

**THE
ETHNIC
CHINESE
IN
THE
ASEAN
STATES**

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL
ESSAYS**

EDITED BY
LEO SURYADINATA

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INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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National University of Singapore

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Preface

This monograph is an outgrowth of a panel discussion at the IAHA Conference held in October 1986. Before the conference, I had been invited by Dr Yong Mun Cheong, the then secretary of the Tenth IAHA Conference, to organize a panel discussion on the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. I happily took up the assignment and four scholars were asked to write bibliographical surveys of the ethnic Chinese in some ASEAN states. These four essays, however, were insufficient to form a monograph. Therefore, after the conference I invited more scholars to write on relevant topics. At the same time, I requested the four earlier writers to revise their papers for publication. A year later, I succeeded in gathering enough papers for this monograph.

The monograph begins with a general overview on the studies of the ethnic Chinese in the ASEAN states. This is followed by five country overviews. Singapore and Malaysia are combined because of the difficulties in separating these two countries prior to 1965. Brunei Darussalam is not included here as few studies have been done on the Bruneian Chinese. In addition to the five country overviews, two papers on specific topics — Chinese religions in Indonesia and Chinese education in Malaysia and Singapore — are included because of the importance of these topics and the availability of the writers.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Dr Yong Mun Cheong for inviting me to organize the panel and to the contributors of this volume for their support. I would like especially

to mention the late Professor Chinben See of the University of the Philippines for his contribution. He accepted my invitation to come to the IAHA Conference but while preparing his paper, he discovered that he was suffering from liver cancer. Being a dedicated scholar, he finished the paper but was too ill to come. He then requested Professor Theresa Carino to present it for him at the IAHA Conference. The participants and I were moved by Professor See's commitment to the study of the Philippine Chinese. This was probably his last paper because he passed away soon after the IAHA Conference. I would like to dedicate this monograph to his memory.

Leo Suryadinata

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is the study of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. His publications on the subject include *The Chinese of Pasuruan: Their Language and Identity* (1987) and "Serat Ang Dok: A Confucian Treatise in Javanese" (1987).

The late CHINBEN SEE (1932–86), an anthropologist, was an Associate Professor in the Asian Center, University of the Philippines and Research Associate with the China Studies Programme at De La Salle University, also in the Philippines. His research interests had focused on the Overseas Chinese and he published numerous articles on religion and clan associations among the Chinese in Southeast Asia and the United States.

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Introduction

Leo Suryadinata

The ASEAN Chinese and their Number

When discussing the Chinese in the ASEAN states, the first question that usually arises is: who are the Chinese? With rapid Aseanization of the Chinese in the region, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate some Chinese from the non-Chinese. However, for the purposes of the discussion here, the term “Chinese” is used to refer to those of Chinese descent, or *Huayi* [华裔], including those with mixed ancestry who are still not yet *fully* assimilated or absorbed into the indigenous communities. Some Southeast Asian Chinese have an ambiguous ethnic identity but the majority can still be identified as Chinese.

Country	Chinese	Total Population	% of Chinese
Brunei	54,150	212,840	25.4
Indonesia	4,166,000	147,000,000	2.8
Malaysia	4,214,282	12,736,637	33.1
Philippines	699,000	46,000,000	1.5
Singapore	1,856,237	2,413,945	76.9
Thailand	6,000,000	46,100,000	13.0
Total	16,939,669	255,063,422	7.5

SOURCE: Leo Suryadinata, *China and the ASEAN States, The Ethnic Chinese Connections* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), p. 6.

The precise number of Chinese in the ASEAN states is not known, because some ASEAN states no longer classify their citizens of Chinese descent as “Chinese”, although within the community, the differentiation is still made. The number of Chinese in the ASEAN states is estimated to be 17 million.

Various Terms for the ASEAN Chinese

The Chinese in the region had in the past often been called “Overseas Chinese”, or *Huaqiao* [华侨]. Strictly speaking, the term “Overseas Chinese” refers to those who are Chinese nationals under the old Chinese Nationality Law. However, after 1955, and especially after the 1980 Chinese Nationality Law, local citizens of Chinese descent should no longer be called “Overseas Chinese”.

At the present time there are two kinds of Chinese in Southeast Asia in general, and in the ASEAN states in particular. One group consists of the Chinese (or Taiwanese) nationals, and the other comprises local citizens. The latter group has grown rapidly while the former has continued to decrease. To refer to these Chinese outside China, the terms *Huaren* [华人] and *Huazu* [华族] have been increasingly used. This is to differentiate them from those in China. The term *Huaren*, which is more neutral than *Huaqiao*, does not indicate the national status of the Southeast Asian Chinese. The English equivalent for it is “ethnic Chinese”.

Some still prefer to use the term “Chinese” to refer to those of Chinese descent in Southeast Asia because to them the term “ethnic Chinese” gives an image of a high degree of Chineseness while the term “Chinese” does not. I prefer the term “ethnic Chinese” because it clearly differentiates the Chinese in China from those in the region. The term also does not indicate to me the degree of Chineseness. Although some ethnic Chinese are more Chinese than others, all share common denominators: they are of Chinese descent living outside China and have varying degrees of the ethnic marker.

However, it should be pointed out that the ethnic Chinese in each of the ASEAN states have their own characteristics. When referring to specific groups, certain terms are used. Among those who still speak Chinese, distinctive terms are used for the citizens of the different ASEAN states — for example, *Xinhua* [新华] (Singapore Chinese), *Ma-hua* [马华] (Malaysian Chinese), *Taihua* [泰华] (Thai Chinese), *Feihua* [菲华] (Philippine Chinese), and *Yinhua* [印华] (Indonesian Chinese).

Among these Chinese-speaking Chinese, they can be further divided into the various dialect groups — for instance, Hokkien, Teochew, Hakka, Cantonese, Hainanese.

Among those who no longer speak Chinese, local terms are often used to refer to themselves — for example, *peranakan* Chinese (locally born and Indonesian-speaking Chinese), *Baba* (locally born and Malay-speaking Chinese), Chinese mestizo (mixed-blood Chinese Filipino), and so forth. More commonly, however, these Chinese simply call themselves the Chinese of their respective countries: Indonesian Chinese, Malaysian Chinese, Singapore Chinese, Thai Chinese, Philippine Chinese and Bruneian Chinese. Many also prefer to emphasize their nationality rather than their ethnicity. They call themselves Chinese Indonesian, Chinese Malaysian, Chinese Singaporean, Sino-Thai, Chinese Filipino and Chinese Bruneian. The diversity of and disagreement on the use of these terms show the complexity of the problem and also the relatively new process of nation-building in the Southeast Asian countries.

No matter what they are called, as has been mentioned earlier, they still have common denominators: they are of Chinese descent and have varying degrees of Chineseness (or the ethnic Chinese marker). However, because of the looseness of the term “ethnic Chinese”, in this volume various terms are used to refer to them, depending on the context and the writer’s preference.

1

*The Ethnic Chinese in the ASEAN States*¹

Leo Suryadinata

This chapter attempts to examine briefly the study of the Nanyang Chinese (ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia) with special reference to the ASEAN states.² The chapter is divided into two parts: Part I touches on pre-war studies while Part II deals with post-war studies. Each part is further divided into Western writers and local (mainly Chinese) writers. In Part II, two additional categories have been introduced: regional studies and country studies.

I. Pre-War Studies

The study of the Nanyang Chinese began long before World War II. The first group of writers consisted of Westerners who were either sinologists, colonial officials or missionaries. They were later followed by local Chinese writers. The Chinese scholars in China began to be attracted to the study of the Nanyang Chinese only after the establishment of the Republic of China; apparently, it was only then that they realized the importance of the "Overseas Chinese" to China.

Works on the Nanyang Chinese during the pre-war period were either general history or specific studies on particular countries. Some

were very detailed and therefore informative. Comprehensive studies on the Nanyang Chinese in general, however, were not conducted, probably because of the lack of information on them and the under-developed status of the social sciences.

The following paragraphs describe a few pre-war writers who had produced interesting works.

Western Writers

The Chinese Abroad was written by H.F. MacNair (1891–1947), a Professor of History and Government in St. John's University in Shanghai. The book, which was first published in 1924, deals with the position and protection of the Chinese overseas, including those in Southeast Asia. It was the first systematic attempt by a Western scholar to examine the problem of the Chinese from an international relations' point of view.

Among the pre-war Western writers who wrote on Malaya, J.D. Vaughan and W.L. Wynne are worth mentioning. Mr Vaughan was a British civil servant who was first stationed in Penang and later in Singapore. In 1879 he published a book entitled *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements*. Like many other early writers who wrote about the Chinese in the region, Mr Vaughan wrongly assumed that they were a homogeneous group. Nevertheless, it is a valuable study on the subject. Mr Wynne, a senior police officer, was another civil servant who presented an informative study. His book, entitled *Triad and Tabut*, is a survey of the origins and diffusion of Chinese and Islamic secret societies in the Malay peninsula from 1800 to 1935. Published by the government for official use in 1941, it has become a classic on the subject.

J.J.M. de Groot, a Dutch sinologist and civil servant, who did a six-volume study on the religious systems in China, also produced a scholarly work in 1870 on the Chinese secret societies in West Kalimantan. Other works were published only in the twentieth century. B. Hoetink, for instance, wrote two important biographies concerning So Bing Kong, the first Chinese *Kapitein*, and Nie Hoe Kong, the Chinese *Kapitein* who was involved in the 1740 rebellion. These are valuable for their information on the Chinese leadership during the reign of the Dutch East Indies Company. J.L. Vleming, the head of the Indies Revenue Auditing Service, edited an informative book on Chinese economic activities in the Indies in the early 1920s. P.H. Fromberg, a

leading Dutch lawyer who was familiar with the *peranakan* Chinese, had his collection of essays published in 1926. The book is still an important source for studying *peranakan* customary law and politics.

In Thailand, a missionary who later became an expert on South-east Asia, Dr Kenneth Landon, published in 1941 the only major book on the Chinese in Thailand. His wife was the writer of the well-known novel, *Anna and the King of Siam*.

Chinese Writers

Chinese writers began writing on the Overseas Chinese in the 1920s when Jinan University in Shanghai established a department concentrating on Nanyang studies. Among the prominent Chinese writers who worked on the Nanyang Chinese, Li Qangfu, Liu Shimu and Chen Da deserve special attention.

Li Qangfu was with Jinan University. His work, *Huaqiao* (Overseas Chinese), was published in 1929; his other book, *Nanyang Huaqiao gai-kuang* (General Conditions of the Chinese in Southeast Asia), appeared in 1930. These were the two early works by a Chinese scholar specializing in the Chinese abroad. As with most of the pioneering works, they are very general. Liu Shimu, an Overseas Chinese from Sumatra, was also associated with Jinan University. In 1929 he edited the book *Huaqiao jiaoyu lun wenji* (Symposium on Overseas Chinese Education) which is a useful reference source. In 1935 he published *Huaqiao Gaiguan*, a general account of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. The best study by pre-war Chinese scholars on the Overseas Chinese is probably Professor Chen Da's *Nanyang Huaqiao yu Min-Yue shehui* (The Nanyang Chinese and the Fujian and Guangdong Society), published in 1939. Professor Chen, who taught at Tsing-hua University and was at one time a Fellow at the University of Columbia, presented his work in two parts. Part One deals with the nature of the Overseas Chinese society, and Part Two is on immigration as a factor of social change.

Prominent among the local Chinese writers who worked on the Chinese in Southeast Asia, were Song Ong Siang and Liu Huanran. Song was a British-trained lawyer who published a source-book entitled *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* in 1923. The value of this book does not lie in its analysis (there is hardly any) but in its rich information. Liu Huanran, a local Chinese newspaper reporter, published *Hoshu Dong Yindu gailan* (1939), which contained detailed biographies of prominent Chinese in the Dutch East Indies.

Apart from the two Chinese authors in Singapore, there were also a number of *peranakan* (local born and Indonesian speaking) Chinese writers in the Dutch East Indies who studied their own community. Liem Thian Joe, a local historian, wrote *Riwajat Semarang* (History of Semarang), recording historical events from 1416 to 1931 relating to the Chinese in the Indies generally, and in Semarang particularly. Nio Joe Lan, a journalist, compiled *Riwajat Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan 40 Tahun* (History of the Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan in 40 years [1900–1939]). It is a well-documented history of the first pan-Chinese organization in Java. The best works by pre-war *peranakan* Chinese writers are by Kwee Tek Hoay, a leading writer, publisher, and religious leader as well as an active participant in the modern Chinese movement. Kwee published a number of long articles in Indonesian on the education and social movement of the Indonesian Chinese. However, as they were not published in book form, they are rather difficult to trace now. Nevertheless, his important work on pre-war Chinese education was serialized in *Panorama*. It gives an account of the educational interests among the Indonesian Chinese in terms of their different cultural and social backgrounds. His other major work on the origins of the modern Chinese movement in Java, also serialized in *Moestika Romans*, deals with the role of the pan-Chinese organization, the Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK), and covers reforms in Chinese customs, religion and education. In fact, it not only examines those reforms but also explains their causal relationships. The work has been translated into English by Professor Lea E. Williams. In 1943, a *peranakan* sociologist, Dr Ong Eng Die, whose basic training was in economics, published his dissertation in Dutch on the Chinese of the Dutch East Indies. Unfortunately, this study is not superior to those of his less-educated counterparts. It covers numerous aspects of the Chinese society in the Indies, ranging from politics, economics, and demography to education and culture. As a result, it is rather superficial. Little attention has been paid to important sociological matters such as social stratification and group relations.

II. Post-War Studies

There have been numerous studies conducted on the Chinese in South-east Asia since World War II. For this reason, post-war studies are examined here in greater detail. However, because of the large number of these studies, it is impossible to give a comprehensive coverage here. One has to be highly selective in dealing with these works.

The reasons for the sudden increase in the study of the Nanyang Chinese in the fifties are many. One important contributing factor was that Western scholars were eager to know more about the People's Republic of China. Since they were unable to conduct field-work in China after the communists took over, they resorted to studying the Overseas Chinese. Perhaps in those days they believed that this would give them some notion about the Chinese in China. Apart from this, some might have thought that the Chinese in Southeast Asia, being economically powerful, might be used by the communist government to promote its interests and hence should be studied to minimize Western political risks. However, there were also Western scholars who wanted to study the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia in their own right. They wanted to know more about this ethnic community in post-war Southeast Asia. Gradually, non-Western scholars also followed in the steps of their Western colleagues.

Not surprisingly, the post-World War II period saw significant development in the study of the Nanyang Chinese in terms of both quantity and quality. It was during this period that many generalizations about the Chinese in Southeast Asia came into being. Social scientists, including historians, began to create frameworks and analytical models in order to understand the Nanyang Chinese communities. Some of these works are macro studies, in the sense that they cover the whole of Southeast Asia; others are micro studies concentrating on individual countries or a part of a country. The presentation here will be divided into two sections: studies on the whole region and those on individual countries. In the first section, the author has arbitrarily selected the works of eight scholars whom he thinks are interesting. These works deal with the general history of the Chinese in the region, problems of studying the ethnic Chinese and their identities, and ethnic and international relations. The authors are Victor Purcell, C.P. FitzGerald, Linda Lim and Peter Gosling, Lea E. Williams, Wang Gungwu, Stephen Fitzgerald, and W.F. Wertheim.

On the Region

The discussion first focuses on Dr Purcell and Professor C.P. FitzGerald who had similar views.

Dr Purcell was the first Western writer to contribute a major work on the Chinese in Southeast Asia. His monumental work, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, which first appeared in 1951, consists of more than

800 pages, covering the whole region: Burma, Siam, Indochina, Malaya (now Peninsular Malaysia), British Borneo (now Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah), Indonesia, and the Philippines. His approach is historical and his main objective in writing the book was to provide the people with "some knowledge of the nature, the development and the aspirations of the overseas Chinese" (p. 672). Did Dr Purcell achieve his aim?

Before answering the question, it should be mentioned that Dr Purcell was a British colonial officer who was initially interested in China. His first study on Chinese education in China was published in 1936. He was later stationed in Malaya where he published his book, *The Chinese in Malaya*, in 1948. Therefore, his expertise was really on China and the Malayan Chinese. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that his work on the Chinese in Southeast Asia is of mixed quality. The section on Malaya is superior to the other sections.

Dr Purcell's familiarity with the Malayan Chinese misled him in his judgement of the Chinese community in other parts of Southeast Asia. He believed that all the Chinese were alike. Thus, the Malayan Chinese were used as the model to illustrate the whole Chinese community in the Southeast Asian region. In his words:

the Chinese of Southeast Asia are, in essence, the same people over the entire area, in spite of a considerable diversity in occupation and dialect, and variation in purity of blood (p. 656). Not only have they marked physical characteristics in common; their customs, their religion, their attitude of mind have an almost uncanny similarity (p. 657).

Embarking from this false premise and without conducting intensive research in other areas besides Malaya, Dr Purcell failed to throw light on the problems faced by non-Malayan Overseas Chinese. In the section on the Indonesian Chinese, for instance, he did not touch on the divisions within the Chinese community, the problem of integration and assimilation, and inter- and intra-group relationships.

Obviously, there are similarities among the Chinese in Southeast Asia, but certainly, there are also differences because of their diversified backgrounds and local conditions. These differences are equally important in our attempt to understand the Chinese in the region. However, Professor C.P. FitzGerald's book, *The Third China*, which was published fourteen years after that of Dr Purcell, committed the same error. Professor FitzGerald is a historian specializing on mainland China. He seems to believe that the Chinese in Southeast Asia are a