

Understanding Confucianism in West Kalimantan

Pontianak: IAIN Pontianak Press

By Samsul Hidayat

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What is Confucianism? What are its teachings? What is its culture? How did it grow in Indonesia? What is Confucianism like in West Kalimantan? The book, *Agama Konghucu* (Confucianism) written by Samsul Hidayat, was written to answer those questions. The author of this book, a lecturer at the State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) of Pontianak, has long been doing a study on Confucianism in his capacity as an expert in the field of comparative religion.

The book is physically easy to recognize. Its cover is red, giving the impression of closeness of the contents of the discussion with the Chinese people who have an important role in Confucianism in Indonesia. The ISBN number 978-602-9152-86-9 is listed on the back cover. On the left side, there is a black logo of STAIN Pontianak Press as the Publisher of the book which was printed in October 2012. This book can serve as a great teaching material at the IAIN, and can also be used for discussion of Confucianism, especially Confucianism in West Kalimantan.

In West Kalimantan, books related to Confucianism are still scarce. The book was edited by Amalia Irfani, therefore, can fill the shortage. The book is special because it also discusses the festival of Cap Go Meh in Singkawang. The collaboration of several ethnic groups in West Kalimantan in the feast is also presented in this book. And, from here, it is known that the *tatung* has not only played an important role in the rituals of the Chinese society in Singkawang, but also is influential on improving welfare, solidarity, and multiculturalism.

Discussion related to Confucianism in Singkawang, West Kalimantan is certainly worth reading. The reason is the distinctiveness will illustrate a comparison with Confucianism outside West Kalimantan. However, to understand more about Confucianism, the first part of the discussion can be found in chapter I and chapter III.

The first chapter, an introduction, is divided into three sections. The first part

contains human thought about religion, the reason humans need religion, the human role in religion, and explains the purpose and mission of the presence of the Prophet for the people embracing religion.

The second part discusses the debate on Confucianism as a religion. The views that Confucianism is not a religion from various parties are presented in this book. The decline began with the issuance of the presidential instruction during Soeharto era, the Cabinet Meeting on January 27, 1979 stated that Confucianism was not a religion.

Many view that Confucianism is not a religion but a culture. However, the view that Confucianism is a religion, is presented in this book and can offer an explanation so as to provide reasons for the debate and recognition. This discussion is very interesting. When the majority of people do not know how to distinguish Confucianism between a religion and culture, this book demonstrates the relationship between the two by giving the understanding that the role of religion as a cultural identity becomes a bond for communities.

Togetherness among the followers of Confucianism is also strongly influenced by the MATAKIN, the Confucian religious organization. MATAKIN's vision and mission, not affiliated to any socio-political organizations, are presented in this book. The organization's structure and programs are also described here. Agreements on the implementation of the Congress of MATAKIN were also covered. A long history was summed up without forgetting the struggles and challenges of MATAKIN in defending Confucianism at the time.

From this book, readers can learn more about the decrees with regard to the status of Confucianism from the old order to the reform era which shows a long period of pursuit. Chapter III covers the teachings of Confucianism as an important part in the book. The first section in this chapter provides information regarding the concept of religion in Confucianism. The answer to the question, "what is Confucianism?" can be found here.

The eight pillars of the teaching on faith or *Pat Sing Ciam Kwi* are discussed in the next sub sections. *Pat Sing Ciam Kwi* becomes the guidelines in daily life of Confucians. The three pillars of faith among eight are the faith to believe in God the Almighty, the faith to uphold kindness, and to be aware of life and spirit.

Next, the discussion focuses on the concept of God. This concept is described in the classic books of Confucianism. One of them is the belief in one true God as the source and origin of all things, the Giver of life and Protector of mankind. The book also discusses the concept of creation of the universe and the concept of revelation and prophethood.

The life story of the Confucian Prophet can be a learning process for a better life. Several important relatives during the Prophet of Confucianism were presented here as well. In addition, the religious activities of the Prophet's mother when she was pregnant also turn out to have a relationship with the name of the Prophet. The important points of Confucianism are also discussed in this chapter. The Confucian Prophet's family line can also be found in this chapter despite a lack of family background.

The next section discusses art. In Confucianism art is an integral part. Art is discussed as it relates to the construction of the self, faith, ethics and morals taught by the religion. Still in chapter III, art becomes part of the discussion in the form of the relationship between art and religion, human character development and leadership.

As mentioned earlier, in chapter IV concerning topics related to religion and culture in Singkawang, West Kalimantan. This particular discussion differs from other books that deal with Confucianism. The facts are there but are not realized by the community. The author elaborated the preservation of the Chinese culture through celebration. The new identity was discovered in the city of a thousand temples (Singkawang) where the celebration of Chinese rituals are no longer exclusive; it belongs to the communities of the city. To present more details with regard to Confucianism in Singkawang, the author divided the discussion into several subtitles: the Chinese is our culture too, the Exoticism of *Cap Go Meh* and Commodification of Culture, and Tatung looking for identity.

The four topics in the subtitles focus on the celebration of the Chinese New Year and *Cap Go Meh* in Singkawang. This book is certainly useful to anyone, especially those who want to broaden their knowledge with regard to Confucianism in West Kalimantan. As a book in the series of inter-religious understanding, this book can bring people to participate in the religious activities to explore the memory of cultural diversity. From these experiences, we might have a better understanding of each other. Moreover, the community of West Kalimantan can no longer be separated from the Chinese community in Singkawang.