ETHNIC STUDIES

LEO SURYADINATA

CHINESE AND NATION-BUILDING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Marshall Cavendish Academic

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Preface to this Reissue Edition

This book was originally published in 1997 as "Asian Studies Monograph Series No.3" by the Singapore Society of Asian Studies, and reprinted in 1999 with a new appendix. This 2004 edition is similar to the 1999 edition, except for the inclusion of a new epilogue. The epilogue contains my later reflections on nation-building, economic development, and the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia in the era of globalization and democratization.

In the last seven years since the publication of the first edition of this book, there have been a few international conferences touching on the issue: one was in Bali (2002) with special reference to nation-building and the Chinese in Indonesia; and the other was in Singapore (2004) on ethnic relations and nation-building in Southeast Asia with special reference to the Chinese in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Both procedings have been published.[1] This book can serve as a companion reader to those publications.

Leo Suryadinata
July 2004

1 Leo Suryadinata, ed. *Chinese Indonesians: State Policy, Monoculture and Multiculture*. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004; Leo Suryadinata, ed. *Ethnic Relations and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Chinese*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004.

Acknowledgements
(for the First Edition)

All of the papers but one have been published in various journals. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the journal editors and publishers for granting me their permission to reproduce them in this volume. The precise title of the article and name of the journal are mentioned at the end of each article.

I would also like to thank Mr. Lim How Seng, the president of the Singapore Society of Asian Studies and Mr. Lim Guan Hock, the honorary secretary of the society, for their encouragement and kind assistance.

The Singapore Society of Asian Studies and I gratefully acknowledge the grant from the Shaw Foundation which has made the publication of this monograph possible.

I alone am responsible for the views expressed in these papers.

Leo Suryadinata

Preface

The seven papers compiled in this book were written over the last 15 years. Understandably, some of the papers are somewhat dated. However, I have not revised the papers for two reasons: first, many of my arguments are still relevant today; second, those articles reflected the views I held and the knowledge I had during one specific period. Nevertheless, where necessary, I have added a brief postscript to the paper to alert the reader that the situation has now changed.

Leo Suryadinata
August 1996

Changes to the 1997 Edition

This is a reprint of my book on ethnic Chinese and nation-building in Southeast Asia. However, in the first printing, there is a mistake on page 29, where two paragraphs on page 28 reappeared. This has now been corrected.

Also, in this reprint, I am enclosing a new appendix on "The Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia: An Unsolved Dilemma", as there has been a major development in Indonesia in 1998.

Leo Suryadinata
15 February 1999

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Chinese and Nation-building in Southeast Asia: An Introduction

NATION-BUILDING

Southeast Asia consists of multi-ethnic states. Due to the divisive nature of ethnicity, most of the Southeast Asian governments have decided to manage multi-ethnic societies through a strategy of national integration.[1] The objective of national integration has been to create a nation based on the existing state boundary.

Nevertheless, the definition of the nation differs from country to country. Generally speaking, a nation has been defined in terms of a sense of belonging to a community of people who share the same heritage and will share the same future.[2] It commands the "supreme loyalty" of the people who are prepared to die for it.[3] Nevertheless, there is no agreement on what makes up a nation.

TYPES OF NATION

Walker Connor defines a nation in terms of common descent but distinguishes it from an ethnic group by the degree of self-consciousness.[4] In other words, a nation in this case is still based on one ethnic group. Using this definition, there are only approximately 20 countries which can be called "nation-states", i.e. a state based on one ethnic group.[5]

However, many writers argue that an ethnic-nation or ethno-nation is only one type of nation. The majority of the states in the world consist of social-nations,[6] i.e. nations which are based on multi-ethnic groups integrated into a community with shared common values. The social-nation is therefore defined itself by social ties and culture rather than common descent. Outsiders can join it if they identify themselves with it and adopt its social characteristics.

Southeast Asian countries do not fit neatly into the above definitions of nations. They may however be grouped according to their nation-building policies. Those which aim to create "ethno-nations" include Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam, while "social-nations" in the making include Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

As a matter of fact, the name of a country more or less indicates the dominant ethnic group within the state. "Vietnam" refers to the land of the Viets; Myanmar to "Burma" or "Burmans", the dominant ethnic group in that country; "Thailand" means the land of the Thai; "Malaysia" is a Malay-dominated country; and "Brunei Darussalam" is a Malay kingdom.

However, one has to add quickly that in nation-building, the governments of the above countries may not be able to assimilate other ethnic groups and transform them into the dominant ethnic group. In some cases, the constitution guarantees that all groups in the country have religious and linguistic freedom. Nevertheless, in building a new nation, the frame of reference is always determined by and based on the dominant ethnic group. In the case of Malaysia, Malay is the national language and used in the schools throughout the country. Islam, the Malay religion, is the official religion and the national culture is based on Malay and Islam. Dueto the extent of the problem, it is a "mission impossible" to transform an ethnic nation into a multi-ethnic society. Therefore, in reality, the above states are still creating social-nations instead of ethno-nations, at least in the foreseeable future.

Unlike the so-called "ethnic-nations" in the making, the names of Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore do not represent any dominant ethnic group. Therefore, there is no dominant group reference in the process of nation-building. The characteristics of the social-nation are less certain. Nevertheless, a state attempts to seek congruence among different ethnic groups within a country. Values integration is stressed while common symbols, including a common language, are sought in order to build unity. In the case of Indonesia, for instance, the Malay language, a minority lingua franca (later known as Bahasa Indonesia), not the language of the majority Javanese, has been selected to be the national language although ethnic languages are allowed in primary education. National culture is based on multi-ethnic groups and unity in

diversity is observed. But the national literature is based on the Indonesian language. Ethnic literature is considered to be sub-national and is accorded less prestige than the national one.

It is essential, nevertheless, to note that social-nations can be sub-divided into indigenous and immigrant nations. Indonesia and the Philippines are indigenous social-nations in the making while Singapore is an immigrant social-nation. In other words, the indigenous nation uses the native ethnic groups as its frame of reference, while the immigrant social-nation uses the model of the immigrant groups themselves.

ETHNIC CHINESE AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS

It is imperative to note that both the intended "ethno-nation" and indigenous "social-nation" in Southeast Asia are based on indigenous groups. The ethnic Chinese in these nations are not on par with the indigenous minorities (also known as "homeland minorities"). While the indigenous minorities' desire to maintain their cultural distinctiveness is tolerated, the ethnic Chinese are often required to be assimilated into the indigenous-based national culture.

The only country in Southeast Asia where the ethnic Chinese do not have to be assimilated into an indigenous-based culture is the immigrant state of Singapore. In fact, the Singapore nation-to-be is based on cultural pluralism; values integration rather than ethnic integration has been stressed. Malay, a minority language, is selected as the national language but it is only symbolic in nature. The colonial language, English, has been used as the working language/administrative language of different ethnic groups in the country.

It should be pointed out that the concept of nation has always been articulated by the power elite and has been defined by the state. When we talk of "nation" in Southeast Asia, we are actually referring to the state-defined nation rather than the social science-defined nation.

National integration here, therefore, refers to the endeavour of the state in creating the state-defined nation. Generally, the ethnic Chinese are more easily integrated into a social-nation rather than ethno-nation. This does not mean, however, that the nature of an "ethno-nation" invariably comes into direct conflict with ethnic Chinese identity. In Thailand for instance, ethnic Chinese who are Buddhists and were born and brought up there have easily been integrated into Thai society. The

Thai Buddhist culture is closer to Chinese culture than the Malay culture. Therefore it is easier for the Chinese to assume a Thai identity. However, the Vietnamese culture is also close to that of the Chinese, yet the identification of the ethnic Chinese with the Viets can be a problem. Therefore, apart from cultural proximity, external factors, such as the China factor in Vietnam, is an important intervening variable for Chinese identification with an adopted nation in Southeast Asia.

CONTENTS OF THE CHAPTERS

Apart from this introductory chapter, this monograph consists of seven chapters which deal with various aspects of national integration in Southeast Asia. The first chapter examines the Chinese search for national identity in Southeast Asia over the last half century and the local governments' efforts to integrate them into the nation.

The second chapter deals with Chinese political participation in four ASEAN states, showing different patterns which are based on their different conditions.

The third chapter is a comparative discussion of Malaysia's and Indonesia's nation-building policies towards the Chinese. Differing factors in the countries have contributed to different results in nation-building.

The fourth chapter also addresses ethnic issues in the same countries, focusing on the importance of indigenism and its relevance to the ethnic Chinese. In fact, the ethnic issue and nation-building cannot be separated from economic factors. The strong economic power of the ethnic Chinese is often considered by the indigenous population as the stumbling block to creating a nation.

The fifth chapter focuses on Indonesian government policies towards indigenous minorities and ethnic Chinese in terms of nation-building. It shows that the policies differ. While the government has adopted the policy of accommodation towards indigenous minority groups, it has introduced assimilation towards the Chinese. Yet the Chinese have been able to retain a certain degree of ethnic identity because Indonesia is a country based on the state ideology of *Pancasila* which recognizes religious freedom.

Still on Indonesia, the sixth chapter examines the China factor and its impact on the Indonesian Chinese minority. It also deals with the influence of the ethnic Chinese factor on China-Indonesia diplomatic relations. This external dimension has provided an

important perspective on the national integration of the Chinese in a Southeast Asian country.

The last chapter, which surveys China's policy towards the Chinese in Southeast Asia, clearly shows that there is continuity and change over more than one century. In fact, China's policy towards "Chinese overseas" serves as an essential factor affecting the national integration of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia.

CHAPTER 2

Chinese Search for National Identity in Southeast Asia: The Last Half Century

INTRODUCTION

Following the open-door policy of China and ethnic Chinese investments in the mainland, there is now a renewed interest in the so-called "overseas Chinese". In the Western press as well as the local English press, the term "overseas Chinese" and its equivalents (such as "Chinese overseas"), once considered dated, have become fashionable again. The term has been widely used to refer to all Chinese outside China, especially the Chinese in Southeast Asia who form approximately 80–85 per cent of the "overseas Chinese" population.

In this context of evolving concern, it is interesting to ask the following questions: Can we consider these Chinese populations "overseas Chinese"? To what extent has the identity of this group changed? Do they constitute a homogeneous group? How does the Chinese government act towards them? What is the perception of the indigenous population (especially the government and the ruling elite) towards the position of the Chinese in their respective countries? Have the Chinese become Southeast Asians or are they still "strangers on the shore"? What has been the impact of a resurgent China on them? What are the future prospects for the national identity of the ethnic Chinese? These are the questions this chapter attempts to answer.

For a start, we need to say a few words about "national identity". It has something to do with nation, and nation is a cultural concept which often includes political identity as well. While the concept of a nation is vague, most argue that it has something to do with a sense of belonging to a community of people who feel that "they shared deeply significant

elements of common heritage and that they have a common destiny for the future".[1] Nevertheless, a nation usually has some characteristics which are shared by its members. Nationality, national symbols, national institutions, national language and education are often considered as the components of a nation.[2]

TABLE 2.1 Numbers and Percentages of Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia (1990)*

	Total Pop.	Ethnic Chinese	% of Chinese in Total Pop.
Brunei	260,482	40,621	16.0
Burma (Myanmar)	33,300,000	466,000	1.4
Cambodia	5,100,000	50,000**	1.0
Indonesia	182,000,000	5,460,000	3.0
Laos	3,200,000	10,000	0.4
Malaysia	17,763,000	5,261,000	29.6
Philippines	67,000,000	850,000	1.3
Singapore	3,016,400	2,252,700	77.7
Thailand	55,888,050	4,813,000	8.6
Vietnam	64,412,000	962,000	1.5
Total	431,939,932	20,165,321	4.69

* Please note that not all the figures on ethnic Chinese cited are for 1990. Some are for 1985. With the exceptions of Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore, all figures are estimates.
** According to *Lianhe Zaobao* (1 July 1994, p. 30), Phnom Penh has a population of 800,000, of which one quarter are ethnic Chinese.
(SOURCE: *Cai Beihua, Haiwai Huaqiao Huaren Fazhan Jianshi* (Shanghai: Social Sciences Institute, 1992), p. 170; Li Qing, "Jianlun Dongnanya Huaren yu Hueren Wenxue", *Wenxue Shijie*, no. 8 (1990), p. 13; Tran Khanh, *The Ethnic Chinese and Economic Development in Vietnam* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1993), pp. 26–27; Nirmal Ghosh, "Thugs will not stop Chinese-Filipino Activist", *Sunday Times*, 10 July 1994; Jiang Baiqao, *Ershi shiji Taiguo Huaqiao Renkou Cutan*, Bangkok Bank, 30 April 1992, p. 20; *Singapore Census of Population 1990* (Singapore, 1992), pp. 3–4; Population Census of Malaysia 1990, cited in Lee Kam Hing, "The Political Position of the Chinese in Post-Independence Malaysia", Paper presented at Luodi Shenggen Seminar, San Francisco, November 1991.

The Southeast Asian states are multi-ethnic and multi-religious states and most of them are new nations and hence many are still nations in the making. With the exception of Singapore, most

Southeast Asian nations are "indigenous nations", which define nation in terms of the "indigenous culture". However, within these nations, some define "nation" in both racial and cultural terms while others define it solely in cultural terms. It appears that for immigrants, it is much more difficult for them to identify themselves with Southeast Asians who define nations in both racial and cultural terms than those who define it solely in cultural terms.

Ethnic Chinese have a long history of integrating into the Southeast Asian population. Prior to the nineteenth century when the numbers of Chinese were small, it was easier for the Southeast Asian population to absorb them. However, since the second half of the nineteenth century after the large influx of the Chinese population to the region, assimilation has become more difficult. In fact, today most of the ethnic Chinese who maintain very strong Chinese characteristics are more recent migrants. The persistence or decline of the Chinese identity—especially a strong political identity with China—is the result of two factors: China's policy towards this minority, and the influence of the local Southeast Asian situation. Therefore, it is important to examine these two related factors.

OVERSEAS CHINESE

It is a well-known fact that prior to Western colonization in Southeast Asia, the Chinese had migrated to the region in small numbers; mass migration took place only after the arrival of the West. The push factor of famine and turbulence in China and the pull factor of Western economic exploitation in Southeast Asia resulted in a large influx of overseas Chinese to the region. The more recent migrants formed a new community which was often separate from the older established Chinese community. The number of new migrants (*xin ke*) was larger and more dynamic than the earlier settlers because they were new and less integrated into the local society. They still spoke Chinese (dialect or Mandarin) and considered themselves Chinese. They maintained links with China and were China-oriented—both culturally and politically. They were termed *Zhongguo qiaomin* (Chinese nationals who live overseas), or *Huoqiao* (Chinese sojourners) by the Chinese government. In fact, the term *Huaqiao* began to be used by the government of China in the mid-nineteenth century without any political connotation, but by the early twentieth century it had come to be loaded with both political and legal connotations.[3] The term is normally translated as "overseas Chinese".