This book is a major revision of its first edition (Mitsuo Nakamura, 1983: The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press) by Mitsuo Nakamura (hereafter “the author”), to include the events which have taken place between its original publication and the present; it has been published as a second edition by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies of Singapore. The first edition was based on the doctoral thesis which the author submitted to Cornell University in 1976, compiling the results of anthropological fieldwork carried out in Kotagede, near Yogyakarta in central Java, in the early 1970s under the Soeharto regime. Its subject was a description and analysis, based on anthropological fieldwork in Javanese society on the ground, of the development process of the (modernist) Islamic Muhammadiyah movement in Indonesia at that time.

In particular, a major theme is the relation between two tendencies: the area of more traditional cultural practices in Javanese society, symbolized by the “Banyan Tree” of the title, and the modernist Islamic movement represented by the Muhammadiyah or “Crescent” (which coexist, while containing considerable tensions and conflicts/oppositions). The new edition (2nd enlarged edition) is divided into Part I and Part II, of which Part I, with the exception of some additions and corrections of details, effectively represents the content of the 1983 first edition. In comparison, Part II is new content based on fieldwork done by the author in the region since the publication of the first edition, that is regarding the changes which have taken place from 1972 up through 2010.

As Merle Ricklefs points out in the Foreword to the second edition, the first edition had already received plaudits at the time of publication to the effect that it was a landmark work of quality at least equal to Clifford Geertz’s The Religion of Java (if not even more significant than Geertz’s work), which was immensely influential in Indonesia studies at that time.

However, at the time, the first edition was published by Gadjah Mada University, that is to say an Indonesian university, and was by no means necessarily easy to acquire. For this reason, it was for a long time effectively a “hidden classic” known only to a select few. Given this situation, the publication of this second edition is not only a welcome event for many readers...
who have never encountered the first edition, but also a valuable chance for readers familiar with the first edition to learn a great deal, through the publication of this greatly expanded second edition, about the tremendous changes in status which have taken place since (up through 2010).

Due to limited review space, the second edition cannot be discussed comprehensively here in specific detail, but this reviewer was particularly intrigued by the momentous changes of recent years which are described in Part II, and the unexpected conclusions to which some of them have come. To give just one example, regardless of the activities and developments of the Muhammadiyah as depicted in Part I, the traditional cultural practices of Java which became a target of criticism from the Muhammadiyah movement have clung stubbornly to existence, and remain popular on the ground; in some situations, these “typically Javanese” cultural practices, such as wayang (shadow puppetry) and gamelan, have been permitted even among some Muhammadiyah members, and the indication that some situations have even involved action to encourage these practices was a fascinating conclusion. As well, opinions on points such as how the Muhammadiyah movement has dealt with (or failed to deal with) the increase in social and cultural diversity accompanying the establishment of democracy after the collapse of the Soeharto regime, as well as modern and difficult social situations such as globalization and the poverty and wealth gap which it has brought, provide valuable case studies when considering the relations between modernity and Islam.

Finally, to express just one regret in the spirit of asking for the moon, I felt that the book would have had an even greater impact in the context of theoretical comparative research if a clearer consideration had been included of points such as whether, and to what extent, the cases and opinions taken up in the book can be applied (or referenced) beyond the context of Kotagede and Java to the Muslim society of Indonesia as a whole, or even to Southeast Asia and beyond (or whether, conversely, the opinions expressed in the book are of a specifically Javanese character). Of course, this issue does not affect the value of the book at all, and while of course representing expectations of further developments in the author’s future research, can also be said to be an issue for those who have read the book (including this reviewer) to address through survey work in their own fields and so forth, based on the opinions expressed in the book. In this sense, not only for scholars of Java and Indonesia but also for those in the field of Muslim society (and Islam) in other regions, this is a groundbreaking piece of work which will serve as a point of reference for comparative research in the future.