

January 1, 2013

Chinese Indonesians Reassessed: A Critical Review

Siew Min SAI

Chang Yau HOON, *Singapore Management University*

Chinese Indonesians Reassessed

History, religion and belonging

**Edited by Siew-Min Sai and
Chang-Yau Hoon**

Acknowledgments

Many people offered us valuable input and assistance in making this book possible. We owe special thanks to all our contributors, who believed in the project and worked with us to make this book happen. We would also like to acknowledge the following friends and colleagues who offered critical reading and comments on various chapters in this volume: Mary Somers Heidhues, Huang Jianli, Jeremy Jammes, Chenyang Kao, Abidin Kusno, Nick Long, Jemma Purdey, Anthony Reid, Claudine Salmon, Karen Strassler, Denise Woods and Diana Wong. Charles Coppel offered us his encouragement and personal support for this project when it was still in its infancy. We thank him for his confidence in the two of us. We are grateful to the Routledge series editor, Peter Sowden, for believing in our project, and to editorial assistant Jillian Morrison for her assistance at various stages of the manuscript preparation.

We are also grateful to the institutional support offered by our respective universities: the National University of Singapore and the Singapore Management University. This book would not be possible without generous funding from the Singapore Ministry of Education's Academic Research Fund (Tier One), grant number R-110-000-033-112.

Finally, we owe special thanks to our wonderful assistants, who dedicated so much of their time and effort to render much-needed research and editorial help. We thank Wong Lee Min (National University of Singapore) and Rebecca Lim Rui Da (Singapore Management University). We thank Lee Min, in particular, who was meticulous and patient in going through all the chapters in the book.

Introduction

A critical reassessment of Chinese Indonesian Studies

Siew-Min Sai and Chang-Yau Hoon

Reassessing the “Chinese Problem” in Indonesia

Constituting between 2 and 3 percent of Indonesia's total population, Chinese Indonesians form a heterogeneous ethnic community (Suryadinata, Arifin and Ananta 2003; Mackie 2005). They are but one out of more than 300 ethnic groups in a country that has celebrated its ethnic diversity by adopting, since its independence in 1945, the official motto of “Unity in Diversity” (Ind.: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*). Despite such a motto, Chinese Indonesians do not possess the same status as other ethnic community groups who are perceived as “native” (Ind.: *asli/pribumi*) to Indonesia. A long history of Chinese migration to Indonesia beginning from pre-colonial times appears to condemn this ethnic community to the permanent status of “essential outsiders” (Chirot and Reid 1997), a popular idea expressed through labelling Chinese Indonesians as “non-natives” (Ind.: *non-pribumi*). As Aguilar's perceptive remarks on the hidden racialized logic of Indonesia's thinking about its territorial space suggest, “the Chinese are attributed a definite and knowable place of origin – China – and a first set of ancestors from ‘outside’ who first set foot on ‘Indonesia.’ With a focus on the past and the many first landings that the past is made to hold, the descendants (*keturunan*) are indelibly linked to the first-generation immigrants and, in an unbroken chain, remain forever aliens” (Aguilar 2001: 517). Given the contentious ways in which the Chinese have been defined against Indonesian nationhood, the diagnostics of Indonesian nationalism continue to cast long shadows on studies concerned with this ethnic community. Against such a backdrop, this book embarks on a collective attempt to angle new directions in studies on the ethnic Chinese and issues pertaining to Chineseness in Indonesia. The key problem the book addresses is the limitations of studying the Chinese in Indonesia as an ethnic community and the need to move beyond the issue of Chinese (non)belonging to the Indonesian nation.

The chapters in this book reflect a continued engagement with the ambivalent position of Chinese Indonesians. The book is, however, premised on the argument that it is timely to bring a renewed sense of cogency and critical reflection to the burgeoning research on the ethnic Chinese and Chineseness in Indonesia. The stunning increase in the number of articles and books published on the Chinese Indonesians in the aftermath of the regime change in May 1998 underscores

the extent to which scholars have given this heterogeneous community unprecedented attention in the field of contemporary Indonesian Studies. This post-1998 state of affairs stands in marked contrast to the Suharto or pre-Suharto years, when research on the Chinese Indonesians was seen as “a marginal enterprise” (Lindsey and Pausacker 2005 :1). The New Order regime’s long-standing discriminatory policies against Chinese Indonesians, coupled with a history of “anti-Chinese” sentiments in Indonesia, are key reasons for this marked interest in Chinese Indonesians expressed by scholars, experts and researchers alike. An immediate trigger for this heightened attention was the dramatic outbursts of violence in different parts of Indonesia which accompanied Suharto’s downfall. The violence that took place was immediately ethnicized by the media as “anti-Chinese” (Heryanto 1999). It was disturbing to witness numerous instances of violence – including mass rapes – perpetrated against women of apparent Chinese descent. Reports of such violence hogged the headlines of both the local and global media for weeks, galvanizing numerous Chinese communities in different parts of the world into condemning the spectacle of “anti-Chinese” violence in a dramatic show of ethnic solidarity (Tay 2006).

The chapters in the book exemplify the expansiveness of the scholarship and, more significantly, they depict how scholars are moving beyond the adoption of a narrow ethno-nationalist framework in their research on Chinese Indonesians. This is evident in the recently published edited volume *Chinese Indonesians and Regime Change*, which problematizes the nation-state paradigm and the political economy approach, both central to studies of Chinese Indonesians, especially during the New Order period. The editors acknowledge that “so far only few attempts have been made to reassess these [approaches] in regard to the modern historiography of the Chinese Indonesians” (Dieleman, Koning and Post 2011: 6). The book departs from the state-centered perspective, which often presents the Chinese as disenfranchised victims, juxtaposed against a strong and oppressive state; and treats the Chinese as insiders, not outsiders, and as active agents, not as passive bystanders, in historical events.

Nonetheless, the discourse of “*Masalah Cina*,” otherwise known as the “Chinese Problem,” remains a major stumbling block in any attempt to reinvent this field. A key phrase in the nationalistic discourse on the ethnic Chinese and Chineseness in postcolonial Indonesia, “*Masalah Cina*” is popularly used in an unconscious manner, as a shorthand reference to a range of multi-faceted problems – whether historical, institutional, economic, racial, socio-cultural, or religious – that obstruct Chinese Indonesians from either identifying themselves or being identified fully as part of the Indonesian nation-state.

While existing scholarly literature demonstrates both an empathy and a critical awareness of the myriad ways in which the Chinese community has been discriminated against, victimized, or made scapegoats for the socio-economic problems afflicting the Indonesian nation, it is not always obvious that scholars make a sufficiently clear distinction between the complex problems Chinese Indonesians confront in becoming encompassed within Indonesia and the dominant discourse of *Masalah Cina*. This distinction is important to identify precisely the ideological work that *Masalah Cina* does in anchoring a particular discourse about

the Chinese and Chineseness in Indonesia. Casting the Chinese in the country as a “problem” on a “national” scale, the discourse of *Masalah Cina* not only abets the minorization of the Chinese, it reduces the long history of Chinese presence since pre-colonial times to a question of whether and how the Chinese can eventually fit into the Indonesian nation. Chinese Indonesians and Chineseness are therefore prefigured as a “national problem” to be checked, regulated and eventually overcome with artificial policies and solutions discussed below. The diagnostics of Indonesian nationalism therefore permeate the discourse of *Masalah Cina*. The entrenchment of an ethno-nationalist paradigm is further attested to by the evident difficulties in dislodging discussion of the Chinese or issues pertaining to Chineseness in Indonesia from *Masalah Cina*, even after May 1998.

It is necessary to account for as well as to explain the workings of the *Masalah Cina* discourse by shedding light on its historicity. This is mainly because the discourse performs multiple functions of erasure, including suppressing the historical circumstances of its own beginnings. Anti-Sinicism evidently has a history in Indonesia that predates 1945. However, as Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s well-honed historical sense suggests, “what is surprising about anti-Chinese racism is this: why does it occur in an independent Indonesia?” (cited in Purdey 2003: 1). The *Masalah Cina* discourse problematizes the Chinese and Chineseness in Indonesia by collapsing the different dimensions of the historic presence of Chinese communities in the country into one alleged problem and solution with a convenient phrasology. The emergence and dissemination of this discourse, it must be emphasized, constitutes a historical event in and by itself. It heralded the beginnings of the New Order regime as the government undertook to implement a “comprehensive solution” to the “many-faceted Chinese problem” in the late 1960s (Coppel 1983: 29). In *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, Charles Coppel writes that although there was a sense in post-World War Two Indonesia that the Chinese residents, be they Indonesian citizens or otherwise, were felt to be “a problem,”¹ it was only in 1967 that the New Order government found it necessary to embark on an all-encompassing solution, and more importantly, possessed the capacity to enforce a coordinated policy when compared with the ad hoc way the presence of Chinese residents in post-war Indonesia was dealt with by earlier Indonesian central and regional authorities.

The New Order government’s total solution would eventually be laid out in a three-volume publication in the late 1970s that contained almost all the laws, regulations and policies relating to the Chinese in Indonesia under the macabre title *Guide to the Solution of the Chinese Problem in Indonesia* (Ind.: *Pedoman Penyelesaian Masalah Cina di Indonesia*) (Coppel 2002). The government’s solution basically involved compelling the Chinese to lose all traces of their Chineseness, which necessitated outright bans on nearly every aspect of what was seen as “Chinese tradition and culture,” including the Chinese language, Chinese schools, newspapers and other kinds of Chinese-language mass media. Chinese-language materials were not allowed into the country. The public use and display of Chinese characters were strictly forbidden. The number and type of Chinese organizations, or any group with large number of members who were of Chinese descent, were heavily circumscribed. Chinese-Indonesian citizens were

also encouraged to change their names to “Indonesian-sounding” ones. What is perhaps less obvious is how the adoption and execution of one alleged *total* solution has created the unfortunate effect of reducing and refiguring the problem in a fixed direction. In the discourse of *Masalah Cina*, the problem is pre-defined as one of the inability of the Chinese to *assimilate* into the Indonesian nation, hence justifying the extreme measure of eradicating all traces of Chineseness.

This takes us to our next point, the dominance of an assimilationist discourse during the New Order period and the ideological work *Masalah Cina* performs as part of a military-endorsed Assimilationist (Ind.: *Pembauran*) Program from the 1960s onwards. Commenting on the various possible options for accommodating ethnic diversity in Indonesia just before the end of the New Order regime, Thung Ju-lan writes that “the discursive competition between assimilationism, multiculturalism and the subjectivity of conditional belonging has not yet taken place in Indonesia. So far an assimilationist discourse rules” (Thung 1998: 23). Historians have shown how this came to pass. For instance, Mary Somers Heidhues and Charles Coppel have documented the ideological and political contestation between two groups within the Chinese community – the integrationists versus the assimilationists – who proposed two different approaches to how the Chinese could be accepted fully as Indonesian citizens in the 1950s and 1960s. The integrationists were represented by the organization “*Baperki*” which stood for “*Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia*” (Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship). *Baperki* was established in March 1954 to contest the proposed legislation that would limit the number of Chinese eligible for Indonesian citizenship by changing existing citizenship requirements. Existing citizenship regulations permitted local-born Chinese who were Dutch subjects to automatically become Indonesian citizens via a passive system, whereas the proposed 1954 law permitted only those whose fathers were born locally to qualify for citizenship and only if he/she made an active choice to become an Indonesian citizen. Although *Baperki* was a mass organization, it functioned like a political party. Its political platform was laid out in the 1955 elections, which called for an end to racial discrimination, particularly through unifying the race-based legal system left behind by the Dutch and through redefining “domestic capital” to include non-native businesses established in Indonesia. Under *Baperki*’s banner, the integrationists were committed to the position that Indonesians of Chinese descent should be accepted as a group with their own special social and cultural institutions. The onus, then, was on the Indonesian majority to accept the Chinese community. At the same time, *Baperki* emphasized that Chinese Indonesians must, of course, embrace Indonesian nationality fully. On the issue of ethnic culture and identity, *Baperki* advocated “cultural pluralism” (Somers 1965: 256). *Baperki*’s position was that Chinese Indonesian citizens should be treated equally as one of the many ethnic groups (Ind.: *suku bangsa*) in Indonesia and was insistent that the Chinese could become Indonesian citizens while remaining culturally distinct. As Heidhues notes, *Baperki* worked on the premise of the undesirability of discrimination and had made fighting discrimination in Indonesian life its first priority since its inception (Somers 1965). *Baperki* became closely allied with the Indonesian

Communist Party (PKI), which was supportive of its anti-discrimination stance. It was also a keen follower of President Sukarno’s politics.

As Indonesia moved into the 1960s, it was *Baperki* and the integrationists who represented the status quo and, as Somers observes, the more “conservative force” (Somers 1965: 257). Compared to *Baperki*, the assimilationists started informally as a small, loose group of Chinese Indonesians who were reacting to the unsettling effects of “PP-10” on the community and the left-ward drift of *Baperki*’s politics. PP-10 (or Presidential Instruction no. 10), decreed in 1959, stipulated a ban prohibiting foreigners from engaging in retail trade in the rural areas in Indonesia. Although the ban targeted “alien Chinese” – non-Indonesian citizens who were Chinese – the impact of PP-10 was so widespread that almost all those of Chinese descent felt its effects. Within the community, the fall-out from the PP-10 ban triggered another round of questioning of their shaky position in the country and highlighted the apparent ineffectiveness of the integrationists’ position (Somers 1965: 251–59). Coppel dates the beginnings of the assimilationist movement to the publication of their ideas in the *Star Weekly* newspaper in March 1960 (Coppel 1983). Reacting to the integrationists’ position, the assimilationists opined that Chinese Indonesians had not done enough to gain full acceptance into the Indonesian nation despite becoming Indonesian citizens. They urged Chinese Indonesians to participate actively in “ethnically inclusive” organizations, expressed disapproval of organizations made up mostly of Chinese members, encouraged Chinese Indonesians to drop their Chinese names, adopt Indonesian names and to inter-marry with indigenous Indonesians. The assimilationists were adamant that Chinese Indonesians must disassociate socially and culturally with all “alien Chinese.” The assimilationists’ program therefore, proposed that Chinese Indonesians “must cease to be culturally distinct from the Indonesian majority and must dissociate themselves from Chinese traditions” (Somers 1965: 258). The assimilationist movement took institutional form in 1963 when it became the Lembaga Pembina Kesatuan Bangsa (Institute for Nation-Building, or LPKB for short). From the very beginning, it had close links with and enjoyed the support of the military (Coppel 1983). The internal dissension within the Chinese community along integrationist-assimilationist lines thus overlapped with the larger political divide in Indonesian politics during this period – between the left wing led by the PKI under Sukarno’s patronage and protection on one side and the right wing helmed by the army on the other.

When the 30 September Incident in 1965 and the 1966–67 anti-communist massacres occurred, the LPKB managed to prevail over *Baperki*. Coppel argues that in the turbulent years following 1965, the LPKB played important roles mediating between the Chinese community and the army. It helped, for example, in alleviating the effects of violence visited upon Chinese communities in particular locales due to *Baperki*’s close identification with the PKI. Stressing the usefulness of LPKB’s ties with the army and the amenability of the assimilationist message to the larger national society at a time of unprecedented crisis, Coppel writes that the influence of the assimilationists was crucial when a “new accommodation” between the New Order government and Chinese Indonesian community eventuated in the late 1960s:

[The LPKB's] previous association with the army and other anti-communist Indonesians had been a valuable demonstration to their partners that they were "good" Chinese who were neither pawns of Peking nor camp followers of the PKI. Their assimilationist ideas, which put much of the blame for the Chinese problem on the Chinese themselves because of their "exclusivism" and "feelings of superiority," were also welcome to many indigenous Indonesians ... The official adoption of the policy of assimilation of citizens of foreign descent, the encouragement of name-changing amongst [Chinese Indonesian citizens], the principle that there should be no discrimination amongst Indonesian citizens but a clear distinction between citizens and aliens, and the abolition of the old colonial distinction between Europeans, Foreign Orientals and Natives – all these originated in recommendations from the assimilationist Chinese in the LPKB.

(Coppel 1983: 175)

Where the development of Chinese Indonesian identity is concerned, the political ascendancy of the assimilationists and the subsequent hegemony of their ideas in this "new accommodation" were among the most profound consequences of the violent transition of power after 1965. The "new accommodation" emasculated the Chinese with state-imposed assimilationism but allowed Chinese capitalists free play in the economic arena in partnership with the power-holders. With the political death of the integrationists, a competing influential voice on the value and meaning of (Chinese) Indonesian citizenship was eliminated and the "Chinese Problem" assumed concrete form after 1967. No longer was the "Chinese Problem" understood as a consequence of long-standing discriminatory institutions, laws and policies preventing equality of citizenship rights for Chinese Indonesians which was propounded by the integrationists. Instead, the "Chinese Problem" morphed to become the *Masalah Cina* discourse. Attaining cultural homogeneity with the native Indonesians was conceivably the only way Chinese Indonesians could work toward embracing their Indonesian nationality fully.

As Thung observes with the benefit of hindsight, the hegemony of assimilationism for more than three decades resulted in much-reduced scope for articulating alternatives to assimilationism (Thung 1998). Ironically, not only did state-sponsored assimilation fail to eliminate the "native" (Ind.: *pribumi*) versus "non-native"/Chinese Indonesian (Ind.: *non-pribumi*) binary, persistent problematizing of Chineseness through the *Masalah Cina* discourse sensitized Indonesians – Chinese and non-Chinese alike – to imagined threats of cultural/national subversion and inclined them toward holding on to racialized understandings of both Indonesian nationalist as well as Chinese identities. As Heryanto argues, instead of disappearing completely, Chineseness was "always under erasure" (Heryanto 1998: 104). Even after the downfall of the regime in 1998, the *pribumi* and *non-pribumi* binary which reproduces racialized perspectives about Indonesian nationalist and ethnic identities remains entrenched (Heryanto 2005). Other writers such as Jemma Purdey and Christian Chua have emphasized the Machiavellian motivations of New Order assimilationism, which, they argue, was never meant as a sincere gesture of dissolving the divide

between the *pribumi* and the *non-pribumi*. Instead, assimilationism was wielded as a deliberate instrument to create widespread negative perceptions of a stigmatized community that could be utilized in multiple ways to manage or redirect popular unhappiness and/or keep an important economic force under control (Purdey 2003; Chua 2008). Their arguments appear to be backed by retrospective statements from prominent leaders of the original assimilationist group who now claim that the assimilationist agenda was "hijacked" by the New Order government (Purdey 2003).

Charting new directions in Chinese Indonesian Studies

In the face of blatant discrimination against the Chinese in Indonesian society as a result of forced assimilation, scholarship in Chinese Indonesian Studies has demonstrated sensitivity and empathy to the plight of the community over the last few decades. The existing literature has reacted critically to New Order assimilationism in several ways. First, historians and scholars such as William Skinner, Charles Coppel, Leo Suryadinata, Mona Lohanda and Anthony Reid have pointed to the pre-1945 past to explain the complexity of Chinese presence in contemporary Indonesia. In so doing, they have suspended the "blame game" to provide historically grounded accounts of changing Chinese identities in Indonesia. In addition, the historical approach of using fine-grained analysis of particular acts or events of violence against Chinese communities in different locales in Indonesia has proven to be particularly useful in facilitating understanding of these events without generalizing all and sundry as "anti-Chinese" in character (Purdey 2006).

Second, scholars have also highlighted the contributions of this ethnic community to the development of Indonesia. A special issue of Cornell University's *Indonesia* journal in 1991 entitled *The Role of the Indonesian Chinese in Shaping Modern Indonesian Life* provides a prime example. The exemplary writings of Indonesianists researching the development of Indonesian national language and literature demonstrate conclusively that localized Chinese had been long-time native users of *Melayu* – the lingua franca of the Dutch East Indies that was later reconstituted as *Bahasa Indonesia*, Indonesia's national language – and were a major force in popularizing the language that served as the vehicle for disseminating early Indonesian nationalist ideas. Ahmat Adam (Adam 1995), for example, credits Chinese publishers, editors and writers as one important group responsible for the development of the *Melayu* press that enabled the imagination of the Indonesian national community. Claudine Salmon's writings on the literary works produced by the Chinese using *Melayu* are a *tour de force* in Indonesian Studies. More recently, Karen Strassler has documented the role of the Chinese in popular photography for providing ordinary Indonesians with a means of visualizing Indonesian nationalist modernity during the 1950s and 1960s (Strassler 2008).

Finally, the extant literature has also challenged ethnic stereotyping of Chinese Indonesians by emphasizing their heterogeneity as well as the extent to which Chinese persons who are locally born and settled for many generations

in Indonesia are in fact acculturated, if not fully assimilated into local society. Amongst acculturated/assimilated Chinese Indonesians, scholars have understandably paid most attention to those conventionally labeled as “*Peranakan Chinese*.” *Peranakan Chinese*, who are mostly concentrated in Java, are perceived to be the most assimilated Chinese Indonesians because they lost recognizably “Chinese” attributes, especially the ability to speak in a Chinese language, even before the language ban came into effect.² To further showcase the heterogeneity of Chinese Indonesians, Charles Coppel and Dede Oetomo have called for more work to be done on Chinese communities outside of Java as early as the 1970s. Mary Somers Heidhues, who began writing about the political activities of the Java-centered *Peranakan Chinese* community in the 1960s, eventually moved to research the less-known Chinese Indonesian communities settled on Bangka Island and West Kalimantan. Heidhues’ work on these communities points to the localization of Chinese Indonesians that are not widely perceived to be as “assimilated” as Java’s *Peranakan Chinese* Indonesians because they have come to identify themselves by place of birth and residence in Indonesia (Heidhues 2003). Other scholars also observe that Chineseness in Indonesia is not only inflected by one’s place of birth and residence but by class, cultural and religious differences (Hoon 2008) and, increasingly, generational differences as well (Sai 2010; Dawis 2009; Budianta 2007).

These important directions in Chinese Indonesian Studies have given the field its critical edge. However, to the extent that scholars are preoccupied with assimilationism and its effects and continue to be interested primarily in the larger question of Chinese position and identification with the Indonesian nation, the field remains defined by and invested in studying Chinese Indonesians as an ethnic community within an ethno-nationalist framework. Moreover, although scholars are critical of forced assimilationism, the distinction between the New Order discourse of *Masalah Cina* and scholarly discourse on the problematic encompassment of Chinese Indonesians in the country has not been clearly demarcated. The two sets of discourses share common interest and common ground in the “Chinese Problem.” As Coppel notes, Chinese Indonesians themselves perceive the presence of a “Chinese Problem” (Coppel 1983: 30). Coppel is referring to the struggles with nationality, identification and discrimination that confronted the Chinese in Indonesia for much of the twentieth century and, if we may add, for the twenty-first century as well. As such, scholars studying the Chinese Indonesian community were and remain concerned with the larger problem of Chinese encompassment in the Indonesian nation. Scholarly writings and the *Masalah Cina* discourse have evolved historically from the years when the citizenship status of the Chinese in Indonesia (but also elsewhere in Southeast Asia) during a politically turbulent period made Chinese identification with China and Indonesia a pressing issue on the ground and in academia. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the *Masalah Cina* discourse and Chinese Indonesian Studies have crystallized around this issue, which has not faded away. Comparable to the concerns of the *Masalah Cina* discourse, the difficulties the Chinese have experienced in either identifying themselves or in being accepted as Indonesians in the country remains a key problem for scholars interested in this field of study.

Much of the scholarship after the regime change in May 1998 remains fixated on the old problems of Chinese (non)belonging to Indonesia. Such scholarship has focused on the impact of the regime change after 1998 on the different Chinese Indonesian communities, specifically the complexity of their identity politics. This is understandable given the dramatic ways Chinese Indonesians were implicated as the Suharto regime made its exit. The very visibility of Chinese Indonesians has sent researchers scurrying back to the old preoccupation with the *Masalah Cina* discourse and the long-standing issue of how the Chinese are pre-defined as “essential outsiders” against which Indonesian nationhood is constituted. While researchers have arrived at their own conclusions about whether different groups of Chinese Indonesians have embraced their Indonesian nationality, been accepted politically, socially and culturally by the rest of Indonesian society, or reinforced their ethnicity in new and old ways, these differing arguments do not indicate any clear shift to a new paradigm in Chinese Indonesian Studies. Instead, what is witnessed is the interrogation of a new situation with an old question.

Chinese Indonesians Reassessed argues that it is necessary to unpack the ethno-nationalist framework and the “Chinese Problem” it embeds. The individual chapters showcase updated research and they point collectively to the inadequacy of this framework and how specialists in the field are reflecting on materials in new ways. Taken as a whole, the book encapsulates a broad time frame from the late nineteenth century to the post-1998 period and includes new material on Chinese communities settled outside Java as well as on Chinese Christian and Muslim communities that have hitherto fallen below the radar because of overwhelming attention on “traditional Chinese” religions in Chinese Indonesian Studies. There is an element of a “new generational voice” in this effort to take stock and push the field in new directions. Most of our contributors are emerging scholars or just starting out researching on the Chinese in Indonesia. Instead of tackling “the Chinese problem” in isolation, or arguing for or against integration, assimilation and other possible alternatives, *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed* argues for the need to put the geographical scale of “the national” under interrogation. Instead of taking the Indonesian nation as the sole framework of analysis, we critique the diagnostics of Indonesian nationalism. Evidently, we are aware that we can never discount Indonesian nationalism, historic or otherwise, as an important force still animating in an ongoing project of nation-building. We wish to argue, however, that “the nation” constitutes *one of the* and not *the sole* analytical category. Taking a step or two away from the diagnostics of Indonesian nationalism permits considerations of when, why and how the identities of the differentially located Chinese communities in the Indonesian archipelago are scaled *not necessarily and not always in nationalist terms*.

Chinese Indonesians Reassessed proposes a re-examination of “the national” in several ways. First, we issue a clarion call to be less Java-centric in our focus. Consciously or otherwise, “the national” scale in Indonesia tends to be oriented toward Java Island. To counter the “Java effect,” the book (Chapters 4 to 7) sheds new light on important areas in Indonesia where there is a higher-than-national-average concentration of the Chinese population, notably the Riau Islands

(3.72%), West Kalimantan (9.46%) and Medan in Northern Sumatra (10.65%).³ In spite of the significant presence of the Chinese in these areas, little attention has been paid to these Chinese communities by researchers.

Second and more importantly, the book explores expressions or conceptualizations of geographical locations that depart from “the national.” This fosters a deeper appreciation of the impact of different senses and sensations of space on identity formation amongst Chinese Indonesians. The book demonstrates through a rich array of historical and contemporary examples of differentially situated Chinese Indonesian communities that their identities and self-interpretations are not simply formed by putting a hyphen between Chinese ethnicity and Indonesian nationalism. Instead, we argue that the formation of Chinese Indonesian identities has implicated and/or abetted different kinds of spaces beyond the nation-state. Chapter 1 by Didi Kwartanada showcases turn-of-the-twentieth-century expressions of “trans-border modernity” that were apparently inspired by the pan-Asian networks of the founders of the Tiong Hwa Hwe Koan (the Chinese Association or THHK in short) movement. Chapter 2 by Siew-Min Sai charts the emergence of the “Nanyang (South Seas) diasporic imaginary” which was taught and disseminated by teachers in Chinese schools in the Dutch East Indies in the 1920s or 1930s. Chapter 3 by Charlotte Setijadi examines expressions of cosmopolitanism in independent film-making in post-1998 Indonesia. Chapter 4 by Yen-ling Tsai proposes studying “sites of racial formation” such as old Chinese school buildings in Medan to better understand problems of emplacement and displacement of the Chinese in Indonesia. Chapter 5 by Yew-Foong Hui raises the notion of “trans-local Chinese subjects” who exited from West Kalimantan in the 1950s and found themselves suspended between imagined homelands of both “Indonesia” and “China.” Chapter 6 by Lenore Lyons and Michele Ford examines the complex rationalization of ethnic identification and political allegiances by Riau Chinese. Chapter 7 by Margaret Chan looks at the hybridized performance of localized identity by Chinese spirit mediums in Singkawang in West Kalimantan. Finally, Chapters 8, 9 and 10 by Chang-Yau Hoon, Wai-weng Hew and Syuan-yuan Chiou respectively explore problems of rescaling the universalistic beliefs of Christianity and Islam for Java’s Chinese communities.

In addition, the content of several chapters overlap significantly. Chapters 1 to 3 concern knowledge and cultural production. Chapters 1 and 2, in particular, address the history of education for the Chinese during the pre-World War Two period. Chapters 4 to 7 are about Chinese communities on Indonesia’s borderlands, while Chapters 7 to 10 focus more specifically on religion. We have grouped these chapters together to facilitate reading them as a group rather than as stand-alone pieces.

In urging the suspension of scholarly assumption about the primacy of “the national” in Chinese Indonesian Studies, we are undoubtedly influenced by current literature investigating the fluidity of interconnections amongst Chinese communities dispersed throughout the world (see McKeown 2001; Ong and Nonini 1997). While seeking to present our findings and arguments in a more sustained and holistic manner, our critique of the nation-state paradigm is

not entirely new. Michael Godley and Charles Coppel took early steps in this direction when they adopted trans-border perspectives to study the economic activities of Chinese businesses based in the Dutch East Indies (Godley 1981). A trans-border perspective can also be seen in a study of Chinese Indonesians who left Indonesia for China in the 1950s and 1960s, some of whom settled eventually in Hong Kong from the 1970s onwards (Godley and Coppel 1990; Godley 1989). Officially classified as *guiguo huaqiao* or “Returned Overseas Chinese” by the Chinese state, these sizable communities settled in different parts of China and Hong Kong are receiving increasing attention from scholars studying diasporic Chinese communities. Difficulties in obtaining citizenship, discriminatory policies, particularly the PP-10 ban, and political instability in Indonesia during the pre-1965 period have caused many Chinese Indonesians to leave for China. As Tan Chee-Beng observes, they now make up a large part of those classified as *guiguo huaqiao* and have received more academic attention than returnees from other parts of Southeast Asia (Tan 2010, 2011; Chin 2003). It is also noteworthy that an important part of this secondary literature on the returnee communities is written in Chinese and produced by scholars based in China and Hong Kong (Wang 2006; Huang 2005). Scholarship on the *guiguo huaqiao* and the historical interconnections of dispersed Chinese communities offers influential trans-border perspectives.

However, a second category of scholarship must be highlighted. This form of scholarship is mainly from a historical nature, moving in parallel with and unpacking the territorialized cogency of “Indonesia” through tracing roots to older modes of religious cosmopolitanisms, global flows and creole nationalism (Azra 2004; Laffan 2003). Only recently, historian Eric Tagliacozzo has proposed the possibility of producing “trans-regional studies of Indonesia if these can be accomplished without marginalizing Indonesians from their own histories, or from their own present” (Tagliacozzo 2010: 2). Tagliacozzo was writing in the introduction to a special *Indonesia* volume dedicated to exploring the *longue durée* approach as a means of expanding the historical depth and breadth of the more recent “transnational turn” in Indonesian history. This “transnational turn” is also observed by other specialists researching Indonesia. John Sidel writes that “the trajectory of modern Indonesian history no longer seems to cohere in narrowly national – or nationalist – terms” (Sidel 2007). It seems overly archaic that in spite of new developments in cognate fields of study and reinterpretation of Indonesian history, the bulk of the scholarship on the Chinese and Chineseness in Indonesia remains bound, implicitly or otherwise, to the issue of Chinese (non)belonging to Indonesia. This is surely revealing of the heavy restrictiveness imposed by adopting an ethno-nationalist framework.

Rather than argue for the primacy of one geographical scale, especially “the global” or “national”, over another such as “the local” and vice versa, the chapters in the book demonstrate further that there is a need to take heed of the fine interplay of geographical scales. In raising the issue of non-national geographical scales to critique the ethno-nationalist framework, we are aware of the temptation to assert that “the local” and/or “global” is either subversive of or complicit with “the national.” We have eschewed glib generalizations and have instead chosen to

provide empirically grounded case studies that illuminate how Chinese identities and Chineseness in Indonesia can be better understood by taking into account the interplay of different geographical scales. For instance, Didi Kwanada argues that in reacting to the absence of any provision for modern education for the Chinese by the Dutch colonial government, founders of the THHK movement drew their ideas about modernity primarily from Asian sources to establish schools that served and ultimately shaped the local community in Batavia at the turn of the twentieth century (Chapter 1). Siew-Min Sai goes on to argue in her chapter (Chapter 2) that formalistic construction of knowledge in Chinese textbooks while Sino-centric in nature expresses a perspective on localization of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies against the larger backdrop of European imperialism by using a concept of the larger “Nanyang” region popular amongst Southeast Asian Chinese. Charlotte Setijadi writes that independent Chinese Indonesian film-makers project cosmopolitan sensibilities in their work through the specific lenses of Chinese Indonesian experiences (Chapter 3). Yew-Foong Hui’s evocative portrayal of what he calls the “translocal Chinese subject” from Pemangkat in West Kalimantan pushes us to rethink the idea of nationalist space – whether Indonesian or China – especially when these have been radically reconfigured by major geo-political shifts and mediated by intense memory-work (Chapter 5). Lenore Lyons and Michele Ford argue in their chapter on the Chinese in the Riau Islands (Chapter 6) that although immediate regional influences such as mass media transmissions from Singapore and Malaysia have made Riau Chinese more “Chinese,” for instance in their relative proficiency in Mandarin Chinese compared to Java-based Chinese, their intimate knowledge of Indonesia’s neighbors does not necessarily facilitate identification with the dominant Chinese majority in Singapore or the Chinese in Malaysia. Instead, Riau Chinese, according to Lyons and Ford, communicate an understanding of identity that holds the Riau Islands to be distinct from Singapore, Malaysia and the rest of Indonesia. Significantly, these findings support the emphasis that some ethnographers of “out-of-the-way” places in Indonesia have begun to put on the “middling” geographical scale, i.e. regional dynamics and politics (Spyer 2000; Lowenhaupt-Tsing 1993) or on “the translocal” (Ho 2006) in explaining what used to be conventionally accounted for with the sleight-of-hand “local society.” It seems that for any place-bound ethnic community in Indonesia or elsewhere for the matter, accounts of “local society” cannot be simply taken for granted but constitutes a subject that needs to be investigated and explained. Closer attention to the interplay of different geographical scales can perhaps make it easier to keep both the inevitability of Indonesian nationalism as well as highly romanticized notions of the “resistant local” at bay.

The argument for attributing significant relevance to geographical scales beyond the national is perhaps most instructive for the chapters on religion in this book. The religious lives and practices of Chinese Indonesians is one topic that exposes the weaknesses of the ethno-nationalist framework most glaringly. In spite of the importance of religion in Indonesia, this topic is surprisingly under-researched in Chinese Indonesian Studies. Where religion is concerned, the preference has been for studying ostensibly “Chinese” religions such as Confucianism or religious practices in Indonesia’s *klenjengs* (or Chinese temples), which is revealing

of academic bias about what constitutes Chinese ethnicity and Chineseness. The chapters on religion in our volume seek to break new ground by investigating the much-neglected Chinese Christian and Chinese Muslim communities in the country. Since the dissemination of these world religions in any given community cannot be direct and immediate but requires further reinterpretation and transplantation of universalistic beliefs to suit local needs and references, the adoption of these faiths by Chinese Indonesians requires creative but also risky processes of rescaling both religious and ethnic identities. In his chapter on Java’s Chinese Christian communities, Chang-Yau Hoon (Chapter 8) delves into the long history of incompatibility between Christianity and Chinese religious practices which was transposed onto the Chinese Indonesian Christian community via trans-border Chinese missionary networks. While the problem of incompatibility of faiths plagues Chinese Christian communities, Chinese Indonesian Christians are “doubly alien” in the eyes of *pribumi* Indonesians, who perceive both Chineseness and Christianity as inauthentic to Indonesia. The two chapters on Java’s Chinese Muslim community present a useful counterpoint to Hoon’s chapter on Chinese Christians. Although Chinese Muslims are not marked by religious difference and are accepted as members of the same faith as the Indonesian Muslim majority, Wai-weng Hew’s (Chapter 9) and Syuan-yuan Chiou’s (Chapter 10) essays on this community do not portray a neat picture of religious communion. Just as Chinese Christians were compelled to navigate the question of fit between universalistic beliefs and Chinese traditions, Chinese Muslims also confront the question of whether there is a place for a more assertive ethnic Chinese identity in Islam. Unlike Chinese Christians whose “foreignness” to Indonesia appears unequivocal in popular imagination, the space for Chinese Muslims to showcase their Chineseness appears more flexible. Interestingly, while the performance of stereotypical Chineseness by some Chinese Muslim preachers for the purpose of “marketing” Islam was accomplished with great aplomb, as discussed by Wai-weng Hew, the hybridized practice of *Imlek Salat*, which is an Islamic prayer performed during Chinese New Year festivities, was highly controversial, as discussed by Syuan-yuan Chiou. This uneven, if surprising, reception of Chineseness amongst followers of Islam in Indonesia reminds us of Werbner’s injunction not to celebrate hybridity uncritically, because “in reality, hybridity is not essentially good, just as cultural essentialism is not intrinsically evil” (Werbner 2001: 149). We return to the issue of discrepant receptivity of Chineseness in the next section.

Ethnicity, Inc. in Indonesia: Chineseness as ethno-commodity

[To survive ...] cultures, like brands, must essentialize ... successful and sustainable cultures are those which brand best.

(Cited in Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 18)

There remains an outstanding issue that is in part connected to the globalizing economy which, in our view, demands greater attention from specialists in Chinese Indonesian Studies. This issue concerns the political economy of

Chinese as manifested in the commodification of Chineseness, especially what is widely perceived as common denominators of "Chinese culture" but also of more tangible emblems such as confiscated properties once owned by the Chinese community that is discussed by Yen-ling Tsai in Chapter 4. The commodification of Chineseness is easily one of the most striking phenomena concerning the state of Chineseness in Indonesia today, the implications of which remain under-investigated. Several chapters in *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed* address this issue directly, including Hew's analysis of the marketing and consumption of Chineseness amongst Indonesian Muslims, which he argues produces an "essentialistic Chineseness" suitable for consumption in "Pop Islam" (Chapter 9); Margaret Chan's study of the spirit-medium parade on the fifteenth day of the Chinese New Year festivities (known as the *Capgomeh* in Indonesia) in Singkawang in West Kalimantan, which, she argues, is about the performance of localized Chinese identity but also a prominent example of ethnic tourism (Chapter 7); Hoon's and Chiou's discussion of the contentiousness over brazen commercialization of Chinese New Year celebrations (known locally as *Imlek*) amongst Chinese Christians and Muslims (Chapters 8 and 10); Charlotte Setijadi's analysis of post-Suharto films, which demonstrates how the cosmopolitan sensitivities of independent Chinese Indonesian film-makers draw strength from but also cater to the market of international film festivals (Chapter 3); and finally, Yen-ling Tsai's investigation of the "political economy of transactions" (Ind.: *transaksi*) underpinning negotiations between Chinese communities and the government over confiscated school buildings in Medan and elsewhere in Indonesia (Chapter 4). The operative dynamics of this political economy, she argues, collude to put Chinese Indonesians in a persistent double-bind, as the most assimilated foreigners in the country.

In a remarkably lucid treatment of the commodification of ethnic cultures as a global phenomenon, the Comaroffs provide several sharp insights on the characteristics of the "ethno-commodity." The ethno-commodity, as they point out, defies classical economic theory because, *pace* Walter Benjamin, the mechanical reproduction of an explicitly cultural product or practice for the marketplace does not always cause either its aura or its value to dissipate. Neither is authenticity the most important element of a commodified culture. Drawing from a wide variety of examples from different parts of the world, the Comaroffs note that there are too many examples where a commodified cultural form or practice is wildly successful because of its marketability and accessibility and despite being made kitsch or far from authentic. Neither are producers and consumers of ethno-commodities wholly dupes of market forces, since more often than not, strategic and tactical concerns drive acts of production and consumption undertaken to ensure the survival and continuity of cultural traditions, even if a good measure of conscious invention is called for. What seems to be happening in the production and consumption of ethno-commodities is the discovery of new ways of reanimating and experiencing ethnic cultures beyond simply nostalgic recuperation or lamenting denigration and cultural loss (see also Gans 1979; Bankston and Henry 2000).

The rise of the ethno-commodity is indicative and part of a macro shift in commodity production from tangible goods and services to the intangibles: "to a greater extent than ever before in the past ... [commerce *sui generis*] involves the fulsome cultivation of highly charged sentiments, at once emotional and cognitive, to chosen lifestyles" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 28). As they succinctly put it, "just as culture is being commodified, so the commodity is being rendered explicitly cultural – and consequently, is comprehended as the generic source of sociality" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 28). However, these characteristics of the ethno-commodity, they argue, leave us with ambiguous effects which appear unaccounted for. In many parts of the world, especially so in impoverished areas where the ethnic industry provides the few means of sustainable livelihood or in areas where local ways are threatened with irrevocable extinction, the commodification of ethnic cultures can be empowering (see, for example, Bankston and Henry 2000). Yet this comes at the cost of reducing historically sedimented cultural knowledge and ways of life to highly objectified "essences" and/or formulaic marketing slogans. Another pertinent concern lies in the question of who the main beneficiaries are when ethnic cultures are turned into ethno-commodities. It is not always clear that economic benefits accrue only to members of an ethnic group which then raises simultaneously the question of criteria of membership, especially when foreign capital is involved. The many examples of foreign venture capital working in tandem with numerous Indian Nations to set up and manage casinos on reservation land in America as discussed by the Comaroffs in their book is one such case in point. Given overwhelming scholarly attention to the role of identity politics where the study of ethnicity is concerned, the Comaroffs suggest that the dynamics and effects concerning the production and consumption of ethno-commodities have not been given systematic theorization.

Some of what scholars have observed about the pervasive commodification of Chineseness echoes the Comaroffs' theoretical treatment of the ethno-commodity. Several commentators and researchers, including those whose essays are collected in this volume, agree that the commodification of Chineseness after May 1998 is nothing short of phenomenal. A good example is *Imlek* festivities and the ubiquitous *barongsai* or Chinese lion dance, which became immensely popular after President Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2001) abolished the 1967 ban on Chinese culture and language. This was followed by an announcement by his successor, President Megawati, in 2002, who declared that *Imlek* would be a national holiday beginning in the year 2003. *Imlek* celebrations in Indonesia have since taken place against the backdrop of euphoric recovery of all things "Chinese." Analysts such as Hoon have noted the divisive debates within and outside the Chinese Indonesian community surrounding *Imlek* celebrations and other signs of Chineseness such as Chinese ethnic clothing or the Chinese language (Hoon 2009). Several Chinese Indonesian intellectuals have expressed discomfort at the "excessiveness" of *Imlek* celebrations and overt displays of "Chinese" symbols and have urged fellow Chinese Indonesians to show greater sensitivity toward the culture of the dominant Indonesian majority. This criticism, as Hoon notes, is also articulated by Indonesians who are non-Chinese.

Yet these contentions signs of Chineseness, it seems, are here to stay, *particularly in their essentialized and commodified forms*. Aimee Dawis' evocative portrait of how she spent her first *Imlek* national holiday in 2003 in Jakarta reinforces this point:

[T]he whole of Jakarta was awash with vibrant colors of red and gold – not only in the Chinatown areas of Glodok and Gajah Mada but also in the posh shopping malls such as Plaza Senayan in south Jakarta and Plaza Indonesia in central Jakarta. Displays of cherubic dolls wearing traditional Chinese costumes appeared in the windows of Sogo department stores at Plaza Senayan, and red ribbons fluttered down from the high, domed ceilings of the mall ...

Other than public spaces such as malls and stores, "*Gong Xi Fa Cai*" or "Happy Chinese New Year" messages proliferated the mass media in Indonesia. The local newspapers also included articles on the meanings behind Chinese New Year. Many advertisements were also published to promote *barongsai* performances at housing complexes along with store advertisements offering discounts on the occasion of Chinese New Year. The Chinese characters *fu* for luck and *xi* for happiness were also used in many of these advertisements, which used the prosperous colors of red and yellow in the background.

(Dawis 2009: 184–85)

As Dawis emphasizes, this 2003 scene was impossible before 1998. Like Dawis, Purdey observes that it has now become commonplace for the Indonesian President, ministers and government officials to attend events organized by Chinese Indonesian groups where the *barongsai* is performed. In Makassar in October 2008, the military command overseeing South Sulawesi incorporated the *barongsai* into its celebration of the Indonesian Army sixty-third anniversary. Purdey writes that "not long ago it would have been unimaginable that the military (backers of Suharto's assimilationist policy) would incorporate a Chinese cultural display into its sacred nationalist rituals" (Purdey 2009).

Where the market has capitalized relentlessly on the attraction of ostentatious signifiers of Chineseness in Indonesia, it does appear to signal a greater degree of acceptance of Chinese ethnicity and Chinese Indonesians by the larger Indonesian society. The sight of non-Chinese Indonesians wearing ethnic Chinese costumes during *Imlek* celebrations in public spaces or learning to speak and write Mandarin Chinese does hint at the release of signifiers of Chineseness from manifestly biological markers of ethnic identity. In so doing, however, stereotypical notions of Chinese culture and Chineseness are reproduced, disseminated and consumed. Although potentially empowering and liberating for Chinese Indonesians, the effects of this marketplace liberation remain equivocal and uncertain. Chinese Indonesian commentators and activists remain suspicious of what they perceived to be "tokenism" given that Chinese Indonesians continue to confront discrimination on a practical and day-to-day basis even after regime change (Wibisono 2009; Tjhin 2009).

As our analytical frameworks strain to keep up with a rapidly changing and fluid situation, it is perhaps obvious that a singular preoccupation with identity politics plaguing Chinese Indonesians may obscure the production and consumption of Chineseness as an ethno-commodity in Indonesia. What does it mean to live an ethnic identity under the pervasive workings of the sign of the commodity? What are the effects, if any, on the production and consumption of Chineseness against one's constitution of ethnic subjectivity? How does this in turn relate to the experiences of ethnicity, not only for Chinese Indonesians, but for non-Chinese Indonesians as well in this day and age? In their own ways, some of the chapters in *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed* have grappled with these questions and arrived at their own conclusions. Setijadi observes that Chineseness has lost some of its allure for young Chinese Indonesians after more than a decade of openness. For this group, the ethno-commodity seems to have lost some of its aura. Hew observes in his chapter that although essentialistic ideas about Chineseness appear effective in "marketing Islam," Muslim Chinese preachers themselves appear to wear their Chinese identity very loosely, if at all, in their everyday lives. This makes it apposite to consider the following questions: what aspects of ethnic cultures are amenable or susceptible to commodification and under what circumstances does the commodification of ethnic culture occur or is nothing spared from the relentless force of encroaching neoliberal capitalism? How does commodification change how one experiences or performs one's ethnic identity? The issue of discrepant receptivity of Chineseness is also discussed pointedly by Chiou, who argues that public acceptance of *Imlek-Salat*, ironically a hybridized cultural practice, is limited by the possession of deep cultural capital of the dominant Islamic Indonesian majority which confined space for deliberate acts of hybridization by the Chinese Muslim community he studied.

The Comaroffs' insights into the global rise of the ethno-commodity form part of a larger analysis of what they see as a two-part dialectical process involving on one side widespread commodification of ethnic cultures and on the other an equally widespread phenomenon of the incorporation of ethnic groups as profit-making entities whose primary mission is to generate economic value out of selling their culture. Whichever way this process begins, the Comaroffs stress that there is a proclivity for the two processes to merge into one, giving rise to what they call "Ethnicity, Inc." Significantly, they argue that "the form" of the dialectic may be "broadly similar everywhere" although, substantively speaking, the dialectic works itself out differently, depending on such factors as the proportionate weight given to the two sides of the dialectic, state and institutional intervention, and whether the dialectical process is actually completed (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 140). The caveat is therefore that this dialectic is "less linear, less teleological, more capricious than either classical economics or critical theory might suggest" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 20). It may be useful to point out that although Chineseness as an ethno-commodity has become the latest "in-thing" in Indonesia after May 1998, Ethnicity, Inc. is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia at all. Rather, it had begun surfacing during the New Order period. The case of Ethnicity, Inc. in the commercialization of local culture in Bali is

perhaps one of the most striking examples anywhere in the world of how this dialectical process, as analyzed by the Comaroffs, came to a resolution.

Another prominent example of the workings of Ethnicity, Inc. is the New Order government's politically motivated creation of the "Beautiful Indonesia"-in-miniature" (Ind.: *Taman Mini "Indonesia Indah"*) theme park in the 1970s. Inspired by Disneyland no less, this initiative was personally spearheaded by President Suharto's wife. "*Taman Mini*," as it came to be called, is located on the outskirts of Jakarta. At the heart of the theme park, there is an 8.4-ha pond which contains miniature islands created to reflect Indonesia's territorial space. Cable cars providing visitors with an aerial view of the park overlook this pond. *Taman Mini* also houses recreational facilities, including a 1,000-room hotel and a shopping center of "international standards" (Pemberton 1994: 152; see also Acciaoli 1996) and is a popular venue for cultural performances and competitions. Central to the park's main attractions are customary houses (Ind.: *rumah adat*) and exhibition pavilions showcasing the carefully distilled and differentiated ethnic cultures of Indonesia's 26 provinces. Every regional pavilion displays items reflecting the area's dominant ethnic culture, particularly musical instruments, ethnic crafts and traditional wedding clothes for bride and bridegroom. John Pemberton writes that distilling Indonesia's ethnic diversity into 26 highly objectified architectural forms and formulaic "essences" abets a distinctive sensation of ethnic belonging. First, *Taman Mini* presents an already disciplined ethnic diversity captured through standardized forms. It is a "dedicated, unitary recuperation of difference within a representational framework of the local" (Pemberton 1994: 12). Second, the customary houses encourage the recuperation of ethnic origins denuded of any history or content. The inverted commas marking Indonesia in *Taman Mini*'s official name accentuate, in fact, the difference between the object of representation, that is, "Beautiful Indonesia," and the represented object, that is, Indonesian realities. Just as there is "Beautiful Indonesia," there are "Javanese," "Balinese," or "Malay" cultures in *Taman Mini*. In truth, the copy can never exhaust the real: "Beautiful Indonesia" and for that matter "Javanese," "Balinese," or "Malay" cultures do not exist apart from their status as "signs of" in a theme park. But, as Pemberton reports, the materiality of the customary houses all brought under a single gaze – cast in "a form so totally unconfusing, so endowed with an abstracted miniaturized clarity" (Pemberton 1994: 152) – introduces a degree of accessibility and completeness to experiences of ethnic cultures such that Indonesians prefer to go "home" to "Central Java" or "Bali" in "Beautiful Indonesia" to satisfy their longing for "home" while saving the trouble of actually going back. Pemberton's ethnography on *Taman Mini* illustrates the value of the ethno-commodity as a "generic source of sociality" possessing the capacity to reanimate experiences of ethnic identities in Indonesia (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 28).

The *Taman Mini* packaged ethno-commodity has more than accidental relevance for the commodification of Chineseness after May 1998. Illustrative of the New Order government's lack of recognition and tolerance of Chinese culture, *Taman Mini* does not showcase the cultures of communities who trace their descent beyond Indonesia, including not only the Chinese Indonesian community

but also the Arab Indonesian and Eurasian communities (Heryanto 2005; Kusno 2000). In 2002, in a symbolic gesture of reclaiming space within the nation, a Chinese Indonesian community organization, the "Indonesian Chinese Social Association" (Ind.: *Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia* or PSMTI for short) announced plans to build a museum complex in a Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park (Ind.: *Taman Budaya Tionghoa Indonesia*) in *Taman Mini*. In 2003, permission was given by the foundation managing *Taman Mini* (which was still owned by the Suharto family) for PSMTI to use two hectares of land to construct the museum park (see Figure 1.1).

According to Yumi Kitamura who has studied this project, PSMTI plans for the Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park do not demonstrate a departure from "Suharto's method of packaging ethnicity by wedding clothes, dances and the authority of *Taman Mini*. The Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park can thus be seen as a belated assimilation into the Suharto's regime's ethnicity policy" (Kitamura 2007). Tellingly, plans for the museum to narrate Chinese Indonesian history with the objective of nation-building in Indonesia do not match overall construction plans. In adopting the New Order/*Taman Mini* formula of representing ethnic cultures by casting cultural "essences" in the form of customary houses and pavilions, the most important buildings and structures in the park appear to display "China" more than any form of identity which is "Chinese Indonesian."



Figure 1.1 Pictorial representation of plan for the Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park in *Taman Mini*

The buildings are modeled after world-famous and easily recognizable Chinese architectural forms – in particular the Forbidden City in Beijing and the gates of the Eastern and Western Qing Tombs – which are not necessarily authentic to the history of the Chinese in Indonesia. Kitamura writes that these impressive buildings overshadow the only building that reflects the historic presence of the Chinese in the country. This is a replica of the *Candra Naya*, once located in Jakarta's Chinatown. Constructed in the late nineteenth century, it was home to Khouw Kim An, the last Chinese officer of Batavia during the Dutch colonial period. After the Japanese Occupation, the building housed important Chinese organizations such as the Sin Ming Hui and its school. *Candra Naya* was the site for the first Indonesian Badminton Association Congress in 1957 and it subsequently became the headquarters of the Indonesian Student Action Front (or “KAMI”) after 1965. The *Candra Naya* therefore holds significance not just for Chinese Indonesians but for Indonesian history as well. True to form, the building is an architectural hybrid, combining a blend of Dutch colonial Batavian architecture with southern Chinese styles (Kitamura 2007). To date however, a replica of *Candra Naya* has not materialized in the park, which remains under construction.

The challenges related to construction of the Chinese cultural park did not end with the politics of representation of what to include or exclude in plans for the museum park. Many decisions depend largely on the logic of capitalism, which encompasses contribution and distribution of resources and donors' agendas. During his visit to the site in late 2009, Hoon found that the construction was taking place at a slower pace than planned. At the time of the visit only these structures had been built: the gates, which resembled those at the Qing Tomb (Figure 1.2); a Chinatown-styled building; a Cheng Ho Museum; a Chinese gazebo; and a replica of the bridge featured in the Chinese legend, “The Butterfly Lover” (Figure 1.3). The delay was mainly caused by challenges associated with fund raising. Contrary to the assumption that the project would undoubtedly be financially supported by rich Chinese conglomerates who reside in Jakarta, they were among the least responsive in contributing to the cause, as they did not see any benefit or profit in such a project. Most donations came from middle-sized Chinese entrepreneurs outside Java, such as those in Riau, Bangka-Belitung, West Kalimantan, Manado and Medan, who were more assertive about an authentic Chinese identity and who took pride in the construction of patently “Chinese architecture” to represent Chineseness in Indonesia.

Writing about a different kind of building but extending the discussion on how ethnic cultures are materialized, Tsai's chapter presents a different political economy undergirding Chineseness, one that reconsiders our dominant understanding of the *Taman Mini*-sque ethno-commodity. Central to the story she tells are two school buildings in Medan built by the local Chinese community, which were lost to government confiscation after 1965. Like the Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park, these school buildings and the land they sit on are tangible markers of Chinese presence in Indonesia. The establishment of the museum park after 1998 and, more so, the efforts of the Medan Chinese community in attempting to reclaim their communal properties (with varying degrees of success) throughout the New

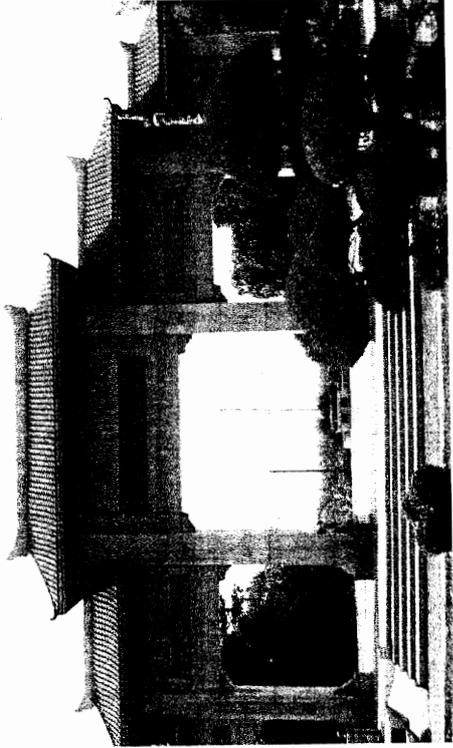


Figure 1.2 The gates of the park are styled after those of the Eastern and Western Qing tombs



Figure 1.3 The “Butterfly Lover” bridge and gazebo; the Cheng Ho Museum is in the background

Order period are efforts on the part of Chinese Indonesians to find a legitimate way to belong to Indonesia. However, instead of visible displays of an ethnic Chinese "essence," which the Chinese Indonesian Cultural Park is meant to embody, these comparatively nondescript communal buildings are less ethno-commodities in and by themselves than they are what Tsai calls "sites of racial formation." During the New Order period and after, negotiations between Chinese Indonesians and the authorities in Medan over the buildings exemplify how Chinese Indonesian communities have generally "transacted" with official authorities, which basically involves Chinese Indonesians paying for the provision of governmental services. Tsai argues, somewhat counter-intuitively, that these transactions, often interpreted as examples of discrimination against the Chinese, are revealing of a perverted assimilation into the Indonesian state (as opposed to the nation), which she understands as an alternative form of assimilation integrating Chinese Indonesians into the political economy of governance. Following Tsai, the buildings at the heart of these transactions in this political economy are not ethno-commodities in the usual sense of the word, that is, aesthetic and lifestyle pleasure products of the neoliberal age. Instead, the buildings perform the function of "ethno-commodities" in a different way because as their ownership changes hands, what gets transacted in the process are racial stereotypes of both kinds, of *non-pribumi* Chinese Indonesians who are rich and willing to pay because they are perceived as undeserving of Indonesian citizenship and of the racist *pribumi* dominated state as greedy and corrupt. In the end, whether it is the Comaroff's notion of old school buildings analyzed as "sites of racial formation," it is important to understand that ethno-commodities are not lifeless material objects. They do not simply mediate but also actively abet particular experiences of ethnicity and ethnic cultures in Indonesia.

A reassessment of the "Chinese Problem" in Indonesia is timely. Against a changing social and political landscape, any foray into the study of Chinese Indonesians may best be seen through a wider lens which encompasses research into areas beyond Java. For a more comprehensive understanding of this ethnic community, one needs to step into the thus far less traversed terrains of the Riau Islands, West Kalimantan and Medan, to name a few. With a wider lens of coverage, further assessments of the "Chinese Problem" may then turn to focus on the interplay of senses and spaces within identity formation.

Tangible manifestations of "Chineseness" may best be observed through architecture, festivals and traditions. Buildings, be they of the past or present, are symbolic of the façades of any prevailing forms of "Chineseness." Beyond being a symbolic landmark, the outward appearance of a building is representative of remnants of Chinese culture that Chinese Indonesians now seek to preserve and showcase. Festivals and the celebrations that come along with them, whether lavish or simple, indicate an outward pronouncement of Chinese identity. As discrimination against Chinese Indonesians persists, one must reassess the inherent problems that have plagued Chinese Indonesians for far too long. It is argued here that this entails moving beyond the *Masalah Cina* discourse and an ethno-nationalist framework. Admittedly, any movement away from such a framework is difficult. Nonetheless, a call to reassess the "Chinese Problem" is

made here, in order to attain a more meaningful appreciation of the nuances of identity politics that continue to be in force.

The larger question remains, "where do we go from here?" We argue that the starting point lies in drawing a clear distinction between the problems that have plagued Chinese Indonesians and the dominant discourse of *Masalah Cina*. One must certainly move beyond the adoption of *Masalah Cina* as a departure point, for it only serves to further buttress preconceived notions of the assimilationist discourse. It is by now clear that existing attempts toward embracing the motto of "Unity-in-Diversity" have been far from successful. We suggest that apart from making policy changes, adopting a different lens and framework in analyzing the population of Chinese Indonesians may be helpful before any effective policies are reviewed and introduced. In *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed*, we highlight the subtleties that sometimes go unnoticed in existing studies of Chinese Indonesians and it is hoped that further literature in this field will emerge using the lens of a broader and more all-encompassing framework, to better tackle the problems confronting Indonesian society. It is with such a hope that *Chinese Indonesians Reassessed* was birthed, and is thus presented.

Notes

- 1 Coppel mentions in a footnote that the title of an anti-Chinese tract published in the 1950s and authored by A.J. Muajja was "The Chinese Problem of Indonesia" (Coppel 1983: 183).
- 2 See Sai 2010 for a critique of a language-biased definition of the *Peranakan* Chinese. These figures are taken from the 2000 census. The figure for Riau excludes Bangkabelitung, which is 11.54%, while the figures for the two major cities in West Kalimantan, i.e. Pontianak and Singkawang, are 17.03% and 41.71% (see Suryadinata *et al.* 2003; Dawis 2009).

References

- Acciaoli, Greg (1996) "Pavilions and Posters: Showcasing Diversity and Development in Contemporary Indonesia," *Eikon* 1: 27–42.
- Adam, Ahmat (1995) *The Vernacular Press and the Rise of Indonesian Consciousness, 1855–1913* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University).
- Aguilar, F. V. (2001) "Citizenship, Inheritance, and the Indigenizing of 'Orang Chinese' in Indonesia," *Positons: East Asia Cultures Critique* 9(3): 501–33.
- Azra, Azyumardi (2004) *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulamā' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press).
- Bankston III, Carl L. and Jacques Henry (2000) "Spectacles of Ethnicity: Festivals and the Commodification of Ethnic Culture among Louisiana Cajuns," *Sociological Spectrum* 20(4): 377–407.
- Budianta, Melani (2007) "The Dragon Dance: Shifting Meanings of Chineseness in Indonesia," in Kathryn Robinson (ed.), *Asian and Pacific Cosmopolitans: Self and Subject in Motion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 169–89.
- Chim, James (2003) "Multiple Identities among the Returned Overseas Chinese in Hong Kong," in Michael Charney, Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Chee Kiong Tong (eds), *Chinese*

- Migrants Abroad: Cultural, Educational and Social Dimensions of the Chinese Diaspora* (Singapore: Singapore University Press), pp. 63–82.
- Chiroi, Daniel and Anthony Reid (eds) (1997) *Essential Outsiders: Chinese and Jews in the Modern Transformation of Southeast Asia and Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press).
- Chua, Christian (2008) *Chinese Big Business in Indonesia: The State of Capital* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon).
- Comaroff, John and Jean Comaroff (2009) *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Coppel, Charles (1983) *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press).
- (2002) *Studying Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia* (Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies).
- Davis, Aimee (2009) *The Chinese of Indonesia and their Search for Identity: The Relationship between Collective Memory and the Media* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press).
- Dieleman, Marleen, Juliette Koning and Peter Post (2011) "Chinese Indonesians and Regime Change: Alternative Perspectives," in Dieleman, Juliette Koning and Peter Post (eds), *Chinese Indonesians and Regime Change* (Leiden and Boston: Brill), pp. 3–22.
- Gans, Herbert J. (1979) "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups in America", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2(1): 1–20.
- Godley, Michael (1981) *The Mandarin-Capitalists from Nanyang: Overseas Chinese Enterprise in the Modernization of China, 1893–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- (1989) "The Sojourners: Returned Overseas Chinese in the PRC," *Pacific Affairs* 62(3): 330–52.
- Godley, Michael and Charles Coppel (1990) "The Pied Piper and the Prodigal Children: A Report on the Indonesian-Chinese Students Who Went to Mao's China," *Archipel* 39: 179–98.
- Heidhues, Mary (2003) *Goldiggers, Farmers, and Traders in the "Chinese Districts" of West Kalimantan, Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University).
- Heryanto, Ariel (1998) "Ethnic Identities and Erasure: Chinese Indonesians in Public Culture," in Joel Kahn (ed.), *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand* (Singapore: ISEAS), pp. 95–114.
- (1999) "Rape, Race and Reporting," in Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley and Damien Kingsbury (eds), *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash Asia Institute), pp. 299–334.
- (2005) *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon).
- Ho, Engsing (2006) *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).
- Hoon, Chang-Yau (2008) *Chinese Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Culture, Politics and Media* (Brighton, UK; Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press).
- (2009) "More Than a Cultural Celebration: The Politics of Chinese New Year in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 3: 90–105.
- Huang, Xiaojian (2005) *Guiguo huaqiao de lishi yu xianzhuang* [The Returned Overseas Chinese: Their Past and Present Situation] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Press for Social Sciences).
- Kitamura, Yumi (2007) "Museum as Representation of Ethnicity: The Construction of Chinese Indonesian Ethnic Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 8/9. Online. Available HTTP: <http://kyotoreviewsea.org/kitamuraeng.htm>, accessed 31 August 2011.
- Kusno, Abidin (2000) *Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia* (London: RoutledgeCurzon).
- Lindsey, Tim and Helen Pausacker (eds) (2005) *Chinese Indonesians: Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting* (Singapore: ISEAS).
- Laffan, Michael (2003) *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon).
- Lowenhaupt-Tsing, Anna (1993) *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Mackie, J.A.C. (2005) "How Many Chinese Indonesian?," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 41(1): 97–101.
- McKeown, Adam (2001) *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Ong, Aihwa and Donald Nonini (eds) (1997) *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon).
- Pemberton, John (1994) *On the Subject of "Java"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Purdy, Jemma (2003) "Reopening the Asimilasi vs. Integrasi Debate: Ethnic Chinese Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Asian Ethnicity* 4(3): 421–37.
- (2006) *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996–99* (Singapore: NUS Press).
- (2009) "A Common Destiny," *Inside Indonesia* 95. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-95-jan-mar-2009/a-common-destiny-11011168>, accessed 31 August 2011.
- Sai, Siew-Min (2010) "Pugilists from the Mountains: History, Memory and the Making of the Chinese-Educated Generation in Post-1998 Indonesia," *Indonesia* 89, April: 149–78.
- Sidel, John (2007) "From Russia with Love?," *Indonesia* 84, October: 161–72.
- Somers, Mary Frances Ann (1965) "Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia," unpublished PhD dissertation, Cornell University.
- Spyer, Patricia (2000) *The Memory of Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- Strassler, Karen (2008) "Cosmopolitan Visions: Ethnic Chinese and the Photographic Imagining of Indonesia in the Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Periods," *Journal of Asian Studies* 67(2): 395–432.
- Suryadinata, Leo, Evi Nurvidya Arifin and Aris Ananta (2003) *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: ISEAS).
- Tagliacozzo, Eric (2010) "Trans-regional Indonesia over One Thousand Years: The Art of the Long View," *Indonesia* 90, October: 1–13.
- Tan Chee Beng (2010) "Reterritorialization of a Balinese Chinese Community in Quanzhou, Fujian," *Modern Asian Studies* 44(3): 547–66.
- (2011) "Indonesian Chinese in Hong Kong: Re-migration, Re-establishment of Livelihood and Belonging," *Asian Ethnicity* 12(1): 101–19.
- Tay, Elaine (2006) "Discursive Violence on the Internet and the May 1998 Riots," in Charles Coppel (ed.), *Violent Conflicts in Indonesia: Analysis, Representation, Resolution* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon), pp. 58–71.
- Thung, Ju-lan (1998) "Identities in Flux: Young Chinese in Jakarta," unpublished PhD dissertation, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Vic.

- Tjhin, Christine Susanna (2009) "A New Political Animal," *Inside Indonesia* 95 (Jan.–March) Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-95-jan-mar-2009/a-new-political-animal-11011165>>, accessed 31 August 2011.
- Wang, Gangbai (2006) *Huo zai biechu: Xianggang yinni huaren koushu lishi* [Life is Elsewhere: Stories of the Indonesian Chinese in Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong).
- Werbner, Pamina (2001) "The Limits of Cultural Hybridity: On Ritual Monsters, Poetic Licence and Contested and Postcolonial Purifications," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7(1): 133–52.
- Wibisono, Christianto (2009) "Learning from Malaysia's Mistakes," *Inside Indonesia* 95 (Jan.–March) Online. Available HTTP: <<http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-95-jan-mar-2009/learning-from-malaysia-s-mistakes-11011166>>, accessed 31 August 2011.