printed banners and billboards for Medan's advertising business. There were 70 workers, labouring from 6:00am until sunset prayers. He did not want to create an environment which was more comfortable than what they would have to face after they left. Ex-convicts usually stayed in the centre for one year. If they successfully learned a skill, they could then open their own shops after they left. Two thousand ex-convicts had "graduated" from the At-Ta'ibin centre. Medan also refused to accept donations to preserve the centre's financial independence.

Medan initiated the banner business in 1997 after a journalist asked him to help solve a problem. The journalist's banners to promote a magazine were always carried away by a group of street hoodlums (*preman*) named Pemuda Pancasila. Medan negotiated with them and they agreed not to take away the banners again.[20] Advertising turned out to be profitable. At its height, the business employed 200 ex-convicts working at his Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin Centre.[21] Inspired by the success of Majelis Taklim At-Ta'ibin, he planned to build a more ambitious rehabilitation park which included factories, a meeting hall, and a football field. He realised that nobody would choose a life of crime but were forced into it due to a lack of economic opportunities. He also believed that putting criminals into jail did not solve the problem but would make it worse.

In 2005, Medan had established several other businesses, including a small construction company and a chicken farm. He devised a three-stage training programme for ex-convicts. All ex-convicts went through the same stages. Construction work was for the first level; farm work came next; and banner-making was for the final level. At a higher level were administrative jobs (Yamin, 2004)

Becoming a *Kyai*

Medan's growing wealth from his businesses enabled him to establish an Islamic boarding school. Aware of his limited formal education and taking the Prophet Muhammad as his role model, he reasoned that the Prophet did not receive much formal education but became a great religious leader. He wished to help the young to receive a viable vocational training in order to be able to help their families and country. Medan realised that the colonial government emphasised book learning in the *pesantren*, while religious schools prioritised the teaching of Islam. Many Muslim students graduated before the age of 20 and tended to get married shortly after. As a result, it is important for Muslim students to learn vocational skills. Medan therefore emphasised the importance of practical knowledge and having a career plan in mind before graduation. Hence, in 2005, he established a

training centre or *pesantren*. Named as At-Ta'ibin, it also featured a Chinese-style mosque and his personal grave.[22] Medan's concept of education and the purpose of what he did were reflected in the school motto: "Make yourself useful, establish your faith, straighten your mind, achieve your goals. Remember, death is not what you should worry about. It's what happens after death that you must prepare for."[23] Like other such centres in Indonesia, it offered occupational education in the curriculum such as tailoring and woodworking. The products of students were then sold and the revenues went into supporting tuition and for other purposes.

Medan saw the entrepreneur as a *wirausaha*, a compound word consisting of two words: *wira* and *usaha*. The former means "hero" or "heroism" and the later means "talent." He regarded entrepreneurship as a person's talent bestowed by God. He believed that business success was determined by God and was accorded with moral principles. The educational mission at At-Ta'ibin was to teach students to recognise and develop the gifts bestowed by God. Consequently, while the curriculum of other such schools stressed the importance of Islamic law, the Hadith, and Tafsir (exegesis of the Quran), the five main subjects at At-Ta'ibin were worship, entrepreneurship, language, environmental science, and occupational training.[24] The language curriculum included Arabic, Chinese, English, and Japanese. Religious studies were confined only to the Quran and the Hadith. Although commonly used by other *pesantren*, the yellow book (*kitab kuning*; textbooks used in Islamic boarding school) was not amongst the teaching materials.

When asked for his opinion about combining business and *dakwah*, he expressed some reservations, saying:

> It's better if business is business, and preaching Islam is preaching Islam. So, don't use religion as a mean for doing business; it's not allowed. In this case [Jahja's approach], if preaching Islam is mixed with doing business, it will endanger religion itself. [25]

However, Medan agrees with Syafii Antonio's approach, because "he teaches people to do business with an ethical base. I admire his approach, but I cannot imitate him, due to my lack of higher education."[26] Assuming a dual identity as a preacher and businessman, his view on the relations between business and *dakwah* was:

> If the economic condition of a preacher is not good, then there will be problems. If a preacher has his own business, he neither begs money nor depends on the government, and can feel independent and active. He will also be more qualified to offer unbiased advice to people because he won't be constrained by the people who donate money to him… Most preachers don't have their own business, and only offer religious talks. Because of that, when their talk is finished, then everything is over; there is a beginning but no sense of completion. I don't

want to be such a preacher… If the economy becomes stronger, then Islam can become more prosperous.

Medan's conversion experience and preaching of Islam linked two interesting issues together. These were the conversion to Islam in prison, and how Islamic teachings be applied to the programme for ex-convict rehabilitation (Hamm, 2009; Spalek and el-Hassan, 2007; Dannin, 2002). Moreover, his experience as the leader of a gang allowed him to be more "pragmatic" than other *kyai*, and he knew how to hire ex-convicts to work for him.[27] He built his Islamic boarding school using the profits from his business affiliated with a so-called training centre for ex-convicts, and applied his pragmatic ideas to his *pesantren*. However, his opinions on public affairs were sometimes controversial. He once advocated that the Indonesian government should legalise casinos in a special region, reasoning that Indonesian gamblers still patronised casinos in Malaysia and Singapore which earned taxes that could be made by Indonesia if gambling was legalised. Despite arguing that Muslims should not be allowed to gamble or manage the casinos, his idea reminded many of his sordid past. Not surprisingly, Muslim leaders were strongly opposed to his opinion on this issue.[28]

Epilogue

Medan's success in business and religious preaching attracted much attention from the media. On one hand, he was elected as the Chairman of the Indonesian Chinese Islamic Association (PITI, Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia) from 2012 to 2017. In his inauguration speech, PITI was a Muslim organisation "to unite Chinese Muslims, open to the public, does not approve discrimination against Javanese, Sundanese, and other Chinese. In fact, Islam frees humans from discrimination."[29] On the other hand, he became an activist, frequently speaking for issues such as the human rights of prisoners and the process involved in detaining criminal suspects. Additionally, he supported Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) as Governor of DKI Jakarta in 2014 when Joko Widodo was elected the new president. Some Islamic mass organisations rejected Ahok for his Christian background. He argued that "the leader of the ummah must be a Muslim because he is the one who leads the congregation to determine matters of worship and those related to rituals, [but] the leader of the nation must be a plural leader. According to the law and the constitution, national leaders are chosen based on competence and track record."[30] However, in contrast to his positive image as an activist for human rights and anti-racism, he maintained close connections with conservative Muslim circles, including making visits to families of the convicted Bali bomber and a hard-line Muslim organisation, the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI, Front Pembela Islam) (Hew, 2017). Medan eventually passed away from a combination of stroke and diabetes on 13 May 2021, and was buried in the grave in his Islamic boarding school.

Conclusion: Rethinking the Weberian Thesis

In the past two decades, discourses on promoting Islamic economics and the rise of the Muslim middle class have been flowering among the Indonesian Muslim community. One of the significant aspects in the development of discourses on Islamic economic modernity is identified as "market Islam," which emphasises "its articulation with Islamically tinged consumerism and its connection to neo-liberal, globally integrated economic development" (Howell, 2008: 43).[31] This also highlights how Islamic ethics is "a combination of religious practice and business management knowledge" that is "designed to merge Muslim religious practice and capital ethics" for creating a Muslim as "a self-regulating subject" who is able to achieve the goals of "enhancing productivity in an increasing global market" (Rudnyckyj, 2009, 183, 185, 195, 197). It is easy to assume that Islamic ethics works like the Protestant work ethic which then allows the application of Weberian thesis to analyse how Islamic ethics would contribute to the development of capitalism. It cannot be denied that Islamic ethics may offer spiritual resources for facilitating economic development in a certain socio-historical context. However, considering Anton Medan's appropriation of Islam, we see some interesting ways of practising Islamic economics that reminds us to not mechanically apply Max Weber's thesis without considering the limitations of cultural essentialism.

Anton Medan was a gang boss and a businessman before he became a famous preacher. In addition to being a preacher, he also managed an occupational training programme for ex-convicts. He was proud of his double career as a preacher and businessman. In addition, he claimed that the idea of Islamic economics had been applied to the curriculum of his *pesantren*. Medan held sound reasonable ideas on how to apply Islamic work ethics to business to get practical results. But his personal educational background and interest was not in a high-level approach such as applying Islamic economics to build an Islamic banking system and new Islamic business schools, or propagating Islamic economics and management to Muslim business elites, or transforming the new subjectivity of new white-collar Muslims who would spur the further development of an Islamic economy and society. In contrast, he focused on the grassroots Muslim community, including ex-convicts. His method was simple: give them a job and encourage them to work by learning some low-level skills to cultivate Muslim work ethics, occupational skills, and labour discipline. Medan claimed that Islamic teachings were the basis of the job training provided for his ex-convict workers, although there were suspicions of exploitation. He was a well-known but controversial *kyai*, who even suggested that Indonesia should establish casinos that could be managed in a way that did not contradict Islamic law.

In *The Religion of China* (1968), Max Weber argues that the value system of Confucianism would deter the development of modern Western capitalism in China. Decades later, the Weberian thesis of Protestant work ethic was modified to argue that Confucian ethics may be equivalent to Protestant ethics in promoting the development of capitalism in East Asia. The idea of Confucian

capitalism has been promoted since the 1980s, and is earlier than the idea of Islamic capitalism, which has been promoted for economic development in Muslim Southeast Asia since the 1990s. The Weberian thesis is an important inspiration from a culturalist perspective, and has been appropriated by scholars who promote Islamic economics and management.

However, when applying the notion of "Islamic ethics" to explain the so-called Islamic capitalist practice, including work ethics, Islamic banking and finance, Islamic corporate governance, and so on, we should caution against a politics of theoretical knowledge. The thesis of cultural/religious values and Asian modernisation is a case in point. Adapted from the modernisation theories of scholars such as Geertz and Peacock, this thesis was repackaged as "spiritual capital" by Peter Berger and Gordon Redding (2010) and was applied to the case of Indonesia by Robert Hefner (2010). No one can deny that religious ethics offers spiritual resources as a positive momentum to nourish civil society or the public sphere. However, I argue that such thinking easily overlooks the complexity and potential manipulation of religious values that need to be addressed with a dialectic of social critique. By doing so, we need to examine the "elective affinity" between religious ethics (values) and the "spirit of capitalism" to understand how Islamic economic ethics was selectively applied and articulated by Anton Medan. E. P. Thompson (1966) has criticised Weber for only considering how Protestant ethics was transformed as a capitalist entrepreneurial mentality, while ignoring how the same religious ethics worked on English proletarians in a different way:

> Puritanism contributes to the psychic energy and social coherence of middle-class groups which felt themselves to be 'called' or 'elected' and which were engaged (with some success) in acquisitive pursuits. How can then such a religion appeal to the forming proletariat in a period of exceptional hardship, whose experiences at work and in their communities favoured collectivist rather than individualistic values, and whose frugality, discipline or acquisitive virtues brought profit to their masters rather than success to themselves? (Thompson, 1966, 356)

Thompson argues that Methodism had successfully developed an ideological tool to subdue the "lazy and non-disciplined" English proletariat into the industrious workers ready for the needs of industrial capitalism. The proletarians of the Industrial Revolution were full of passion, self-abuse, and suffering, in contrast to the middle-class Protestants. Thompson questions why Methodism led to a double effect on two classes during the Industrial Revolution (Peltonen, 2008).

Therefore, in examining the relationship between religion-cultural values and economic development, I suggest we take Stuart Hall's "articulation" to re-interpret Weber's concept of "selective affinity" and critically examine how religious values are linked, motivated, or manipulated to construct a believer's subjectivity in a certain socio-historical context.

Stuart Hall finds that Weber's argument of *The Protestant Ethics* can be an important extension of the Marxist theory of ideology. He tried to apply his concept of articulation to illuminate a complex historical relationship of "elective affinity" between Puritan ideas (ideology) and "the structure of the rationalisation of capital accumulation necessary to the development of capitalism" (Hall, 1977: 17).[32] In his earlier argument, he contends that in the logic connecting ideologies and economic forces, "ideologies have their own, complex, internal articulation whose specialty must be accounted for" (Hall, 1977: 17). His vague idea of articulation is further clarified later on by adding a few points related to my study (Chiou 2013). He considers articulation as a process of a subject interpolating a certain discourse or ideology, in which the linkage "is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential all the time." Instead of asking such a question, he suggests exploring "under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made." Thus, he asserts that his idea is "both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, understand certain conditions, to cohere together, within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (Grossberg, 1986: 53). For instance, taking religion as an example, Hall explains how religion can articulate subjects or other social instances:

> It (religion) exists historically in a particular formation, anchored very directly in relation to several different forces. Nevertheless, it has no necessary, intrinsic, trans-historical belongingness. Its meaning—political and ideological—comes precisely from its position within a formation. It comes with what else it is articulated to. Since those articulations are not inevitable, not necessary, they can potentially be transformed, so that religion can be articulated in more than one way" (Grossberg,1986: 54).

Therefore, in illuminating Weber's methodological concept of "elective affinity" in view of Hall's articulation, we can take a more flexible and critical attitude to examine Islamic economics, reflecting on how Islamic ethics are "contingently" applied and re-interpreted for various purposes to articulate different Islamic practices. On the one hand, it is important to be aware of multiple linkages between Islamic economic discursive practice and agendas of building a Muslim new capitalist working subjectivity. On the other hand, concomitantly, we can explore the "historically accumulated forces" of how and why the discourses of Islamic economic modernity are created and promoted to respond to macro-economic developments in Indonesia. As F. Osella and C. Osella suggest, "articulations between economic and religious practices remain contingent and contextual and any possible outcomes (including 'rationalisation) are unpredictable" (2009: 215).

However, if we confine the Weberian thesis to the elective affinity between values and actions, we cannot help but explore the meaning of social mobility in a Chinese-Indonesian businessman's conversion. Through their conversion to Islam, the Chinese-Indonesian Muslim businessmen and

some preachers have traversed the commercial and religious spheres. The question remains: what is the sociological meaning of their social mobility and religious conversion in the transformation of Indonesian Muslim society?

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Notes

1 *Kyai* is a title to address a Muslim clerk who has an important position affiliated with Islamic institutes. In the case of Anton Medan, it means the head of an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*).

2 Anton Medan is his nickname. His Muslim name is Ramdhan Effendi. "Anton" was given to him by one of his friends.

3 Medan beat a person to death in Medan, Sumatra, when he was 13 years old. He was working at a bus station and his money was stolen by someone. He confronted the thief and demanded the money back. He hit the person when he refused to pay up. The person eventually died in the

hospital. Medan was then put in a prison in Medan (Raharjo, 1997, I). Anton Medan's life story up to 1997 is recorded in a six-volume biography written by a hired author S. Budhi Raharjo. Wai Weng Hew (2017) also produced a short biographic account on Anton Medan.

4 Influenced by other convicts, he took an interest in various religions, including traditional Chinese religions and Buddhism (Raharjo, 1997, VI). In an event held by Batu Pejuru Church in the prison in which Christians distributed free food and stamps to the convicts, Anton Medan met Kho Liong, a convict who was later sentenced to death for murder. Medan learned a lot about Christianity and was baptised as a Christian (Raharjo, 1997, VI). He later converted to Buddhism and then became a Christian again (Raharjo, 1997, VI). He read the Bible, attended church regularly and consulted with a Christian prisoner and priests (Raharjo, 1997, VI).

5 From my conversation with Martin van Bruinessen, Tony Ardhie converted from Christianity to Islam and became a well-known radical preacher in student circles in the late 1980s and was sentenced to prison for his sermons.

6 The first time was when his mother visited him at the juvenile detention facility in Binjai, North Sumatra.

7 Medan often discussed religious faith with them. He held that the fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity is that in Christianity each baby is born with original sin inherited through Adam; in Islam, however, each person is born pure. Azhar and his friends kept telling Medan that God is God, human is human, and religion is common sense. That's why Islam does not call Jesus or "Nabi Isa" the son of God, because he was born as a human. This understanding of Islam and Christianity made him rethink the concept of God with common sense. He was told, furthermore, that no one could wipe out his sins except himself, by repenting before God (Raharjo, 1997, VI).

8 Medan had then reverted to worshipping Chinese deities for various reasons, including a belief, as foretold by a fortune teller, in the possibility of a divorce with wife when he was 33 years old. He installed an altar in his house and kept a special room for burning incense, and made offerings to the God of Gamblers to protect his gambling business and casinos (Raharjo, 1997, V).

9 As Medan's business grew, many of his friends from jail came to him for jobs. Besides casinos, he also ran bars, karaoke clubs, and erotic massage parlours. Each outlet was run by a manager, a security staff (some of whom were former police officers), and a public relation person responsible for maintaining good relationships with reporters, police officers, and others. His staff would scrutinise crime reports in the newspapers and would entice the reporters not to write about his business. He would find a way to protect his staff in police custody, often by bribing senior officers (Raharjo, 1997, V).

10 Months before Ramadan, he would stock up on staple items such as sugar, flour, and rice to sell

them for at high prices. He did the same thing in cement trading (Raharjo, 1997, V).

11 Anton's brothers and mother moved from Medan to live with him in Jakarta, regularly cooked and consumed pork in the house.

12 In the Jakarta region, *majelis taklim* (teaching association) is the common term for regular *pengajian* or religious study groups, especially those for women.

13 The proposed programmes of YAI had generated some controversy and was never officially established.

14 When he received an invitation to preach outside Jakarta, he would also preach in the prisons of that region.

15 Medan and his friends had an appointment with the journalist concerned to explain that he only preached to prisoners and prostitutes but not on TV. The journalist agreed to revise the article (Raharjo, 1997, V).

16 See *Asiaweek*, 24 July 1998, collected in Edward Aspinall, Herb Feith, and Gerry van Klinken (1999); Kees van Dijk (2002); Loren Ryter (2001); and John T. Sidel (2006).

17 This book is not an abridged edition of his biography, but by a different author to cover events of May 1998.

18 Liem Sioe Liong's house was the substitute target.

19 Loren Ryter (1998) received a similar account in an interview with Medan, but Ryter finds his statements dubious.

20 Ryter (1998) defines *preman* as extortionists and illegal debt-collectors, who might also work as parking attendants or nightclub security guards when not outright violating the law.

21 See: https://pantau.or.id/liputan/2001/12/spanduk-billboard-dan-anton-medan/

22 On a visit to his *pesantren*, I noticed that he built his mosque and grave at the same time. He says that the sight of a grave reminds his students that the life of a human being is very short.

23 "*Agar dirimu bermanfaat, mantapkan imanmu, luruskan niatmu, tingkatkan prestasimu raih cita-citamu. Ingat, kematian bukanlah yang mesti kau risaukan. Melainkan jalan menuju mati itulah yang harus kau siapkan.*" See: https://jakarta.tribunnews.com/2019/02/05/melihat-keindahan-pondok-pesantren-berbalur-budaya-tionghoa-yang-didirikan-anton-medan.

24 For his ideas on establishing the Islamic boarding school, see: http://muhshodiq.wordpress.com/2009/08/31/fondasi-nilai-nilai-anton-medan/; and http://berita.liputan6.com/sosbud/200511/112053/Metode.Kreatif.Ponpes.At.Taibin

25 Junus Jahja (1927–2011), a well-known ethnic Chinese activist and intellectual, promoted the assimilation of ethnic Chinese into mainstream Indonesian culture. He encouraged the Chinese to move out of their ethnic enclaves, erase their cultural and religious identity, and completely assimilate into the Indonesian society. The other significant *dakwah* (preaching Islam) strategy was the launching of a programme called "*Dakwah* through Doing Business and vice versa."

He encouraged non-Muslim Chinese businessmen to hold meetings with pribumi (indigenous Indonesian) Muslim merchants, hoping that via such meetings, ethnic Chinese businesspeople would exchange their business skills for the pribumi's religious knowledge, and vice versa. Junus's two-pronged *dakwah* strategy raised some pertinent issues regarding the dissemination of religious knowledge to Chinese Indonesians for their conversion to Islam, and whether the converts would enjoy the full status of Indonesian citizenship, while retaining their economic superiority. See Chiou (2015).

26 Syafii Antonio (1965-) is a highly influential Chinese-Indonesian Muslim and has been engaged in establishing the Islamic banking system since 1990s. He has published several books to promote Islamic banking and Islamic management. In particular, he established new business schools based on his special curriculum combining knowledge of Islamic law and modern business administration.

27 For instance, he once supported the idea that Indonesia should legalise casino business that later cause some controversies. See: https://www.skyscrapercity.com/threads/indonesia-issues-of-mafia-money-laundering-and-gambling.267070/

28 See: http://us.detiknews.com/read/2010/07/03/070139/1392108/10/anton-medan-lokalisasi-judi-pakai-keppres-dan-di-tempat-terpencil.

29 See: https://www.newsgemajakarta.com/2012/10/anton-medan-resmi-dilantik-jadi-ketua.html

30 See: https://www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/anton-medan-ormas-tolak-basuki-tak-paham-alquran.

31 "Market Islam" is originally addressed by French scholar Patrick Haenni. This quote is from Julia Day Howell. This concept has been further elaborated by Daromir Rudnyckyj's article "Market Islam in Indonesia" (2009).

32 In his earlier view, he considers that "elective affinity" can avoid a mechanical economic determinism but still adheres to how ideas can be generated in a class without falling into an individual psychologism.