

10-31-2011

## Does multicultural Indonesia include its ethnic Chinese?

Dewi Anggraeni  
djuta2003@yahoo.com.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana>



Part of the [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Anggraeni, Dewi (2011) "Does multicultural Indonesia include its ethnic Chinese?," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia*: Vol. 13: No. 2, Article 3.

DOI: 10.17510/wjhi.v13i2.23

Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/wacana/vol13/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty of Humanities at UI Scholars Hub. It has been accepted for inclusion in Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia by an authorized editor of UI Scholars Hub.

# Does multicultural Indonesia include its ethnic Chinese?

DEWI ANGGRAENI

## ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism in Indonesia is predominantly concerned with various regional cultures in the country, which continue to exist, and in some cases, to develop and progress. These cultures meet and interact in the context of a unitary national, Indonesian culture. There are however people who or whose ancestors originate from outside Indonesia, the major ones being Chinese and Arabs. They brought with them the cultures and mores of their lands of origin and to varying degrees integrated them into those of the places they adopted as homes. This article discusses how the Chinese who opted for Indonesian citizenship and nationality, fared and fare in Indonesia's multicultural society, what problems slowed them in their path, and what lies behind these problems.

## KEYWORDS

Multicultural, cultural plurality, ethnic Chinese, *peranakan*, indigenous, migration, nationalism, VOC, New Order, Muslim, Confucianism, ancestry, Cheng Ho, *pecinan*, Chinese captaincy.

## WHAT IS MULTICULTURALISM?

In Australia, the United States, and Canada, the media started to use the term multiculturalism from the late 1960s to the early 1970s to describe the nature of the society in their respective countries. It is worth noting that Australia, the United States and Canada have been immigrant-receiving nations where immigrants have had a very significant role in nation building and in economic growth.

*WorldQ.com* explains the concept well and defines multiculturalism or

---

DEWI ANGGRAENI is a writer of fiction and non-fiction. She writes for *Tempo*, *The Jakarta Post*, *Femina*, *Pesona*, *Jurnal Kajian Wilayah (LIPI)*, *Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia (Wacana FIB UI)* in Indonesia and other mass media and journals in Australia, Hong Kong, South Korea, and the United States. She is Adjunct Research Associate at the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Her latest non-fiction works have been published independently in English and Indonesian and were entitled, *Breaking the stereotype; Chinese Indonesian women tell their stories* (Melbourne: Indra Publishing, 2010) and *Mereka bilang aku China; Jalan mendaki menjadi bagian bangsa* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 2010). Dewi Anggraeni may be contacted at: [djuta2003@yahoo.com.au](mailto:djuta2003@yahoo.com.au).

cultural pluralism as “a policy ideal, or reality that emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures in the world, especially as they relate to one another in immigrant receiving nations”. The term was first used in 1957 to describe Switzerland, but only came into common currency in Canada in the late 1960s after which it quickly spread to other English-speaking countries.

The *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia* defines multiculturalism or cultural pluralism as “a term describing the coexistence of many cultures in a locality, without any one culture dominating the region. By making the broadest range of human differences acceptable to the largest number of people, multiculturalism seeks to overcome racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination”.

#### HOW MULTICULTURALISM APPLIES TO INDONESIA

The *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*'s definition approximates the situation in Indonesia because Indonesia is strictly speaking not an immigrant-receiving nation. It is rather a nation founded on the presence of a large number of different ethnic groups, each bringing its own culture into the pool. Both *WorldQ.com* and the *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia* entries, however, agree on the concept of the acceptance and the acceptability of the different participating cultures.

In Indonesia, a culture originating from outside the confines of the nation only seems to be accepted and acceptable when that culture is considered to have become an integral part of the national mores.

The Arabs and the Chinese are two ethnic groups that have brought their own cultures to Indonesia stand out because of their prominence and their contributions to the cultures regarded as indigenous to the regions they now call home. It is interesting to note that the former appears to have blended more into mainstream societies than latter which continues to stand out. Psychologically, it may be easier for the mainstream Indonesian population to accept Arabs because they are associated with Islam, the religion of the majority of the Indonesian people but the Chinese continue to stand out because of their decidedly greater numbers. This is especially the case as many Chinese - numerous enough to be conspicuous - carry physical characteristics that are distinctly different from the more Malay features of the majority population, and most of them are Buddhists, Confucians, and Christians, while only a small number of them are Muslims.

While both the Arabs and the Chinese are largely engaged in business and trade, and in many cases compete with each other, the Chinese are again most probably more “visible” because of their larger numbers and the fact that they do not easily blend into the mainstream community.

I argue that the difficulty the mainstream population has in accepting ethnic Chinese as being part of them stems from the historical constructs effected by different ruling powers, and from what is correctly and/or incorrectly perceived as the unwillingness on the part of the ethnic Chinese to be part of them.

*WorldQ.com* and the *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia* are not completely distinct as they overlap each other and are mutually consequential. To explain this, it is necessary to take a closer look at the history of Chinese arrivals/migrations to the region which now forms Indonesia, the policies the region's different governing powers put in effect from the seventeenth century until the present, and the ways different ethnic Chinese communities have interacted among each other and with the non-Chinese population around them.

#### MAJOR CHINESE MIGRATIONS FLOWS TO INDONESIA

It is generally assumed that there have been three major streams of Chinese migration to the area: the first came with or around the time of Cheng Ho's voyage early in the fifteenth century; the second fled China during and around the time of the Opium wars from 1839 to 1842 and from 1856 to 1860,<sup>1</sup> and the third arrived around the beginning of the twentieth century. However, Wang Gung-wu (1994: 22) asserts that Chinese had been sailing to Southeast Asia since the Song Dynasty whose rule lasted from 960 to 1279. This theory presumably is based on non-written records, such as the discovery of tombs, artefacts, and Chinese vocabulary in local languages, as well as Chinese influences in local architecture. Wang admits (1994: 22) that for the period before the Ming Dynasty, which ruled China from 1368 to 1644, there are hardly any written records on Chinese migration southwards.

Lynn Pan (1990: 6) recounts the social and political circumstances that brought private merchants/traders, hunters, artisans and farmers from the southern provinces to sail south. Viewing Chinese migration in terms of Wang's (1994: 4-20) theory of four patterns - traders, coolies, sojourners, and descendents and re-migrants - Anggraeni (2010a: 205) theorizes that the Chinese who came during the Song Dynasty were most likely traders, artisans and other skilled workers looking for a wider horizon.

The Song Dynasty is well documented as having had a strong naval fleet that carried out maritime missions to surrounding waters all the while defending its own territory. People who tended to leave home would have been relatively young and adventurous men who were looking for warmer and friendlier climates. The Song Dynasty is also known as prosperous, and as having had the latest technology in agriculture and handicraft industry. It would thus be reasonable to infer that those who left their homes for foreign shores may have had trade in mind, and would have had the confidence that they would be able to rely on their skills to earn their living if they liked the places they found and decided to settle in.

The descendants of those who did settle in the new lands may eventually have either moved on to professions perceived as more "white-collar", or would have opted to continue their forefathers' vocations like carpentry, cabinet and glass-making, and trading.

Throughout the eighteenth century, significant numbers of traders, miners,

<sup>1</sup> There were two opium wars.

farmers and other skilled workers left China during the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty to escape poverty and foreign power incursions and these migrants significantly added to the number of Chinese settlers in the archipelago, because it would have been one of the places to which they sailed.

Emigrants intended for manual labour sailed in large numbers to North America and Australia – especially during the gold rushes. A relatively small number, however, landed in the archipelago, the most documented being those whom Jan Pieterszoon Coen brought in to build his dream town, near the site where the Dutch East Indies, or *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) had destroyed Jayakarta in 1619. Coen realized that he needed more Chinese labourers if he were to create a European society. Citing Dutch accounts, Susan Abeyasekere – now Blackburn – (1987: 6), writes that Chinese had been living in Jayakarta as various artisans. Coen moreover found the Chinese to be eager and serious workers. He had more of them shipped in from the southern coasts of China and Batavia was subsequently built.

In the nineteenth century, a specific class of Chinese immigrants started to alight on the shores of the Dutch East Indies. They were mainly teachers, journalists and other professionals who were part of the nationalist movement that had begun to take roots in China. Wang (1994: 6-7) states that these people were keen to promote awareness of China and Chinese culture in the region.

The Chinese who continued to arrive at least until well into the 1950s appear to have mostly belonged to the category of traders and included small business operators in retail and in manufacture. There seems to have been only few farmers among them. Today there are still only small numbers of ethnic Chinese farmers mostly in West Kalimantan while others are found in the northern, eastern and southern regions of Sumatra, and in West Java.

#### HOW ETHNIC CHINESE PARTICIPATED IN SOCIETY IN INDONESIA

In line with my theory that the ruling powers of the day greatly influenced the ease or difficulty of the ethnic Chinese in being accepted into mainstream society, I will divide this part of my article into six subsections; the era before the arrival of the Dutch; the era of the Dutch occupation; the era of the struggle for independence (including the Japanese occupation); the era of the early Republic, the era of the New Order; and the era of Reform.

I will refer to these people simply as *Chinese* until the era of Indonesia's Independence, when those who wanted to be part of the new nation became an ethnic group like any other from the many regions that form Indonesia. I will use the term "ethnic Chinese" for the later period.

#### THE ERA BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE DUTCH

While there are no known written records about Chinese presence in the archipelago before Cheng Ho visited the lands now known as Java, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula, it would be safe to infer that Chinese had been visiting at least Java and Sumatra. Chinese records from as early as 600 AD tell of two kingdoms in the southern regions of Sumatra, and three kingdoms in

Java. It is generally believed that Srivijaya is one of the kingdoms in Sumatra the records refer to, and the three on Java were precursors of the famous Majapahit kingdom. Assuming that these records were based on notes made by Chinese Buddhist scholars and monks who stopped in the archipelago on their way to India, it would also be reasonable to assume that some of these travellers would have decided to stay and to try their luck in these lands.

Unfortunately, no reliable records have been discovered that chronicle the arrivals of these people, let alone what they did afterwards. However, we know from independent Dutch accounts that Chinese were living in Jayakarta before VOC's Jan Pieterszoon Coen's army destroyed it in 1619. What is more, we know they made *arak* (rice wine) there (Abeyasekere 1987: 6). We may safely establish also that the Chinese were active in other vocations such as carpentry and other types of artisanship and manual work by the conclusion Coen drew that if he wanted to build a European society he needed to have reliable workers and he knew that Chinese workers were ideal for his purpose (Abeyasekere 1987: 6).

In present-day Jakarta, in areas surrounding former Jayakarta, there are families who for all intents and purposes are native Betawi<sup>2</sup> people; they were born in Jakarta and so were their parents. They speak the Jakartan or Betawi *patois* of Indonesian, they have dark brown skin, and they profess to be Muslim – devout or nominal. However, at close inspection, their facial features may be described as “ambiguous”. They have higher cheekbones than the average Betawi, their eyes are not as round, and their nose more prominent and narrower. Now, post-New Order, they freely confess that they are of Chinese ancestry dating back to the sixteenth century. It is interesting to note, that according to them also, their ancestors were carpenters, cabinetmakers, and fisher folk.<sup>3</sup>

It would be reasonable to establish that these ancestors married local women, lived in local communities, and to varying degrees embraced, and were subsequently accepted into, the local mores. At the same time, they would have taught their descendants their skills, their Chinese dialects, and the wisdom and superstitions they had brought from their homelands. This may explain how many Hokkien words (Hokkien or Fujian being the homeland of many of these ancestors) found their way into Indonesian vocabulary, and that there has been a great deal of overlap and blurring of lines between indigenous and Chinese traditions and customs, food production, kitchen utensils, and recurring motifs found on items of furniture and clothing used by their families, not only in Jakarta and surroundings, but throughout Indonesia. The Ming Dynasty's fleet, especially that under Admiral Cheng Ho who made repeated visits in the fifteenth century, almost certainly would have left behind some crewmembers who had particular skills.

If issuing offspring of rulers may be seen as to constitute participation in society, the Chinese princess who gave birth to Raden Patah of Demak (1475

<sup>2</sup> Local pronunciation of Batavia.

<sup>3</sup> Personal communications with the author in 2008.



to 1568) can definitely be counted as a prominent participant.

A number of documents speculate that some, even all, of the nine founders of Islam in Java, the *Wali Sanga*, were Chinese or of Chinese descent, but so far no definitive data has been found to substantiate this thesis.

According to notes made by the Dutch chronicler Willem Lodewijk who arrived with the first Dutch expedition to Banten in 1596, there were Chinese Muslims in the kingdom they visited who devoted themselves to the service of the king. Didi Kwartanada (2010: 24) writes that Kyai Ngabehi Kaytsu and Kyai Ngabehi Cakradana held harbour manager positions in the seventeenth century. He also noted that the Prince of Bangil and the Regent of Tegal were descendants of Han Siong Kong who was born in China in 1673 and died in Lasem in 1744. In addition, in Yogyakarta (1813-1831) a regent under the reign of Sultan Hamengku Buwono II, was indeed Tan Jin Sing, known officially as Raden Tumenggung Setyadiningrat (1760-1831).

#### THE ERA OF DUTCH OCCUPATION

The Dutch started to arrive in the archipelago towards the end of the sixteenth century. They were driven by the desire to get a fair slice of the spice trade that hitherto had been dominated by the Portuguese. Very quickly, the Dutch realized that to achieve their objectives they had to subdue local rulers. To do that they urgently needed to forge a united front, so they founded their own East India Company, the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, the VOC, in 1602. The VOC was suitably armed, and predictably, it reshaped the fabric of society in each of the region it occupied. It rearranged these societies by imposing European laws, and unsurprisingly, those who benefited most from this rearrangement were the Dutch themselves, though not without problems and complications.

In their position of power, the Dutch were free to recruit skilled and unskilled labour from wherever they deemed profitable. Apart from transferring people from one region of the archipelago to another to meet their labour requirements, Chinese, as well as Indian labour was sought and shipped into the archipelago to places where they were in demand.

For the small number of Chinese who already lived in the archipelago, the social and political landscape changed quickly. Now, they found themselves living in the Dutch East Indies and their numbers continually grew either by Dutch recruitment of labour from the southern regions of China or by later migrations. More importantly, this was for the Chinese the beginning of contrived social exclusion.

To guard against the consolidation of the non-Dutch population in the Indies, which might have turned into a powerful force if it decided to organize an uprising,<sup>4</sup> the VOC divided the population into roughly three categories: Europeans, Foreign Orientals, and Natives. This division however, is not

<sup>4</sup> There was indeed a significant and sustained rebellion in which the Chinese and the Javanese fought together against the Dutch in the mid eighteenth century, as depicted in detail by Daradjadi (2008).

provided in the Government Regulation (Regeringsreglement) of 1854, or earlier. Nonetheless, in its implementation this policy succeeded in excluding the Chinese from mainstream society. As Charles Coppel (2002: 159) points out, this was done by imposing a regulation known as the *passenstelsel* which restricted the Chinese from living outside their designated quarters – these were generally called *pecinan* or *kampoeng Cina* (see Picture 1) –, and from travelling outside these quarters without government-issued passes.



Picture 1. Chinese residence end of nineteenth century (Woodbury and Page, circa 1870, albumen print, collection of KITLV, Leiden).

Throughout the Indies, while at the marketplace the Chinese still met and interacted with indigenous and other foreign oriental and mixed-race groups, they were no longer in a position to mix socially and freely, in the true sense.

Under the Dutch colonial administration, the Chinese occupied positions of intermediaries. They were licensed to be harbour masters and tax collectors, and to manage sugar and coffee plantations and the production of other crops. The Dutch masters had thus no need to deal directly with the mainstream population in money matters. They were assured of steady revenue via the Chinese who for their part benefited financially and who enjoyed the power rented to them by their Dutch masters.

When, in 1619, the Dutch instituted a Chinese Captaincy in Banten by appointing Souw Beng Kong as the Chinese Captain – following the Portuguese practice in Malacca –, they effectively sealed off the Chinese communities there and turned them into a separate entity.

#### BEING EXCLUDED AND EXCLUSIVE

Throughout Dutch occupation, this socially and politically constructed situation shaped the development of Chinese communities, along with



their collective consciousness and self-perceptions. As a definitely different race and a different cultural and ethnic group, the Chinese stood out from indigenous groups and other foreign Orientals such as Arabs and Indians. In late eighteenth century, women joined their husbands in their journey to the archipelago.<sup>5</sup> They were probably Han men who fled the Qing (Manchu) Dynasty for political reasons and who took their families along. They joined their compatriots in the Chinese quarters in various cities. In addition, apart from the men who worked in the harbours and who collected taxes, and artisans who supplied goods to the Europeans and other non-Chinese people, their womenfolk and children could live their entire lives seeing only or mainly fellow Chinese. The only indigenous people these women and children saw on a daily basis were those who worked in their households, such as their domestic servants and guards. While the ties between them and the domestic servants and guards were often and to varying degrees personal, complemented with emotional depth, the image they subconsciously had of the indigenous people was that of people of inferior social class.

#### IMPORTANT CULTURAL CONTRIBUTION

The development of what is known now as *peranakan* cuisine is one important cultural offshoot of inter-racial household interaction of women and children. Chinese women had brought their own recipes from their home regions in China and they taught their indigenous domestic servants how to cook them. Some ingredients were not available locally and hence would have to be replaced by something else. This is where the role of indigenous women was crucial. While looking for substitutes for missing ingredients they also introduced and suggested new ones to replace or even to add to the dishes they had concocted together. A repertoire of new dishes continued to grow. Tastes evolved, not only of the Chinese women and their children, but also of the indigenous women and in some cases, their children, as it was well known that a number of these women also brought their children to the household to live there. Ingredients and dishes Indonesians, now take for granted as having been among them as far back as their memory goes, are in reality fusions of generations of cuisines. *Kecap manis* or sweet soya sauce, which is liberally used in many Indonesian dishes is one example. *Tahu* or soybean curd and *tempe* or fermented soybean cake, which feature regularly in many dishes and make dishes of their own when fried, steamed, boiled, and liberally spiced and tastefully seasoned, are also prominently present in Indonesian people's diets. Not to mention *sayur asin* (pickled vegetables), *bakso* (meatballs), *mie* (noodles), and many, many more.

#### THE REGARDER AND REGARDED

Back in the general community, indigenous and other foreign oriental groups

<sup>5</sup> Personal communications between the author and a number of families in Java during 2008.

had an equally unflattering image of the Chinese. The Chinese were effectively the go-betweens for the colonial administration and the indigenous people and they often did the power elite's dirty work such as extracting payments from the general population, often employing coercive measures. So on the one hand they were disliked by indigenous groups, and on the other, their social position made them feel superior vis-à-vis the indigenous population because they were technically closer to the power elite. This seemed to be especially so in the case of those who enjoyed significant economic success. A number of the wealthy flaunted their privileged positions. Though they did this not only in relation to indigenous and other groups, but also to their less well-off fellow Chinese, it was understandably more felt by, and irritating to, the former. This behaviour only succeeded in reinforcing and increasing the collective dislike of the Chinese among indigenous and other foreign oriental groups. While their society was designed to fill a place between the colonial powers and the indigenous people, as Anggraeni (2010a: 208) writes, legally the Constitutional Regulation of 1854 placed the Chinese under the same legal footing as the natives (indigenous people). This may have caused many Chinese to feel the need to reaffirm their closeness to power vis-à-vis the indigenous people, by display of wealth.

This exclusiveness continued even after the *passenstelsel* was abolished in 1918. This was notably so among those who regarded themselves as more proximate to power and the wealthy, and often these two groups overlapped. "Exalted" and wealthy Chinese tended to keep among themselves. Consequently, they also expected to find prospective sons/daughters-in-law within their own circles. When a son or a daughter of a wealthy family expressed interest in someone outside this privileged world, their families would invariably be against the idea, be it strong, moderate or even in token, depending on how liberal the family was. Inter-ethnic or inter-racial unions were undoubtedly strongly discouraged.

By this time, Chinese communities in the Indies had grown and continued to grow increasingly complex. While legally they were classified as equivalent to natives, as distinct from Europeans, the Dutch granted some of them the privilege of being equated with Europeans and being equated meant being able to enjoy the protection of the European criminal code with respect to arbitrary arrest, jail conditions, and legally qualified tribunal. In the native courts, only the presiding chair was legally qualified. Those who had been granted these privileges would understandably have considered themselves superior to those who had not.

In 1890, the Netherlands signed a treaty with Japan, which resulted in all Japanese nationals in the Indies becoming equated with Europeans. These included the Chinese whose country of origins was Formosa (Taiwan). Consequently, the Chinese whose country of origins was China felt snubbed and disadvantaged. For years, they lobbied the Netherlands to be equated with Europeans too, without success.

In the meantime, the swell of nationalism in China began to reach the

Indies. This had the effect of reinforcing nascent nationalism in the Indies and even to bring it more rapidly to the surface. Furthermore, it increased the politicization of the Chinese communities who were roughly divided into three groups: those who wanted to retain political and cultural links with China; those who shunned political links but wanted to retain cultural ties with China and wanted to remain part of the Dutch Indies; and those who wanted to move away from political or cultural links with China and become part of the new nation after it had gained independence. Some of this group were politically vocal enough to have run foul with the Dutch administration. Each of these groups naturally had subgroups that overlapped and even adopted positions of the other groups in terms of particular policies. And added to these already varied and even opposing expressions of opinion came the voices of the Chinese whose country of origins was Formosa/Taiwan, many of whom were known to blame communism for most problems befalling the Chinese in the Indies.

The strong combination of rising nationalism in China and the feeling of being dismissed as second-class subjects drove those who looked to China for recognition and dignity to found *Tiong Hwa Hwee Kwan*, later known as THHK, on 17 March 1900, in Batavia. Many Chinese were concerned that being classed equivalent to natives meant being inferior vis-à-vis the ruling Europeans. Thus, THHK's main objective was to strengthen the sense of Chinese identity among the Chinese in the Indies, in order for them, as a race, to gain the respect of the Dutch colonial ruling class. They believed that the main means of achieving this objective was to revive Confucianism among the Chinese communities and they did this by planning their own THHK schools to educate their children and to imbue them with Chinese culture and mores. In 1901, THHK founded its school in Batavia, which proved very popular and grew exponentially when increasing numbers of Chinese sent their children to be educated there. Within a short time, branches appeared in other cities in Java and Sumatra. The colonial administration took this seriously to the extent that after a short while they founded the *Hollandsch Chineesche School*, known by its acronym, HCS, a Dutch language primary school for Chinese children. Obviously, they saw the danger of the younger generation of Chinese turning their backs on being Dutch subjects. HCS took off too, most likely because the majority of Chinese in Batavia and other cities in Java and other islands were too pragmatic to know that aligning themselves with China would get them nowhere. Even families whose sense of cultural identity was fairly Chinese sent their children to HCS. There are nuances here that have often eluded those who only gave the Chinese situation a sweeping glance. Their sense of Chinese identity did not include being part of the Chinese nation. Moreover, they felt that educating their children in HCS was a better way to ground themselves in the Indies.<sup>6</sup>

THHK and HCS schools produced a generation of Chinese who varied

<sup>6</sup> Personal communications between the author and descendants of these families, 2008.

widely in terms of self-identity and self-perception, and inevitably, they often found themselves taking opposing political stances. The effect of both schools was that the social barriers between Chinese children and children of other racial and indigenous communities remained.

#### INTER-RACIAL UNIONS

Despite exclusiveness, inter-racial unions did occur, either official or de facto. In the earlier times of Dutch occupation, Chinese men continued to take local women as their common-law wives. During the latter decades, the privileged and educated on both sides began to inch across, if not break down, the racial barrier. A selected few of the Chinese, Arabs, Eurasian, and indigenous families, notably those who were close to the power elite, were granted privileges, one being that of sending their children to the ELS (*Europeesche Lagere School*), a Dutch elementary school for Dutch children and thus the young generations of these groups developed inter-racial friendships. Nevertheless, when friendships developed into inter-racial marriages, such as between a Chinese and a Javanese, a Chinese and a Batak, or a Chinese and an Arab, caused a great deal of stir in the families of both but they certainly did take place and rifts generally healed with time. Mutual acceptance thus developed, though on a limited scale.

#### SOCIAL LIMBO AND LEGAL ANOMALY

When looking back, the irony of the situation could hardly have been lost to the ethnic Chinese. They were made to believe or feel that they were closer to the power elite than the natives and other foreign Orientals because of the facilities and "privileges" the Dutch colonial administration conferred on them. Yet legally they were equated with the natives, a fact that slighted them, especially after the 1890 treaty with Japan, which was followed by Japanese nationals and Formosan Chinese being equated with Europeans. To further confuse the matter, the concept of "equating", as Coppel (2002: 158-159) points out, is not clear or straightforward. While being equated with the natives, some legislation was not consistent with that status. For example, the Agrarian Law of 1870, which prohibited sale or permanent transfer of land from "natives" to Europeans or other "foreigners" including to the Chinese (Coppel 2002: 159).

#### THE INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE ERA

The turn of the nineteenth century was a poignant time in the Indies, and the Chinese, being at least physically and in a sense also inherently part of the Indies, became involved in the turbulence of the struggle for Independence, some with conviction, others with varying degrees of hesitation.

As described in the earlier section of this article, the Chinese in the Indies were far from a social or political monolith and thus they never participated in a uniformed manner. For them, the first decades of the twentieth century were disturbingly uncertain times no matter how they stood socially or politically and the inevitability of the Dutch departure generated a great

deal of anxiety among them as they knew that when that happened, their position would become really uncertain. Under colonial rule they at least knew where they stood. While the Chinese to varying degrees tried to adopt a politically “neutral” stance, a fair number of them sided with the nationalists. Prominent among them was Kwee Kek Beng, the chief editor of the Chinese Malay daily and weekly *Sin Po*. Kwee wrote that Soekarno, who would later become Indonesia’s first president, visited *Sin Po* in order to seek support and indeed *Sin Po* was the first publication to publish and publicise *Indonesia Raya*, Indonesia’s national anthem (Kwartanada 2010: 26).

During this era, Chinese participation in society is not generally categorized as heroic or outstanding. Those who eschewed political involvement because of their sense of uncertainty and insecurity, quietly continued to be part of the budding nation, just like most of the rest of the population, indigenous or otherwise. They were occupied in small businesses, distribution networks, and in printing and publishing. Occasionally however, some were driven to reach out further.

One example is Liem Koen Hian (1896-1952), a journalist who founded Partai Tionghoa Indonesia in 1932. Liem, as Didi Kwartanada detailed,<sup>7</sup> openly exhorted all fellow-Chinese to commit themselves to the struggle of Indonesia’s fellow nationalists. In 1945, when the Japanese founded *Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia*, BPUPKI, an agency to look into ways of preparing for Indonesia’s independence, Liem was elected member. In one of the sessions of the agency, Liem requested that in an independent Indonesia, all Chinese automatically be given Indonesian citizenship. Later, he would also take part in Indonesia’s delegation in the Renville Agreement.<sup>8</sup>

Though relatively little known, the Chinese had a definite presence in struggle for Indonesia’s Independence. To name a few, Tan Goan Po,<sup>9</sup> a political activist from *Partai Sosialis Indonesia* and a contemporary of Sutan Sjahrir and Soemitro Djohadikoesoemo; the social welfare activist Auw Tjoei Lian;<sup>10</sup> nationalist journalist Ang Yan Goan,<sup>11</sup> an editor of *Sin Po*, which was later renamed to *Warta Bhakti*; Admiral John Lie,<sup>12</sup> recently posthumously recognized as a National Hero, and many others. They were undoubtedly rooted in the society that would welcome the birth of the Indonesian nation.

The Chinese were also well represented in the performing arts. Two prominent examples in Batavia, later Jakarta, are actors Fifi Young<sup>13</sup> and Tan

<sup>7</sup> See his presentation at the Indonesia China Friendship Association (PPIT) on 16 July 2010, at Japanese Study Centre, University of Indonesia.

<sup>8</sup> The Renville Agreement was held on 17 January 1948, on the deck of USS Renville, a United States warship, a neutral place then, docked at Tanjung Priok port, Jakarta. It was the result of a 40 day negotiation between Indonesia and the Netherlands, mediated by the Committee of Good Offices, consisting of the US, Australia and Belgium.

<sup>9</sup> See Setyautama 2008: 353.

<sup>10</sup> Setyautama 2008: 16.

<sup>11</sup> See Asvi Warman Adam 2010: 27-31; the name is also spelt Ang Yang Goan.

<sup>12</sup> Setyautama 2008: 49.

<sup>13</sup> See Setyautama 2008: 367-368.



Tjeng Bok,<sup>14</sup> whose significant contributions to Indonesian theatre and film lasted until the 1960s.

The role of the Chinese in the cultural realm has consistently been understated. Apart from their work in journalism, Chinese writers produced a large body of literature,<sup>15</sup> which is not recognized as part of Indonesian literature. Helen Pausacker (in Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker 2005: 185-208) records the important part the Chinese played in Central Java, from the turn of twentieth century up to the rise of the New Order. They continuously had been present in various forms of wayang, as *dhalang* (puppeteer), dancers, sponsors, writers, and patrons of performances, because in Central Java, wayang had become an inexorable part of their own mores and collective psyche.

The Japanese occupation of the Indies shook the already shaky ground on which the Chinese stood. Japanese and Chinese political antagonism spilled over to Southeast Asia. The Japanese contempt for the Chinese in the Indies intensified, even turning to hostility against those who had expressed animosity toward Japan, and those who displayed closeness and friendliness with the Dutch. Consequently, after a number of them had been tortured and/or executed, the others generally retreated and tried to keep a low profile, barring a small number who eventually ran foul with the occupiers.

The Chinese who sent their children to Dutch-language schools were compelled to withdraw them and, following the Japanese occupiers' "directives", sent them to Chinese-language schools. This in turn had the effect of swelling the numbers of young people developing strong Chinese self-identification. In school, they learned to take pride in the burgeoning nationalism (against the Manchu rulers) in China. The nationalist movement in the Indies (where they lived) was nudged, by design or default, to the background of their consciousness.

Although there were during these years Chinese among the Indonesian nationalists who worked tirelessly to become part of an independent Indonesia regardless of the serious risks to themselves, such as Tan Ling Djie,<sup>16</sup> Siauw Giok Tjhan,<sup>17</sup> and Go Gien Tjwan,<sup>18</sup> the general perception of the Chinese was not flattering. They were regarded as disloyal and swaying where the wind (of power) blew. In reality, this attitude was not exclusive to the Chinese, but since these images had already rooted in the general mental landscape of the non-Chinese community, the Chinese were stuck with it. They had to bear the unpleasant consequences of this perception and the part the Chinese played in society was generally dismissed.

<sup>14</sup> Setyautama 2008: 393-394.

<sup>15</sup> See Claudine Salmon 1981, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> See Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 67-131.

<sup>17</sup> Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 67-131.

<sup>18</sup> Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 67-131.

## THE EARLY YEARS OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA

Uncertain times continued for almost everybody, even for those who were directly ushering in the new republic. While conscious of being part of a newly independent state, not many, if they were honest, knew where they stood, least of all the ethnic Chinese. However, those whose commitment did not waver in the face of serious risks and uncertainty worked together with their indigenous colleagues, not always in unison, but nonetheless toward a common goal, for example, Siauw Giok Tjhan<sup>19</sup> and Oey Hay Djoen.<sup>20</sup> Siauw dedicated his whole life to building a nation he believed would be fit for all who lived in it. For his conviction, the Dutch colonial administration, the Japanese occupiers, as well as the New Order government respectively imprisoned him. Later on, the New Order government also sent Oey Hay Djoen to various prisons and he ended up being incarcerated in Buru Prison Island for fourteen years.

Injo Beng Goat<sup>21</sup> and Nio Joe Lan<sup>22</sup> also made important contributions in the field of gathering and disseminating information, as well as in political thinking and debate. In general, Injo and Nio with their *Keng Po* daily and *Star Weekly* had different views than Siauw and Oey, but they, and other thinkers and activists were all crucial in the development of a democratic frame of mind among the reading population.

The participation of the ethnic Chinese during these times reflects their diversity in terms of political stances, self-perceptions and their assessment of the political situations. In terms of political participation in the newly founded state, they can be divided loosely into two groups: the active and the passive.

The active group can further be divided into two sub-groups: those actively wanting to be part of the newly founded People's Republic of China and those wanting to be part of the newly founded Republic of Indonesia. While the former were theoretically in terms of Indonesia's multicultural society not as significant as the latter, their impact on the political arena was keenly felt, mainly because to most non-ethnic Chinese, both groups were the same. Too often, the power elite took advantage of this lack of awareness, or at best, did not deem it sufficiently important to enlighten the population.

The larger passive group consisted of people with a wide spectrum of political and cultural affinities. Many among them felt that they were trapped in the middle, and there were reasons for this sentiment. They had just experienced the very unsettling period of the Japanese occupation where they had no doubt that as Chinese the Japanese occupying power regarded them with animosity. During that time, they were indeed collectively singled out as targets of hatred, limiting not only their working space, but also the very space they lived in. This tended to drive them to voluntary "invisibility" and to a habit of looking inward. For that reason, many regarded themselves as

<sup>19</sup> See Siauw Tiong Djin 1999.

<sup>20</sup> See Dewi Anggraeni 2010b: 138-163.

<sup>21</sup> See Setyautama 2008: 94.

<sup>22</sup> Setyautama 2008: 250-251.

victims, forgetting that indigenous Indonesians and other minority groups were also treated harshly.

The legacy of Dutch colonial rule and that of the brief Japanese occupation remained in the collective psyche of the population of the new Indonesian republic. Each gesture to seek more living and working space by the ethnic Chinese tended to be perceived as “preciousness”.

To begin with, the citizenship of ethnic Chinese became a source of debate. Siauw Giok Tjhan,<sup>23</sup> then Minister for Minority Affairs, and Tan Ling Djie,<sup>24</sup> another Partai Sosialis nationalist argued for the rights of the ethnic Chinese who had lived in Indonesia since before independence to be granted Indonesian citizenship. Partai Sosialis, including its non-ethnic Chinese members supported this. However, in the new parliament this proposal met with opposition from Partai Nasional Indonesia’s Lukman Hakim, who wanted people of foreign descents to either apply for Indonesian citizenship, or automatically be registered as foreigners. In fact, the issue had been raised by Liem Koen Hian, who as a member of BPUPKI had exhorted all Chinese to support Indonesian nationalism and had requested that in an independent Indonesia, all Chinese automatically be given Indonesian citizenship. At the time, Siauw and Tan won the argument and a law was passed on 10 April 1946, which provided that ethnic Chinese who were born in Indonesia would be granted automatic Indonesian citizenship unless they opted to refuse it. Unfortunately, this was not the end of the citizenship story as a law would subsequently be passed that overrode the 1946 law. Amendments were attempted and some met with success but by the early 1960s, ambiguities remained, which rendered most ethnic Chinese unsure whether by law they were indeed Indonesian or foreign citizens. Those who wanted to take an active stance by officially rejecting Chinese citizenship were often hindered by bureaucratic rigmarole and accompanying costs.

It was not lost on the ethnic Chinese that their right to Indonesian citizenship was such an issue. They felt redundant and unwelcome in the new nation. In the meantime, China was burgeoning with nationalism and after the 1949 victory of the communist revolution, the People’s Republic of China went from strength to strength in the international arena. With numbers of Chinese Indonesian youth educated in Chinese-language schools during the Japanese occupation swelling the ranks of those who were already looking to China for self-identification, the ambiguousness of the Indonesian government only reinforced their belief that they would be better off as citizens of the new Chinese nation. Nonetheless, the ethnic Chinese who wanted to become Indonesian citizens still outnumbered those who preferred to identify themselves with China. The two camps were not exclusive to the *peranakan-totok*<sup>25</sup> dichotomy but covered both camps. However, the majority of ethnic

<sup>23</sup> See Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 101-103.

<sup>24</sup> Siauw Tiong Djin 1999: 101-103.

<sup>25</sup> The terms *peranakan* and *totok*, are used in everyday language to indicate the degree of cultural integration of ethnic Chinese persons into the community and the social class

Chinese were haunted by increasing doubts as political events kept revealing areas of uncertainty vis-à-vis the ethnic Chinese issue.

An unfortunate event involved Liem Koen Hian, who had until then consistently supported and had exhorted other ethnic Chinese to support the founding of the Indonesian nation. The event shook the faith of many of his colleagues. In August 1951, Sukiman, then Prime Minister, decided to crack down on labour protests for which he blamed the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Many ethnic Chinese members of left-leaning organizations were detained. Herbert Feith (1962: 168) estimated that 15,000 of them were detained. Among them were 16 parliament members, notably Liem Koen Hian, Siauw Giok Tjhan, and Ang Yang Goan. Siauw (1999: 170) recounts that Liem was so devastated at being arrested like a criminal by a government of the nation he had supported all along, that he asked his son to see Achmad Soebadjo, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, for help. Soebadjo had been Liem's close friend during Japanese occupation and had also received significant assistance from Liem. However Liem's son was not well received, and he went away disappointed and empty handed. Liem would later tearfully tell Siauw why he decided to reject Indonesian citizenship: he had managed to evade imprisonment by Dutch colonial administration and the Japanese occupiers, only to be arrested by the Republic of Indonesia which he had spent his life supporting!

Policies were adopted which had the effect of alienating or were at least unwelcoming to ethnic Chinese. One was the *Benteng* program. Though the stated objective of this program was to stimulate the national economy, the policy nonetheless openly discriminated against the ethnic Chinese. In the beginning of the 1950s, big Dutch companies and ethnic Chinese small to medium enterprises dominated Indonesia's economy. The indigenous small to medium enterprises, especially the former, found it hard to compete. It is therefore understandable that the government of the day, under Prime Minister Djuanda, felt it was necessary to institute a form of affirmative action policy: the *Benteng* program. However, pragmatism dictated that it would not be wise to alienate the big Dutch companies because Dutch (and American) capital was still needed for the still nascent Indonesian economy. So the broom was directed instead at ethnic Chinese enterprises. Unfortunately, the program was not sufficiently well planned and certainly badly managed and incompetently administered, and failed dismally.

The ethnic Chinese however, felt they had had a taste of what was to come, and for an indefinite time. The nationalists especially were disappointed that

---

with which they are associated. *Peranakan* Chinese usually have the body language close to indigenous persons of equivalent social class and particular to the region in which they live. *Totok* Chinese have a body language distinctly foreign to the indigenous mores of the region in which they live. In the community, their body language is associated with that of the Chinese culture they imagine. A *peranakan* also speaks Indonesian or a regional language fluently, while *totok*, if they speak Indonesian or a regional language, usually speak it with a heavy Chinese accent. Charles Coppel, in *Studying ethnic Chinese in Indonesia* (2002), elaborates on these issues in more detail on pages 106-123.

the government was prepared to accommodate the big enterprises of the ex-colonial power that they deemed were “charging” the new nation for the massive costs of wars they as the colonial power had waged on the nation itself. In the meantime, the government, they felt, had summarily dismissed what many in the Chinese communities had done to support the independence struggle.

Another policy that had a dramatic effect on the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia was the PP 10 legislation, enacted in November 1959. This legislation barred ethnic Chinese from living and operating any business in rural areas. This effectively wiped out rural ethnic Chinese communities who were indeed mostly small business operators, such as those running food stalls and managing home industries. Many of them were still unsure whether they were Indonesian or Chinese citizens. To make things worse, as soon as this legislation was passed and before they had time to reorganize their lives, many were subjected to raids by local indigenous rival business operators, as well as by opportunists who came for the purpose of looting. Consequently, when the Chinese government offered to repatriate what it regarded as its overseas subjects, ethnic Chinese fled Indonesia in droves for the People’s Republic of China. As not all of them agreed with the communist government, a smaller number who had relatives or other connections in Hong Kong, headed for the then British colony.

G. William Skinner (1963: 111-112) estimated that at 1962, of the 2.45 million Chinese in Indonesia, one million of whom were Indonesia-born, 1.25 million were definitely holding foreign citizenships. Approximately 200,000 had rejected Indonesian citizenship between 1941 and 1951. The number included 50,000 of their dependent children (those who rejected Indonesian citizenship).

The ethnic Chinese continued to participate in the society of the new nation. One of the fields in which they actively played a part was in education. In 1955, BAPERKI, an organization founded in 1954 in Jakarta largely to take care of the social and political welfare of Indonesian citizens of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia, founded schools, followed by a university in 1958. Both spread throughout the country. Unlike the THHK schools of the early 1900s, BAPERKI schools and its university used the national curriculum and emphasized Indonesian nationalism. Its university, Universitas BAPERKI, which in 1962 would be renamed Universitas Res Publica, known as URECA had non-ethnic Chinese board members and students. When President Soeharto’s New Order government later banned BAPERKI, it closed down URECA, but the organization subsequently used its facility (the buildings, furniture, even the staff) to found Trisakti University, the first private university in the country.

One unfortunate cultural side effect of the ethnic Chinese having been figuratively cornered in a regular manner was the proliferation of the culture of bribery. Ethnic Chinese were quick to learn that to get around the plethora of regulations aimed to bar them from operating their businesses smoothly they had to bribe officials. After some time, the practice became the norm, and conversely, the officials expected bribe money from ethnic Chinese. Naturally,



the practice generated a great deal of resentment on the part of indigenous business operators who, on many occasions, found themselves sidelined. The issue of bribery would later become a mark for the ethnic Chinese themselves, and another token to single them out for extortion. Unfortunately, the ethnic Chinese began to internalize this and regarded it as part of life. Mutual resentment between the ethnic Chinese and the indigenous people developed. The majority among both parties were sufficiently pragmatic, however, so this resentment resided in the subconscious most of the time, although it would occasionally come onto the surface in various forms.

The historical landmark that heralded the end of Soekarno's era was the 30 September 1965 violence, which was attributed to an attempted coup by the PKI, allegedly supported by the People's Republic of China.

### THE NEW ORDER ERA

The New Order government's policies in general had a broadly restricting effect on multiculturalism. With relentless emphases on nation building, national unity, and national harmony, the government's tentacles reached out far into individual lives in communities across the board and throughout the regions. Uniformity was vigorously encouraged in the visual and cultural senses. The different regional cultures and customs mostly faded into the background, leaving generally perceived politically innocuous aspects of the cultures, such as dances and music, to be used for political purposes – in line with unity in diversity –, and inevitably, for tourism promotion. However, the most interesting impact yet, was that on the ethnic Chinese. Being publicly blamed for sponsoring the 30 September failed coup, the People's Republic of China was promptly declared as the national enemy, together with communism. Although the government did not explicitly associate Indonesia's ethnic Chinese with China, in society the seed of resentment and suspicion about them had germinated. The continuous vilification of China and communism helped solidify in a subliminal manner the existing suspicions among the indigenous population regarding the loyalty of the ethnic Chinese among them and absurdly, these people's link to communism.

At the same time, the power elite singled out a selected few among the ethnic Chinese to whom they rented their power, making it clear that these individuals and their companies received preferential treatment and they accumulated wealth for themselves (as well as for the power renters). Although there were non-ethnic Chinese businesses who received similar preferential treatment, media and gossip circles appeared only to highlight the ethnic Chinese.

Either by design or by default, the ethnic Chinese themselves helped to perpetuate the situation. Many smaller businesses, understanding that the way to smooth operation was to emulate big businesses, which were known to be close to the power elite, proceeded to follow the same path with officials of lower ranks. This notorious practice became known as KKN, Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism, and one side of the "collusion" mostly featured

ethnic Chinese, known as *cukong*. Even the term *conglomerate* mostly referred to ethnic Chinese.

In addition to that, some businesses owned by ethnic Chinese adopted a strategy that further irritated the indigenous people. In their everyday lives, the ethnic Chinese had to contend with the increasing costs generated by the illegal "fees" they had to pay to officials of various levels and with higher prices private businesses charged them simply for being ethnic Chinese. Therefore, some companies the ethnic Chinese operated began to pay their ethnic Chinese employees higher salaries to make up for this burden. Naturally, their indigenous employees did not receive this well.

There is no doubt that ethnic Chinese businesses thus developed during the New Order era, but they were certainly deeply bound to the power elite. Not only did the ethnic Chinese lack any political power themselves, they had also become exposed and vulnerable to attacks by those who resented their "privilege". Notwithstanding their diversity, collectively they were such a big and easy target that those who could afford it built high fences and fort-like mansions to feel somewhat safe. Those who were unable to afford such costly measures placed their destiny in the hands of God and, it is worth noting that they also relied a great deal on the good faith of their indigenous neighbours (see Picture 2).



Picture 2. Chinese Market at Kelapa Gading (Photograph by the author, 2004).

At this time, the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia were almost completely depoliticized. They were so scared of taking a wrong political step that most of them shunned politics completely. They learned that they would be safe if they just toed the line of the government, assimilated all the policies designed to make them stand out as the "other", and resigned to the situation. They were spooked out of any political discussion, and they hardly ever even told their children what their political opinion was, if they had any. Most of the time, they

were not sure of what would happen to them, in the near or distant future, or anytime for that matter. Once again, their citizenship was continuously made problematic, and this time it was done in a systemic manner.

In 1978, a decree from the Minister of Justice required all ethnic Chinese to obtain a Certificate of Proof of Indonesian Citizenship, known in its Indonesian acronym, SBKRI, regardless of the citizenship documents issued by the previous government they already had. Of course, this put an additional financial burden on the financially disadvantaged ethnic Chinese, who hardly ever appeared in the consciousness radar of the population. Despite clarification in another decree in 1983 that the certificate was only compulsory for those who had made a dual citizenship statement and were seeking Indonesian citizenship, in practice before an ethnic Chinese was able to do anything essential like obtaining an ID card (which is compulsory), enrolling their children in a school, or seeking entrance in a higher education institution, they would have to produce an SBKRI. After embarrassing incidents where Indonesian athletes of Chinese ethnicity encountered problems obtaining travel documents, yet another decree was issued in 1992 stating that children of parents who already possessed a SBKRI only needed to show their parents' certificates to prove their Indonesian citizenships. Again, it was different in practice.

Anggraeni (2010b: 78-79) recounts how badminton champion Susi Susanti, before marrying her now husband Alan Budikusumah in 1996 – the year a Presidential Instruction was passed, stating that SBKRI was no longer required –, was requested to produce her own SBKRI (her father's was not sufficient). When Susi asked the reason for the request, she was explicitly told, "Because you are of Chinese descent."

Despite the success of the power elite's depolitization drive, there were high-profile ethnic Chinese such as the Soe brothers – Soe Hok Djinn (Arief Budiman) and Soe Hok Gie, whose contributions to political and intellectual thinking in Indonesia are well recognized.

It was during this time that the ethnic Chinese's image for the rest of the population was the most tainted and overwhelmingly negative and there was a very distinctive *us and them* dichotomy that separated them from indigenous citizens.

It is significant that the fall of the New Order regime in May 1998 was preceded by a week of horrific anti-Chinese riots in a number of cities, notably Jakarta, Solo and Medan, where property was destroyed and women were raped. However, although the targets of the rapes were ethnic Chinese women, the victims, it transpired, included many non-ethnic Chinese women as well.

## THE REFORM ERA

The beginning of the Reform era following the fall of New Order regime heralded a time of hope and promise for the country's ethnic Chinese. While many political leaders continued to deny that the rapes during the May 1998 riots actually occurred, it is certainly worth noting that these riots and rapes

had shocked a great number of Indonesians: political leaders, community leaders as well as ordinary people. They voiced their dismay in various forms and more importantly, Indonesian society as a whole began to make amends in the direction of the inclusion of its citizens of Chinese ethnicity.

In 1999, a Presidential Decree was passed to reinforce the 1996 Presidential Instruction, and with the press gaining increasing strength, at least in big cities, local officials would hesitate to request the certificate of ethnic Chinese seeking various documents.

In 2000, President Abdurrahman Wahid removed the ban on ethnic Chinese cultural expression, the most prominent being the resumption of the Chinese New Year public celebrations which was even welcomed by large numbers of non-ethnic Chinese people (see Picture 3). In 2003, President Megawati declared Chinese New Year a national holiday. This met with no significant opposition either.



Picture 3. Cap Go Meh after 2000 (Photograph by the author, 2004).

Following the May 1998 riots and rapes, individuals and non-governmental organizations spontaneously extended their help to the victims, notably among them Romo Sandyawan, Ester Indahyani Jusuf, Ita Nadia, Rita Kolibonso, working together with the *Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan* (Volunteer Team for Humanity), *Komnas Perempuan* (National Committee for Women), *Solidaritas Perempuan* (Solidarity for Women), *Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa* (Solidarity for Country and Nation), and various other organizations.

During President Megawati's term, one of the senior cabinet members was Kwik Kian Gie, a Dutch-educated ethnic Chinese who had never changed his name. His brief but high profile position sent out the public message that ethnic Chinese were again beginning to be more actively participating in society.

There are still challenges, as to be expected. Unwelcoming voices are still heard, a high-profile one being Jusuf Kalla who, as vice-president in 2004, was



quoted in the 12 October issue of *Sinar Harapan* newspaper as saying, "Put up with the discrimination or get burned out of your homes."

The political and social reform itself is progressing albeit on a rough and winding road, the issue of multiculturalism being only one corner in the big picture of the country's political realm. However, at this stage, in terms of ethnic Chinese, there is no indication that Indonesian society is turning back to New Order rule.

## CONCLUSION

It has been established that ethnic Chinese have been present since long before Indonesia as a nation came into existence, taking part in everyday life with and among the local people. The early arrivals were men who married local women and their descendants would later be the first generations of *peranakan* Chinese.

The contrived social structure during Dutch colonization put the ethnic Chinese apart from the indigenous local people, which not only highlighted their foreignness, but also hindered any meaningful social intercourse with the rest of the population, indigenous and others.

The indigenous population started to withdraw its acceptance when the Chinese displayed their foreignness or otherness, and especially when they started to come across as superior and condescending. Unfortunately, once this process had started it proved difficult to stop, let alone to reverse. The process came to include numerous personal, social and political elements, which were intertwined and thus impossible to separate. Just as importantly, from the non-Chinese point of view, collectively the Chinese came across merely as being "others", and voluntarily so.

With this image superimposed on any other previous images they may have had, everything the Chinese did in an attempt to show themselves in a better light unfortunately reinforced their "separateness". Those who wanted to attempt to be part of the Indonesian nation and to reach out to the indigenous majority had to double their efforts in order for the message to come through.

If the paradigm of Indonesia's multicultural society – built on the cultures of the ethnic groups of the country's own regions – remained unchanged, the Chinese as an ethnic group would always encounter problems fitting into it. They have no physical region they can call home, not all of them have been accepted into the mores of existing regions. On top of that, there is an actual country, a very significant one in every sense of the word, that bears the name China that the majority of the population, consciously or subconsciously, perceives as the home country of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Regardless of the fact that most of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese have cultural and genealogical roots in Indonesia, and hence call Indonesia home, any group with vested interests can use the above big picture to re-arouse suspicions against them and to blot out most of the good faith the ethnic Chinese have accumulated among the indigenous communities. Deep down, the ethnic Chinese are aware



of this, though at the same time they try to disregard or deny this unfortunate state of affairs.

We may be in need of a modified paradigm of multicultural Indonesia to accommodate and accept the ethnic Chinese as part of it. After all, not only have the ethnic Chinese been present in the country since before it was born as a nation, some indeed, helped in the delivery of the Indonesian nation.

#### REFERENCES

- Abeyasekere, Susan. 1987. *Jakarta; A history*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Adam, Asvi Warman. 2010. *Menguak misteri sejarah*. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas.
- Anggraeni, Dewi. 2010a. *Breaking the stereotype; Chinese Indonesian women tell their stories*. Melbourne: Indra Publishing.
- Anggraeni, Dewi. 2010b. "From China to Indonesia and to Australia", *Jurnal Kajian Wilayah* (LIPI) Vol. 1 No. 2 (February): 203-220.
- Coppel, Charles A. 2002. *Studying ethnic Chinese in Indonesia*. Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies. [Asian Studies Monograph Series 7.]
- Daradjadi. 2008. *Perang sepanjang 1740-1743 Tionghoa-Jawa lawan VOC*. Jakarta: Pelangi Nusantara.
- Feith, Herbert. 1962. *The decline of constitutional democracy in Indonesia*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Kwartanada, Didi. 2010. "Kemajemukan di Indonesia; Perspektif sejarah masyarakat Tionghoa", *CIVIS* (Leimena Institute) Vol. 02 No. 3 (December): 24-27.
- Lindsey, Tim and Helen Pausacker (eds). 2005. *Chinese Indonesians; Remembering, distorting, forgetting*. Singapore: ISEAS, Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute.
- Pan, Lynn. 1990. *Sons of the Yellow Emperor; the story of the overseas Chinese*. Great Britain: Secker and Warburg.
- Salmon, Claudine. 1981. *Literature in Malay by the Chinese of Indonesia, a Provisional Annotated Bibliography*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, études insulindiennes-archipel 3.
- Salmon, Claudine. 2010. *Sastra Indonesia awal; Kontribusi orang Tionghoa*. Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient, Forum Jakarta-Paris, Pusat Bahasa, Yayasan Nabil, Perhimpunan Indonesia Tionghoa, and Masyarakat Tjerita Silat.
- Setyautama, Sam. 2008. *Tokoh-tokoh etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia*. Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia.
- Siauw Tiong Djin. 1999. *Siauw Giok Tjhan*. Jakarta: Hasta Mitra.
- Skinner, G. William. 1963. "The Chinese minority", in: Ruth T. McVey (ed.), *Indonesia*, pp. 97-117. New Haven: HRAF Press.
- Wang, Gung-wu. 1994. *China and the Chinese overseas*. Fourth edition. Singapore: Times Academic Press. [First edition 1991.]