

POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

LEO SURYADINATA

PRIBUMI INDONESIANS, THE CHINESE MINORITY AND CHINA

**A Study of
Perceptions
and Policies**

Marshall Cavendish
Academic

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Preface to this Reissue

This book was first published in 1978 by Heinemann Asia. It was reprinted twice, once in 1986 and again in 1993. The 1993 reprint includes a postscript that examines the developments between 1976–1990, as the first edition ended in 1975. In this reissue by Marshall Cavendish, I have renamed my 1993 Postscript as “Epilogue” and added a new postscript entitled “Sino-Indonesian Relations and Ethnic Chinese: Post-Cold War Developments.” It will serve an update to the book.

Leo Suryadinata

5 August 2004

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This study is primarily based on my doctoral dissertation submitted to the American University. I am grateful to my dissertation committee: Dr. Millidge P. Walker, Dr. Abdul A. Said and Dr. Kenneth P. Landon. Appreciation is also due to the American University for awarding me the doctoral dissertation fellowship.

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None of those mentioned above is responsible for the views expressed and mistakes made in this study, for which, I alone am responsible.

Leo S.
SINGAPORE
October 1977

Explanatory Notes

The spelling of Indonesian words follows the current usage, i.e., *Ejaan yang Disempurnakan* (the Perfected Spelling as it is called in Indonesia or *Ejaan Baru*, the New Spelling, as it is called in Malaysia), except for Indonesian personal names and other Indonesian proper names which existed prior to August 1972. For these the Suwandi Spelling (1947) is retained.

English usage for plurals is followed. While the Indonesian language forms a plural by repetition (e.g., Peranakan-Peranakan), this study simply adds 's' (e.g., Peranakans).

The spelling of Chinese names follows the usual practice in Indonesia (e.g., Dutch Romanized-Hokkien or Dutch Romanized-Hakka, etc., depending on the individual's ancestral origin). The Wade-Giles system is used when the Indonesian spelling is unavailable. The same principle also applies to Chinese terms and names of associations cited in this study.

All quotations in the text, unless indicated otherwise, are actually the English translations from the original source.

A Note on the Third Edition

As major developments have taken place since 1975, there is a need to record and update these changes. Hence, the publishing of the third edition of this book.

In this edition, I have written a new postscript. This will replace that from the second edition. As more materials on this subject matter have been published, I have recorded these under Additional Bibliography (Post-1975). Also, photographs of Indonesian Chinese leaders have been included in this edition.

L. S.

11 May 1991

Singapore

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Introduction

The importance of the Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia has been recognized in recent years due partly to the increasing role played by China in the world community, and partly to the significant role played by Chinese minorities themselves in the region. Because of the complexity of the ethnic Chinese situation in Southeast Asia, the scope of this study is limited to only one country—Indonesia.

To begin with, two problems have to be solved. The first is to identify the members of the Chinese minority and the other to clarify the central terms used. Racial, linguistic and religious categories, frequently used for identifying members of a minority group, are inadequate, if not irrelevant, because many Indonesian Chinese have mixed racial backgrounds, speak no Chinese, and observe non-Chinese religions.

G. W. Skinner proposed that ‘self-identification’ be used in determining members of the Chinese minority.¹ According to his criterion, persons having Chinese surnames are assumed to be of Chinese origin. He estimated that in 1961 there were 2.3 to 2.6 million people in Indonesia who met this standard. Since 1967, the accurate identification of ethnic Chinese, through their surnames, has become increasingly difficult because a large proportion of Indonesian citizens of Chinese origin have ‘Indonesianized’ their names. This practice, coupled with the official policy of not permitting the ethnic origin of Indonesian nationals to be recorded in official documents, makes it more difficult for the researcher to know the precise number of Indonesians of Chinese extraction.²

Of course the Indonesian Chinese did not disappear after changing their names. Indigenous Indonesians are still able to differentiate the Chinese who have taken on Indonesian names from the ‘native population’, hence this ‘alien population’ in the Indonesian context is still differentiated.

Nonetheless, it is still useful to employ Skinner’s concept of ‘self-identification’, because many Indonesian Chinese, who do not want to be called ‘Chinese’, still identify themselves with the ‘Peranakans’, meaning ‘local-born non-natives’ or ‘local-born mixed blood foreigners’, who are actually Indonesian-speaking Chinese.

The term ‘Peranakan’ itself has created a lot of confusion. Most writers have used it to refer to Indonesia-born Chinese, regardless of

their cultural background, that is, whether or not one uses Indonesian (or an Indonesian dialect) as one's daily language.³ However, some writers, including Skinner and the Indonesian Chinese themselves, consider that to be born in Indonesia does not automatically make a Chinese a 'Peranakan'. It is when that person loses the command of the Chinese language and uses only Indonesian at home that the Chinese becomes a Peranakan. Otherwise, he or she is still a Totok, which originally meant 'a foreign-born pure blood foreigner'. The confusion was partly caused by the fact that, initially, all Totoks were foreign-born (in the case of the Chinese, China-born). The Chinese term *ch'iao-sheng* (born outside China) referring to Peranakans is misleading, because it does not indicate the cultural background of a person. This study uses the term 'Peranakan Chinese' in a stricter cultural sense, rather than simply to denote place of birth. It is true that generally Peranakan Chinese were Indonesia-born, but not all Indonesia-born Chinese are Peranakans. A Chinese, who is born in Indonesia, is still a Totok, if he or she is Chinese-speaking and China-oriented.

By the same token Indonesian citizenship is not an adequate guide to the complex situation, for not all Peranakans are Indonesian citizens and not all Totoks are foreigners.

To avoid confusion, a few terms frequently used in this study should be clarified. 'Indonesian' is used here to refer to the indigenous Indonesians; the Indonesian equivalents are *Indonesia asli* and *pribumi*. The application of the term 'Indonesian' to the indigenous Indonesian by no means indicates that an Indonesian citizen of Chinese descent is not a member of the Indonesian nation. The restriction of the term 'Indonesian' to the indigenous Indonesians is the most convenient way to differentiate the two ethnic groups for the purposes of discussion. Whenever appropriate, the Indonesian term '*pribumi*' is also used in this study to describe indigenous Indonesians. When Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent (usually called *Warga Negara Indonesia Keturunan Tionghoa* or WNI or *turunan*) are referred to, the term 'Chinese Indonesian' is used. The terms 'Chinese', 'ethnic Chinese', 'local Chinese' and 'Indonesian Chinese' are used interchangeably to refer to both citizen and alien Chinese, while 'Peranakan' and 'Totok' are applied to different cultural groups within the Chinese community in Indonesia.

The terms 'overseas Chinese' and *hua-ch'iao* (or its Hokkien variant, *huakiau*) are used frequently in Western and Indonesian works to refer to ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia but are misleading because they imply

that the Chinese remain nationals of China and are sojourners staying temporarily in foreign lands. In fact, the majority of the so-called overseas Chinese are either citizens or permanent residents of a Southeast Asian country. It is more appropriate therefore to call them ethnic Chinese. The two terms 'overseas Chinese' and *hua-ch'iao* are retained only when the sources cited use these terms.

Although it is difficult to establish the exact size of the Chinese population, projections can be made from the 1956 estimate.⁴ In that year there were 2.2 million Chinese in Indonesia. If we use this figure as the basis of our calculation and assume an annual growth rate of 3 per cent, there would have been approximately 3.3 million Indonesian Chinese in 1971.⁵ The 1973 estimate of the Chinese in Indonesia ranges from 3 to 5 million.⁶ A conservative figure is about 3.6 million, which constitutes only 2.8 per cent of the total population of Indonesia.

As in many countries in Southeast Asia, the Chinese in Indonesia are well-known for their function as a trading minority whose economic power is resented by the indigenous population. However, the so-called Chinese problem is not confined to the economic field but is also extended to the cultural, social and political spheres. The Chinese minority is often considered by *pribumi* leaders as a homogeneous group, which is generally not only unassimilable, but also disloyal to the Southeast Asian states where it has settled. The Chinese problem in Indonesia still continues. Periodic anti-Chinese riots have taken place, affecting the economic stability of the country. The Indonesian authorities also admit that the 'Overseas Chinese Problem' represents a major obstacle to normal Sino-Indonesian relations.

A central aspect of the Chinese problem in Indonesia is the question of national identity and how the *pribumi* leaders perceive this identity. The Chinese, confronted by the strong force of Indonesian nationalism after World War II, have been diversified in their responses. Many are still rather ambiguous in their identification with various Indonesian national symbols. Some have attempted to retain their ethnic identity while remaining as members of the new Indonesian nation. However, *pribumi* Indonesian leaders consider Indonesian identity as a complete abandonment of ethnic Chinese identity or 'Chinese cultural elements' and adoption of what they perceive as an indigenous Indonesian identity. Unaware of or disregarding the diversity of the Chinese communities in Indonesia, they perceive that the solution to the Chinese problems in Indonesia is to make Indonesian Chinese *pribumis*, which is often

interpreted as the total assimilation into an indigenous Indonesian *suku* (ethnic group) where local Chinese reside. Pluralism has been applied by *pribumi* Indonesian leaders to their fellow *pribumis*, but not to the Chinese minority.

Since *pribumi* leaders, with the possible exception of those associated with the defunct Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), perceive total absorption of local Chinese into the Indonesian population as the solution to the Chinese problem, naturally they have attempted to introduce policies which are assimilationist in nature. Nonetheless, because of the complex domestic and international situation, Indonesian government policies toward the Chinese have not always been in accordance with the declared assimilationist principles. This seems to be the result of constant conflicts between Indonesian perceptions of the Chinese minority on the one hand and the complex economic and political realities on the other. The study of *pribumi* perceptions of, and policies toward, the Chinese minority and China will therefore contribute to an understanding of the complex Chinese problems in Indonesia, Sino-Indonesian relations and difficulties in solving continuing problems.

This study attempts to analyze *pribumi* perceptions of the Chinese minority and to ask how these perceptions, modified by economic and political constraints, manifest themselves in government policies toward this 'trading minority' and China from 1949 (the year Indonesia became a sovereign state) to 1975 (the year the New Order government abolished Special National Schools for the Chinese). The study consists of three parts: Part One deals with perceptions of the Indonesian nation and the Chinese minority. Part Two examines Indonesian Chinese economy and society. Part Three discusses Indonesian government policies toward the Chinese minority and China.

Part One consists of two chapters. The first chapter is on *pribumi* perceptions of the Indonesian nation and the Chinese minority. The underlying assumption of this study is self-evident. Perceptions heavily influence, and in many cases determine, the formation of policy.⁷ Since the elite formulate policy, the study focuses on their perceptions rather than the perceptions of the masses. The Indonesian elites consist of various groups—before Indonesia's independence, they included the Islamic nationalists, the communists and the secular nationalists; after independence they included the secular nationalists, the Islamic nationalists, the socialists, the communists and the military. These groups

all had their own emphases and viewpoints in their perceptions of the Chinese minority.

Although this study covers the period from 1949 to 1975, the analysis of various Indonesian perceptions goes back to pre-1949. K. E. Boulding's observation that images (perceptions) are not shaped overnight,⁸ and that new images are seen as extensions of past images, necessitates the inclusion of the pre-World War II period. The continuity and change of those images are noted. The study does not, however, attempt to examine factors contributing to formation and changes of perceptions, because that is a separate major study in itself.

The perceptions studied here are documented from editorials, of party-affiliated newspapers as well as speeches, articles and statements of major Indonesian leaders published in newspapers, periodicals and books. Chapter One analyzes these sources, giving particular attention to the *pribumi* perceptions of the nature of the Chinese minority (for example, homogeneity, ethnic characteristics), that minority's political behaviour (including its relations with external powers), and its present and future position in Indonesian society (including the perceived solutions to the minority problems).

After examining *pribumi* perceptions of the Chinese minority, it is intended, against this background, to investigate local Chinese perceptions of themselves, of the Indonesian nation, and of their position within that nation. These constitute the major themes of Chapter Two. This chapter concentrates on the perceptions of Peranakan rather than Totok Chinese elites because its emphasis is on Java where the Peranakans form a majority. Moreover, the Totoks' position is more obvious, that is, to maintain a separate cultural identity from Indonesians, and Totoks' views often overlap with those of a segment of the Peranakans. The Peranakan perceptions examined here are those of the leaders of the following Peranakan-dominated organizations:

1. Pre-World War II: the *Sin Po* Group, the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia, the Chung Hwa Hui; and
2. Post-World War II: the Persatuan Tionghua, the Partai Demokrat Tionghoa Indonesia, the Persatuan Tenaga Indonesia, Baperki and the Lembaga Pembinaan Kesatuan Bangsa.

Perception is not the full story. There are gaps between *pribumi* perceptions of the local Chinese and the 'reality' of the local Chinese as

established by social scientists and other detached observers. Gaps also occur between Chinese self-perceptions and the above-mentioned 'reality'. Part Two (Chapters Three and Four) presents a brief account of the economic position of the Chinese and a limited socio-historical analysis of the Indonesian Chinese communities. It further investigates the heterogeneous nature of the local Chinese society. Discussion focuses on two major cultural groups: Peranakans and Totoks, together with their post-war counterparts, and particularly their leadership. This investigation aims at examining the question of whether the fragmentation of the local Chinese society has changed general Indonesian perceptions of the Chinese minority and hence altered Indonesian policies toward the group.

The study assumes that at any specific period of time, one dominant Indonesian perception most affects policy-making. For instance, the secular nationalist perception of the ethnic Chinese prevailed during the Liberal and 'Guided Democracy' periods while the military perception was dominant after the 1965 Coup. Part Three (Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight) examines how these perceptions, modified by economic and political constraints, manifested themselves in Indonesian government policies toward the local Chinese from 1949 to 1975, and their bearings on Indonesian policies toward China for the same period. Although the Republic of Indonesia was proclaimed in 1945, actual governmental control over most of the territory was not firmly established until 1949. Therefore, the examination centres on the post-1949 period except for the citizenship question which goes back to 1946.

Questions raised in Part Three include the following: What have been the Indonesian economic, nationality, cultural and educational policies toward the Chinese minority? Do they coincide with or contradict the principles derived from *pribumi* perceptions? How do Indonesian perceptions of the Chinese minority influence Indonesia's policy toward China? While examining these aspects, various responses of the local Chinese to these policies will also be discussed. The major findings are presented in the concluding section.

PART I

Perceptions of
the Indonesian
Nation and the
Chinese
Minority

