Understanding the Ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia

ED SURYADINATA

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LEO SURYADINATA



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
Singapore

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Preface

This book is a collection of my selected essays published between 1987 and 2005. To preserve their originality, all but one of the essays are published without revisions. The only revised essay is Chapter 10 "Selected Publications on Partially Assimilated Chinese in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore 1980–2006", which initially covered publications up to 1996. It has now been extended to cover those up to 2006.

The essays, 15 in total, cover aspects of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, ranging from ethnic politics, economy, ethnic and national identity, to China-ethnic Chinese relations. A significant number focus on ethnic Chinese in Indonesia but they may have a wider regional implication.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies for publishing these essays in a book so that those who would like to read my essays, which are published in various books and journals, can find them in one easy location.

Leo Suryadinata 8 October 2006

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- 5. "China's Citizenship Law and the Chinese in Southeast Asia", in *Law and the Chinese in Southeast Asia*, edited by M. Barry Hooker (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), pp. 169–184.
- 6. "Peranakan Chinese Identities in Singapore and Malaysia: A Re-examination", in *Ethnic Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia*, edited by Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2002), pp. 69–84.
- 7. "Ethnic and National Identities of the Chinese in Indonesia: A Re-examination", *Asian Culture*, no. 26 (June 2002) pp. 12–25.
- 8. "The Contribution of Indonesian Chinese to the Development of the Indonesian Press, Language and Literature", in *Chinese Studies of the Malay World: A Comparative Approach*, edited by Ding

- Choo Ming and Ooi Kee Beng (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), pp. 82–96).
- 9. "Ethnic Chinese and Nation Building: Concluding Remarks", in Ethnic Relations and Nation-Building in Southeast Asia: The Case of the Ethnic Chinese, edited by Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), pp. 230–240.
- 10. "Recent Publications on Partially Assimilated Chinese in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore: 1980-1996", *Asian Research Trends: A Humanities and Social Review*, no. 7 (1997), pp. 25–37.
- 11. "The 1911 Chinese Revolution and the Chinese in Java: A Preliminary Study", in *The 1911 Revolution: The Chinese in British and Dutch Southeast Asia*, edited by Lee Lai-To (Singapore: Heinemann Asia, 1987), pp. 108–124.
- 12. "The State and Chinese Minority in Indonesia", in Chinese Adaptation and Diversity: Essays on Society and Literature in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1994), pp. 77-100.
- 13. "Chinese Politics in Post-Suharto's Indonesia: Beyond the Ethnic Approach?", *Asian Survey*, Vol. XLI, No. 3 (May/June 2001), pp. 502-524.
- 14. "Buddhism and Confucianism in Contemporary Indonesia: Recent Development", in *Chinese Indonesia: Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting*, edited by Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), pp. 77-94
- 15. "How Many Ethnic Chinese Are in Indonesia?", Asian Culture (June 2004), pp. 63–74.
- 16. Book review: *Jingwai huaren guoji wenti taolunji* [The Citizenship Problem of Chinese Overseas: A Collection of Documents and Articles], edited by Zhou Nanjing (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Press for Social Science Ltd, 2005), pp. 286–288.

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Introduction

VARIOUS TERMS FOR THE CHINESE OUTSIDE CHINA

There have been a significant number of Chinese outside China. These Chinese were called "Overseas Chinese" in the past. This English term was often regarded as an English rendering of *huaqiao* 华侨, a Chinese term which means Chinese citizens (nationals) who temporarily live overseas. However, with a changing international situation and an increase in the number of "Overseas Chinese" who have adopted local citizenship and continued to live in their adopted land, the term "Overseas Chinese" is no longer suitable to refer to the majority of the Chinese population outside China.

However, it is suggested that "Overseas Chinese" can be given a new meaning: the Chinese people who live outside China, without referring to their citizenship. If this new meaning is accepted, the term can still be used. But the English term "Overseas Chinese" has been too closely associated with the Chinese term *huaqiao*, and is therefore very difficult for those Chinese who have the historical memory to accept. In addition, "Overseas Chinese" also means that these Chinese are overseas; they are not yet at home. For the majority of Southeast Asian Chinese, Southeast Asia is their home; when they visit China, and want to go home, they refer to their Southeast Asian home rather than China.

Professor Wang Gungwu has suggested a term "Chinese overseas" (with a lowercase "o") to replace the old term "Overseas Chinese" in order to dispel the political/citizenship notion. This is a better term than "Overseas Chinese", but it still reflects a China-centric concept.

In China itself, the term *huaqiao* is still used, but only to refer to those Chinese who are nationals/citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Another term *huaren*, an English equivalent of "ethnic Chinese" was used recently to refer to those Chinese outside China who are not China's citizens. When referring to China's policy towards the Chinese outside China, Mainland Chinese often use two terms together "huaqiao huaren 华侨华人": those Chinese with PRC citizenship and those Chinese with foreign citizenship. There is also a third term, huayi 华裔, or people of Chinese descent, which is seldom used in the Mainland

Chinese literature unless referring to the Chinese outside China who have been indigenized or are of mixed descent.

In fact, the two Chinese terms, *huaren* and *huayi*, are creations of Southeast Asian Chinese. But the use of the terms often differ in meaning when used by Mainland Chinese scholars. *Huaren* is used to refer to all Chinese who live outside China (excluding China's officials), regardless of their citizenship; while *huayi* is used to refer to Chinese who are non-citizens of either the PRC or Taiwan.

I am personally inclined to accept the Southeast Asian usage of the Chinese terms. *Huaqiao* refers to Chinese nationals living overseas, *huaren* refers to ethnic Chinese who live outside China without any connotation of citizenship, and *huayi* means a Chinese who is non-China citizen. Can the term *huaren* be used to refer to the Chinese in Mainland China? It seems not. Mainland Chinese refer to themselves in Mandarin as ethnic Han 汉, ethnic Man 满, ethnic Meng 蒙, ethnic Hui 回 and ethnic Zhang 藏, or one of the fifty-one other ethnic groups. (The most frequently used term in Mainland China to refer to non-Han minority groups is "minority nationalities" 少数民族). None of them refer to themselves as *huaren*. These fifty-six ethnic groups form a *Zhonghua Minzu* 中华民族 (Zhonghua Nation). They are also known as *Zhongguo ren* 中国人(Man of the "Middle State").

What are the correct English terms for *huaqiao*, *huaren* and *huayi*? In my view, they are equivalent to: Overseas Chinese, ethnic Chinese and foreigners of Chinese descent. It seems that it is generally accepted that *huaqiao* in English is "Overseas Chinese", but what about *huaren*? Can we use an English term "ethnic Chinese"? Will this be confused with the Chinese people in China? Is not the English term for China's Chinese simply "Chinese"?

Nevertheless, I am fully aware that the nationality/citizenship concept among the Chinese was only popularized in the twentieth century, and foreign nationality for the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia was only introduced about half a century ago. Understandably, many Chinese and non-Chinese have difficulty in changing their mindset.

In the era of nation-building in Southeast Asia in the last half century, Southeast Asian Chinese began to feel the importance of using an appropriate term. Nevertheless, with new Chinese migrants and globalization, these new terms may again encounter some challenges. However, I prefer to continue to use to term ethnic Chinese when referring to the Chinese outside China.

THE STUDY OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN CHINESE

About 80 per cent of ethnic Chinese live in Southeast Asia. The study of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia has many dimensions. It has both domestic and international aspects, and often, there is interaction between external and internal environments. It is therefore insufficient to view ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia from merely the external or domestic dimension. This is especially true in the era of globalization.

Nevertheless, one is bound to have one emphasis or another in his/her study of this ethnic group as it depends on the chosen topic. There is no doubt that the domestic dimension is more important if one wants to examine ethnic politics and culture of a Chinese minority in a Southeast Asian country. Without an in-depth understanding of local politics and culture of the country concerned, one cannot appreciate Southeast Asian Chinese politics and culture properly. Understandably, the study's emphasis will be more on the domestic scene rather than the external environment. Nevertheless, external factors will play a role, which cannot be ignored. When dealing with the economic dimension of the ethnic Chinese, however, increasingly the external factors, including the rise of China, have become equally important, if not more important, especially when dealing with large ethnic Chinese businesses.

Due to the multi-dimensional aspect of ethnic Chinese studies, it is essential that scholars are equipped with not only academic disciplines but also multi-lingual skills. Therefore it is a great challenge to venture into the study of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. Also, a scholar is often the product of his times and environment; his/her perspectives often reflect his/her times. Even the selection of research topics is also related to one's personal interest and experience.

I am very fortunate to have been able to research on the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia over a long period of time, trying to adjust my perspectives as time passes, although I may not always be successful. Nevertheless, I often *revisit* some of the topics that I have dealt with in view of latest developments. By doing this, I believe I will be able to

better understand the problem. Due to my multi-disciplinary training, I have also been aware of the external and domestic dimensions in my writings. Nonetheless, to keep a balance of these two dimensions is easier said than done.

I have selected fifteen articles that I have published between 1987 and 2005. They are not my best articles, but rather, they were originally scattered in different journals and monographs published over eighteen years. All the articles (except one) have not been included in my self-authored book. These articles can be grouped into the three clusters: ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and China, cultural adaptation and identity, and ethnic Chinese politics and local culture. Earlier articles may be somewhat dated and hence need to be read in the context of the time. I have not revised the articles because the reader should read what I have written in those days. Those essays may reveal the weaknesses and strengths of my judgement as reflected in the writings.

ETHNIC CHINESE AND CHINA: MIGRATION, ETHNIC CONFLICT AND NATIONALITY

The first cluster of articles is on the "Chinese problem" in some Southeast Asian countries, Chinese migration, Chinese economic success, anti-Chinese movements, and China's nationality law vis-àvis ethnic Chinese in the region. During the Cold War, ethnic Chinese were considered a problem by many Southeast Asian governments. They were often seen as a homogeneous group who could not be integrated, let alone assimilated into local society. They were perceived as a group which served the interest of the People's Republic of China and were "disloyal" to their adopted countries. Moreover, they were perceived as being rich and dominating the local economy. Not surprisingly, many Southeast Asian non-communist governments adopted various methods in order to solve what they perceived as the "Chinese problem".

The first article in the book, published in 1987, attempts to analyse the so-called Chinese problem, which had many dimensions. It also discusses the prospects of solving the problem. The Cold War ideology appeared to have taken command, and the "Chinese problem" is seen only from one perspective. The end of the Cold War led the government to re-examine the so-called Chinese problem without the Cold War

ideology. Nevertheless, the strong economic position of the ethnic Chinese minority in Southeast Asia is still often seen as a problem.

The second article, which was written before the occurrence of the Asian economic crisis in 1997 and slightly revised soon after the crisis, addresses the issue of the ethnic Chinese economic position. It attempts to search for factors which contributed to ethnic Chinese economic success in Southeast Asia. Five major factors, including Confucianism, were examined but no single factor could explain the success of the ethnic Chinese economic élite.

The third article was published in 2004. It deals with ethnic Chinese migration to Southeast Asia and their adaptation. The fourth article, originally written in 2004, examines the complex causes of the anti-Chinese movements/riots in Southeast Asia from past to present, including cultural and economic factors. The article also looks into the possible solutions to ethnic conflict.

The fifth article, written in the early 2002, discusses the issue of China's citizenship law and its application to the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. It traces the changing citizenship law of China from using the *jus sanguinis* principle to *jus soli* principle. The change of the law to a certain extent relieves the tension between China and her Southeast Asian neighbours. Nevertheless, with globalization and possible (although not yet probable) changing citizenship law of China towards the Chinese overseas, tension between China and some Southeast Asian countries may resurface.

CHINESE CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND VARIOUS IDENTITIES

The second cluster of articles is on the cultural adaptation of some Chinese and their "new" identity. The sixth article addresses the well-established ethnic Chinese communities in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, often known as Peranakan (or Baba). These Chinese are partially "assimilated" yet they were not absorbed into the indigenous communities. It is of interest to note that the meanings of the terms varied from period to period. The term also refers to a spectrum of partially "assimilated" Chinese with varying degrees of local culture. The seventh article also investigates the complexity of Chinese Indonesian ethnic and national identities over a longer period of time.

The eighth article discusses their contribution to the development of local culture, especially literature and the press, and the ninth article examines the current ethnic Chinese position and nation-building process in Southeast Asia, showing that ethnic sentiments are still strong and nation-building has not been completed. The final article in this cluster is a bibliography on this partially "assimilated" Chinese in the Malay archipelagos.

EXTERNAL ACTOR, STATE AND ETHNIC CHINESE POLITICS: INDONESIAN CASE STUDIES

The third cluster of articles in this collection consists of essays which examine politics of ethnic Chinese with special reference to Indonesia. The eleventh article examines the impact of international politics on the ethnic Chinese in Java at the turn of the twentieth century. Again, the article shows the diversity of the local Chinese and the importance of external events on the position of Southeast Asia's Chinese. The twelfth article addresses the issue of the role of the Indonesian state and the shaping of Chinese ethnic politics over a long period of time. The thirteenth article maintains that despite the revival of ethnic Chinese politics in the era of globalization, ethnic Chinese political parties in Indonesia were weak, as the Chinese favoured indigenousdominated parties. By the 2004 general election, in fact, no ethnic Chinese political parties were able to survive. Nevertheless, ethnic socio-cultural organizations emerged representing the rise of new ethnic consciousness. The last article discusses the development of Buddhism and Confucianism among Chinese Indonesians before and after the fall of an authoritarian government, indicating how the Chinese minority in Indonesia using "ethnic religion" to preserve their "Chinese identity".

The Appendix in this book discusses the number of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. In fact it reflects the difficulty in ascertaining the number of Chinese in some Southeast Asian countries due to two reasons: their official figures are not available and it is difficult to define who are the ethnic Chinese. Researchers have often had to use outdated information and estimates, if not guess-work, when they discuss ethnic Chinese communities. Nevertheless, with globalization and democratization, more reliable figures may be obtained.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The articles in this book show that the study of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia is complex. Focussing only on the domestic situation of a Southeast Asian country is not sufficient for a comprehensive understanding. Regional and even international perspectives should be adopted. China has always been a factor whenever the ethnic Chinese situation is discussed, and the Cold War had had a tremendous impact on the study of this ethnic group. Even after the end of the Cold War, its impact did not immediately disappear.

With the end of the Cold War and the rise of globalization, the international and regional impact is felt tremendously by both the states and the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. Chinese ethnicity re-emerges and ethnic identity becomes stronger. Nevertheless, the full impact of the rise of China has not been fully revealed. There is no doubt that nation-building in Southeast Asia has encountered greater challenges but local nationalism does not vanish. It is also worth pointing out that the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, to a certain extent, may be resinicized but they will never become a homogeneous group. The ethnic Chinese remain as heterogeneous groups which should be taken into consideration when studying the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and beyond.