

AN EQUINOX CLASSIC INDONESIA BOOK



THE NATIONAL STATUS
OF THE
CHINESE IN INDONESIA
1900-1958

DONALD E.
WILLMOTT

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The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia 1900-1958

by Donald E. Willmott

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PREFACE

In 1956, approximately a year after Professor Willmott's return from Indonesia, the Modern Indonesia Project published as an Interim Report his study of the national status of the Chinese in Indonesia. Subsequently, following helpful comments by Indonesian and Western scholars who had read this study and after having accumulated a considerable amount of additional data, Dr. Willmott undertook to refine and augment his earlier study, while also carrying it forward chronologically through 1958. The present monograph represents, then, a substantial expansion of his earlier Interim Report with considerable new data relating not only to the period 1955-1958 but also to the years 1900-1955.

Dr. Willmott is particularly well qualified to undertake this study. He was born in China, a British subject, in 1925, living there until 1946 when he came to the United States to enroll in Oberlin College, from which he received his B.A. in 1950. Prior to his stay in Indonesia, he spent a year of resident graduate study at the University of Michigan and three at Cornell University, the emphasis of his work being in sociology and social psychology. He arrived in Indonesia with a command of the Indonesian and Chinese languages and a substantial knowledge of Indonesian and Chinese culture. His sixteen months of field work in Indonesia (during 1954-1955) were followed by the investigation of relevant material lodged in the Cornell University Library.

Dr. Willmott received his Ph.D. degree in sociology from Cornell University in 1958. His major study, based upon his field research in Indonesia, *The Chinese of Semarang*, was published by Cornell University Press in 1960. Currently he is Research Associate at the Center for Community Studies at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada.

Dr. Willmott's studies are the first of several carried out by members of the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project relating to the Chinese minority in Indonesia. Others are due to be published during the course of the coming year.

Ithaca, New York
September 15, 1961

George McT. Kahin
Director

INTRODUCTION

During the period from May, 1954, to August, 1955, the writer was engaged in sociological research on Chinese community life in Central Java. He was interested in cultural change and assimilation in this minority group. It was apparent that an understanding of assimilation would require a prior knowledge of the national status and the national orientations of the Chinese, and materials were gathered with this in mind. In writing up this report, however, the author was aware that historians, economists, and other social scientists may also be interested in aspects of this problem. He has therefore endeavored to provide as broad a treatment of the subject as his abilities and sources permit.

With fellowships from the American and the Canadian Social Science Research Councils, the writer went to Indonesia to gather materials for a doctoral dissertation. The present report, however, was made possible by the financial support of the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, during both the field research and the write-up periods.

Much of the present report is based on information and impressions gained from interviews and observations made by the writer during his stay in Indonesia. The majority of the material, however, comes from books, documents, and periodicals, mostly in the Indonesian language. Unfortunately, materials originating in China itself were not available to the author. English and Dutch as well as Indonesian sources were used in the preparation of chapters covering the historical background, but the contemporary materials were mostly Indonesian. As may be expected in a field so highly charged with emotion as that of minority problems, all reports and materials are subject to serious error arising out of the particular biases of the sources. Statistics are no exception in this respect. Although the writer has attempted to evaluate and cross-check materials

wherever possible, most items of information were found in only one or two sources. Therefore, many errors have no doubt been included.

These various deficiencies and shortcomings should be kept in mind while reading this report. In cases where the writer had reason to doubt the complete reliability of a statement, he has used such warning expressions as "probably" and "it would seem that". But since it would be tedious to put every statement of fact in tentative form, the reader is invited to be his own skeptic and judge throughout.

The revised edition of this report attempts to cover developments only up to the summer of 1958 because materials were not available for the subsequent period. It should perhaps be mentioned here that two significant events have occurred in the interim. On May 14, 1959, the Government announced that no aliens would be permitted to engage in retail trade in small towns and villages after January 1, 1960. As a result, a large number of alien Chinese were forcibly moved to the larger towns and cities. Many returned to China. The Government of the People's Republic of China attempted to intervene, but to no avail. The second event, which occurred on January 20, 1960, was the exchange of ratifications of the Dual Citizenship Treaty. This means that the national status of all of the Chinese in Indonesia (and all of their descendants) will have been determined, through options, by January 20, 1962.

The romanization of Chinese names in this report follows the general usage in Indonesia. Most Indonesian Chinese persons and groups have adopted a Dutch romanization of their names as pronounced in one of the South Chinese dialects; for example, the Member of Parliament "Siauw Giok Tjhan", and the early Kuomintang organization "Soe Po Sia". On the other hand, a Wade-Giles romanization of the *Kuo Yü*, or mandarin pronunciation, is used by some; for example, the "Chung Hua Hui", which is an organization quite distinct from the "Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan", although the corresponding Chinese characters are identical.

Indonesian place names are spelled according to general usage in modern English-language publications; for example, "Surabaja", rather than "Soerabaja". The city of Djakarta is called by its former Dutch name, Batavia, wherever it is referred to in the period before its name was officially changed.

One other problem of terminology should be mentioned here. Many members of the Chinese minority group maintain that such terms as

“Indonesian”, “native Indonesian”, or “indigenous population” should not be used to exclude inhabitants who are of Chinese descent. They point out that the majority group itself is not descended from the original inhabitants of the archipelago, and that many Chinese families have been “Indonesians” for hundreds of years. Thus the use of such terms to apply to a group not including persons of Chinese descent may be considered to be discriminatory or offensive. While the present writer sympathizes with this point of view and disapproves of all invidious distinctions, he has found it impossible to find a suitable alternative terminology. He can only say that in using such terms in their exclusive sense, he does not intend to imply that Indonesian citizens of Chinese extraction are any less Indonesian than others.

In fact, the writer hopes that this report will be a contribution, not only to knowledge of the minority problem in Indonesia, but also to its solution.

Donald E. Willmott
January, 1961

CHAPTER ONE

THE POSITION OF THE CHINESE IN THE DUTCH EAST INDIES, 1900-1941

In 1908, the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan, a leading Chinese organization of Batavia, was busying itself with a most unusual task. Its president had received a letter from a certain L.H.W. van Sandick, who had been a district officer in West Borneo and was now in Holland preparing a book on government policy towards the Chinese in the Netherlands East Indies. Van Sandick requested information and opinions from the Chinese notables of the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan on fourteen points. Among them was the following: "Do Chinese who have become Dutch nationals by naturalization thereby lose their former citizenship? Or does the Chinese government continue to consider them as Chinese citizens?"

The officers of the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan were no doubt impressed by the generally pro-Chinese outlook expressed in van Sandick's letter, and glad of an opportunity to publicize the aspirations of the Indies Chinese. To draft a reply, they appointed a special committee, including their own president, four eminent businessmen, and two grandees of the Dutch-appointed Chinese hierarchy. A month later the work of the committee was accepted at an extraordinary meeting of the Board of Directors and officers of the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan. Questions about their organization and its affiliated schools, about legal restrictions on Chinese residents in the Indies, and about government policy towards the Chinese were answered at length. In each case a general "answer" was supplemented by "further information." On the question of citizenship, however, the reply was brief:

Answer: Concerning this situation we are unable to give a reply, because we do not know the existing law in China.

Further information: We cannot give any additional information.

All we can say is: Whether a Chinese who has been naturalized loses his former citizenship or not depends upon the opinion of the man himself.¹

While this reply was perhaps somewhat less than completely candid, no one could have given a definite answer at that time.

And as we trace the history of the national status of the Indies Chinese, we shall see that six citizenship laws and four international treaties failed to settle the matter. Until the implementation of the Dual Citizenship Treaty with China has been completed, the status of Indonesian-born Chinese will remain about what it was fifty years, when the venerable leaders of the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan said that it depended “upon the opinion of the man himself.”

Traditional Dutch Policy as a Stimulus to Chinese Nationalism

The Chinese overseas, like their ancestors in China, had always been sharply divided by provincialism. In spite of their much greater residential proximity in overseas communities, barriers of dialect, custom, prejudice, and suspicion separated the Chinese into more or less exclusive groupings based on the district or even the village which was considered “home” in China proper. In the Indies there was a further division between the “Totoks”, or recent immigrants, and the “Peranakans”, who were local-born Chinese, most of whose parents were also local-born. The great majority of Peranakans had Indonesian grandmothers or great-grandmothers, and spoke Malay or a native Indies language in their homes.

Then, too, the overseas Chinese had never received any help from the Imperial Government of China, and were officially considered as outlaws until 1894, as emigration had been forbidden by law. No wonder, then, that the feeling of belonging to China as a nation had been almost non-existent among the Chinese throughout the several centuries of their life in the Indies.

The fact that the spirit of national solidarity spread quite rapidly among the Chinese in the Netherlands Indies after the turn of the century may be explained by the combined effects of two major factors: a common

1 Van Sandicks' letter and the answers given to it are found in the following source: Nio Joe Lan, *Riwajat 40 Taon dari Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan-Batavia (1900-1939)*, Batavia, 1940, pp. 133-140 and 228 f.