# Chinese Indonesians' Quest for Identity: A Problem of an Ethnic Minority Integration

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## Introduction

The Chinese Indonesians had been a part of Indonesia for over fifty years since its independence in 1945 and had also been an integral part of the archipelago's society for centuries. But compared to their counterparts, other groups of Chinese origin in the neighboring Southeast Asian countries, the Chinese Indonesians have remained in a quandary about their identity and place in the nation they call home. In Malaysia they call and identify themselves as Chinese, in Thailand they have largely become or at least considered as Thai, but in Indonesia there is no certain answer.

William Skinner did a seminal work studying the Overseas Chinese societies during the middle of the twentieth century, a period of the birth of many of the Southeast Asian nations.[1] Skinner traced the development of what he termed the creolized Chinese societies in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and the assimilated Chinese societies in Thailand and Cambodia. In Indonesia, he concluded that despite losing much trace to their origins, the Chinese Indonesians "settled rather uncomfortably" into the "ethnic diversity that is modern Indonesia."[2]

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[1] William Skinner, "Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia," in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Sojourners and Settlers* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

[2] Ibid, 93.

Wang Gungwu, another prominent scholar on the subject of the overseas Chinese, when asked if the Chinese Indonesian case is unique, answered: "Indonesia is the largest country in Southeast Asia with a Chinese problem" and "for whatever understandable reasons, nowhere have more Overseas Chinese been killed or wounded, run away or been chased away, and been so insecure ... than in Indonesia."[1]

Wang predicted the failure of the Chinese Indonesians to press their claim for their own *suku* or ethnic group in Indonesia meant that they would fill a role in society which "is principally one of an instrument of economic growth without either political ambition or social respectability, and will remain in that role until they are totally assimilated and therefore, no longer Chinese."[2]

Wang is correct that the failure of the Chinese Indonesians to construct and assert their identity as one of the *suku bangsa* (ethnic groups) in multi-ethnic Indonesia had left them vulnerable and disconnected from the rest of Indonesia. Their separate identity had made them a frequent target of violence and discrimination. However, the second prediction he made that they would disappear as a group had not come true. Instead, after five decades through three main regimes[3], various political upheavals, extreme governmental policies, economic turns, cultural transformations, and violence directed at them, the Chinese Indonesians are far from gone.[4]

The Chinese Indonesians have persisted as a group; this paradox of the maintenance of a separate identity albeit an ambiguous one is the query this paper attempts to answer. The central question this paper tries to answer is the problem of integration of the ethnic Chinese Indonesians and the reasons behind regular discrimination and violence against the ethnic Chinese.

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[1] Wang Gungwu, "Are Chinese Indonesians Unique?" in J.A.C Mackie (ed.), *The Chinese in Indonesia* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii), 204.

[2] Ibid, 209.

[3] The three main regimes are colonial Dutch, Sukarno, and Suharto

[4] After the fall of Suharto in 1998, Chinese Indonesian civil organizations, media, and groups mushroomed. See Susan Giblin, "Civil Society Groups: Overcoming Stereotypes? Chinese Indonesian Civil Society Groups in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Asian Ethnicity* (2003): 353-368; Andreas Pandiangan. "Chinese Press after the New Order: Caught Between the Continuity of Idealism and the Logic of the Market," *Asian Ethnicity* (2003), 401-419.

There are two issues this paper addresses concerning the reason behind the Indonesian Chinese's lack of integration. The first is the relative resilience of Indonesian Chinese identity despite the challenges to maintain it.[5] The second aspect is the ambiguity of this identity, and the fact that regardless of the absence of clear cut consistent factors[6] to distinguish the Chinese Indonesians from the rest of Indonesia, they are singled out as a separate group and often become the black sheep when things go wrong in the country.

Chinese Indonesians had traditionally been and still is a very diverse group. Historically, dichotomies such as the *peranakan*[7] and *totok*[8], WNI (citizens) and WNA (foreign residents)[9], and integrationist[10] and assimilationists[11] have often been used. However, these dichotomies were merely simplifications and the tip of an iceberg of the tremendous diversity of the Indonesian Chinese; they came from different regions in China, lived and settled in different parts of Indonesia, had divergent heritages and backgrounds, adopted different religious beliefs, and developed and retained various cultures, customs, and tradition. In spite of much convergence after many years under different regimes, the contemporary Indonesian Chinese are still very much a heterogeneous group with different cultural orientations, and diverse economic conditions.

The main argument this paper puts forward is: the problem of integration and violence experienced by the Indonesian Chinese is first a function of identity, which then is a function of the commonly cited problems (causal factors) such as political machination, economic

[5] Government coercive assimilation policies, discrimination and aggression against them, and often absence of official or cultural institutions to sustain it.

[6] The Chinese Indonesians are a heterogeneous group as opposed to a coherent homogeneous group.

[7] Those who speak mainly in the vernacular language, had lived in Indonesia for more than one generation, and no longer follow their traditional customs and beliefs anymore.

[8] Those who are mostly the first generation in Indonesia, Chinese speaking, and very much in touch with their tradition, customs, and beliefs.

[9] This dichotomy is not the same as *peranakan* and *totok*. A WNI can be either *peranakan* and *totok*, and vice versa. The differentiation is also more than a legal distinction between citizens of Indonesia and non-citizens. Particularly as there had been extremely problematic definition of which Chinese can qualify as citizen (will be discussed more later).

[10] Integrationists are essentially those who want to retain their *Chineseness* while becoming part of Indonesia as one of the ethnicities.

[11] Assimilationists are mostly those who advocate the erasure of any traces of Chinese identity and become completely assimilated in Indonesia.

competition or jealousy, and religio-socio-cultural difference. Identity captures much of the underlying problems explained within each causal factor. In politics, it is the political identity, status, and loyalty (perceived or actual) to the nation that became a barrier to integration and acceptance by the rest of Indonesia. In terms of economy, class identity and supposed higher status and stereotypes of exclusiveness and illegitimate privileged status which differentiates them from their neighbors. And finally, religio-socio-cultural differences in part manifested itself into racial and religious identity as grounds for division, estrangement, and alienation of the Indonesian Chinese from the rest of Indonesia. In other words, the thesis of this paper is: *the problem of integration of the Indonesian Chinese is first a problem of identity before any political, economic, or religio-socio-cultural problem.* It is not the difference of the Indonesian Chinese identity from the rest of Indonesia per-se that is the problem, but the ambiguity of its definition and content. As stated before, the Indonesian Chinese had been and are heterogeneous: politically. Some are communal while others are nationalistic (towards Indonesia or China). Economically, some are conglomerates, while others had been living in dire poverty. In terms of religion and culture, some have assimilated with their respective societies (this includes speaking the vernacular language, inter-marriage, and conversion to Islam), while others remained distinct culturally. The crux of the problem is that the assorted political, class, religious, and racial identities had been manipulated and used to characterize the diverse Indonesian Chinese identity by various entities (political, economic, or religious groups or individuals) to serve their motives and purposes, often at the expense of the Indonesian Chinese and detrimental to their situation in the archipelago.

In his assessment of the group in the Minorities at Risk Project, Ted Gurr typologized the Indonesian Chinese as an ethnoclass[12]. Gurr noted that many enjoyed higher economic status but "have experienced social, cultural, and political discrimination and repression."[13] The last serious and major outbreak of violence against the ethnic Chinese was

[12] Gurr defined it as an "ethnically or culturally distinct peoples, usually descended from immigrants, most of whom occupy a distinct social and economic stratum or niche."

[13] Ted Gurr, "Assessment for Chinese in Indonesia," *Minorities At Risk Project*, 31 December 2003, accessed on 30 May 2007 http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=85003

in May 1998. More than 100,000 Chinese fled the country, which left Indonesia's economy in a dire state and 'raised serious questions about their present and future status'. "The brunt of the attacks was borne by poor and middle-class Chinese, many of whom did not have the financial resources to leave the country. The conditions which led to the 1998 riots have not changed significantly since that time, making further violence against the ethnic Chinese population possible in the future."[14]

**Violence and Lack of Integration: Whose Fault is it?**

There are contending views expounded by scholars with different perspectives and research traditions to the question of lack of integration and violence against the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The three main approaches within Comparative Politics - Rationalists, Culturalists, and Structuralists[15] - seem to find their representation in the various explanations proposed by the Chinese Indonesianist scholars.

Rationalists find explanation and outcome to events from an aggregation of strategic and calculated individual choices.[16] Rationalist explanation can be found in the use of economic variables and reasoning to answer the question. The scholars on this position use theories of economic competition and political manipulation to understand incidents of violence against Chinese Indonesians.[17] Some scholars of this orientation argued "economic competition and the middleman role of the Chinese in Indonesia as the single causal factor of anti-Chinese violence."[18] Concurring with these conclusions, Sommer-Heidhues pointed out the importance of economic competition, exploitation, and jealousy as central to the problem. Economic competition between

[14] Ibid.

[15] Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[16] Ibid, 30-32.

[17] For Rationalist arguments see, among others, Mary Somers Heidhues, "Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia," in *Modern Indonesia Project* (Cornell, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1964); The Siauw Giap, "The Group Conflict in a Plural Society, Anti Chinese Riots in Indonesia," *Revue du Sudest Asiatique* 3 (1966): 185-217; W.F. Wertheim, *East-West Parallels*, (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1964); W.F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition. A Study of Social Change* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve Publishers, 1969).

[18] Arguments by Wertheim and The Siau Giap quoted in Jemma Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996-1999* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 28.

*pribumi* (native/indigenous) entrepreneurs against Chinese businesses was among the commonly cited reasons as source of antagonism. The middleman role was the use of the Chinese as business managers by different power-holders as a buffer between the majority population and the authoritarian governments. Social-economic disparity was another reason in rationalist terms, alluding to the resentment against the largely perceived wealthier Indonesian Chinese, leading to seemingly spontaneous riots and violence against them.

Structuralists look into state-society relations focusing on linkages, relations, and interaction among groups and actors within an institutional context.[19] Structural arguments in this matter find answers within political issues and governmental policies. Elite control and the maintenance of power became driving factors behind continued segregation and discrimination against Chinese Indonesians.[20] As an example, Takashi Shiraishi offered the explanation that the Netherland Indies government used elite control and political manipulation of social sentiment to promote anti-Sinicism and create race-based divisions in order to undermine the emerging nationalist sentiment.[21] In the New Order, William Liddle argued that Suharto used the Chinese Indonesians as a buffer. A patronage relationship was set up between the regime and the Chinese business community, which thrived economically but was politically marginalized. This set-up ensured the survival of the regime as the economic strength was held by those who could not challenge their supremacy.

Culturalists are more nuanced in their interpretation, and factor broader variables such as religion, culture, and tradition into their calculations. Culture served as a "system of meaning and basis of social and political identity that affects how people line up and act on a wide range of matters."[22] Cultural explanations are mainly looking at differ-

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[19] Lichbach and Zuckerman. Comparative Politics, 247-279.

[20] For Structuralist arguments see, among others, Christian Chua, "Defining Indonesian Chineseness Under the New Order," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 34 no. 4; Takashi Shiraishi, "Anti-Sinicism in Java's New Order," in Anthony Reid and Daniel Chirot (eds.), *Essential Outsiders* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 187-207; William Liddle, "Coercion, Co-optation, and the Management of Ethnic Relations in Indonesia," in Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly, *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

[21] Purdey, "Anti Chinese", 28.

[22] Lichbach and Zuckerman, *Comparative Politics*, 42-60.

ences in religion and tradition between the ethnic Chinese and the majority Muslim Indonesians, finding the problem to be rooted in ethnic and racial difference and socio-cultural[23] separateness.[24] A proposition in this line denoted that "Islam has in the past been a substantial barrier to the assimilation of the Chinese in Indonesia since few of them were willing to become Muslim – in contrast to the situation in Buddhist countries like Thailand, where the Chinese embraced Theravada Buddhism much more readily and in large numbers.[25] Somers-Hedhues also observed that in addition to economic competition, anti-Chinese sentiment had been largely fueled by religion and tribalism.[26]

The three main common approaches in explaining the problem of Chinese Indonesians are not mutually exclusive and often are very much interrelated and entangled to each other. Each has value in accounting for an aspect of the problem but somehow seem inadequate to explain why the problem still persists after so many decades through different forms of governments, changing economic situations, and variations of cultural differences.

In addition to the three variables implicitly derived from the three main strains of research schools; economy, politics/ government policy, and culture/religion, this paper proposes a fourth variable: identity. The explanations using each of the three variables all contribute in illuminating and explaining part of the problem of integration and violence against the Indonesian Chinese. However, they cannot individually account for the problem across time and place.[27] Furthermore, even all three variables combined together as an explanation still falls short. It may capture different reasons for the exclusion and violence against the Chinese Indonesians in each period at particular locations,

[23] Term denoted by Wang Gungwu, "Are Chinese Indonesians Unique?", 204.

[24] For elements of the Culturalist approach see Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia;* G.W. Skinner, "Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas; a Comparison of Thailand and Java," *Journal of the South Seas Society* (1960); or arguments proposed by Indonesian assimilation proponents such as Jusuf Hamka and Junus Jahja.

[25] William Skinner's "Change and Persistence" quoted in J.A.C Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," in *The Chinese in Indonesia*, ed. J.A.C Mackie (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii), 81.

[26] Somer-Heidhues, "Peranakan Chinese Politics."

[27] Chinese Indonesians, through different periods and geographic areas, have different characteristics. For example in Tangerang there are many poor Chinese communities, yet they still become targets. Across time too the Chinese had been seen adopting new religions such as Christianity and Islam, yet remain excluded.

but fails to explain why the Chinese as a single group among other particular classes, religious or political identities, are pulled out as a target.

In essence with the addition of the fourth variable, this paper tried to unfold and establish two additional aspects of the problem: (1) that identity of the group persists, and (2) that identity had often been constructed from the outside by actors who are motivated by personal or group gain. The relative resilience of identity of the Chinese Indonesians as a group had to do with more than any cultural, communal or familial attachments. Despite the heterogeneity of the group and many disadvantages and challenges the ethnic Chinese experienced, why did the various ethnic Chinese groups' identity persisted and moreover, as a single ethnic entity?

This ambiguous identity as part of a single Chinese group persisted even among those who attempt to shed the identity[28], do not have many Chinese characteristics or associations anymore[29], and could perhaps attempt to "buy" a new identity. As an example, the economic elite who were wealthy or close to power under the Suharto regime could have bought their way to shedding their Chinese identity[30], yet many prominent businessmen even retained their Chinese names.[31] The assimilationist groups who advocated complete absorption to Indonesia by shedding any Chinese related characteristics and converting to Islam remained identified as Chinese. Another example would be the Chinese communities that had for generations lived in Tangerang, and other areas[32]. They had no distinguishing features compared to their 'native' neighbors and lived in impoverished conditions, yet remain as part of the Chinese group. They were also victims of violence and discrimination although they were neither rich, nor did they possess physical or cultural characteristics of the 'stereotypical' Chinese.

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[28] The assimilation proponents, many of whom converted to Islam, grew beards and inter-married.

[29] The "Cina Benteng" in Tangerang has lost many cultural and even physical characteristics of the Chinese.

[30] They could have bought legal identification and recognition as 'pribumi' (native).

[31] Almost all prominent Chinese businessmen retained their Chinese names: Lim Sioe Liong, The Ning King, Lie Mo Tie (Mochtar Riady), etc.

[32] Purdey, "Anti Chinese."

## Explaining the Problem of Integration of the Indonesian Chinese: The Framework

In this section, the variables will be discussed in more detail. An explanatory model is constructed here with the *lack of integration of the Chinese Indonesians* as the main dependent variable being explained. This dependent variable is operationalized and measured by incidents of discrimination and violence directed against the Chinese Indonesians as a group. The three independent variables as discussed before are politics/government policy, economy, and religion/culture.

*Politics/Government policy* is measured by looking into any written or implicit discriminative policies set up by the government. In addition to clear policies that segregate and discriminate, more nuanced political issues that may reflect elite struggle and efforts to maintain power by using the Chinese Indonesians either as scapegoat or buffer will be observed. Hence the rather ambiguous variable name: politics and government policy.

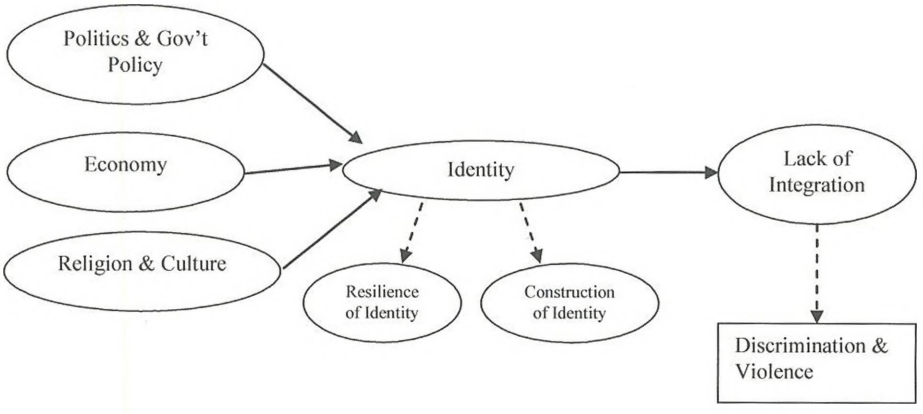
The *Economy* variable would look into economic issues that translated into isolation and hostility against the Chinese Indonesians. It is observed if economic competition or envy were dominant issues and reasons behind violent incidents against the Chinese during a particular period. This should also capture differences, if any, of economic conditions of Chinese communities that were victims of violence during the period.

The third variable is also named a little ambiguously as *religion/culture*. Although religion is often considered the prominent issue highlighting the difference between the ethnic Chinese and the rest of Indonesia, as a culturalist variable it would be more valuable to also capture differences of tradition, values, and perception. In essence, it should capture whether subjective interpretations of cultural differences (which is highlighted by religion supported by other factors) happens to be the dominant issue during a certain period and place.

The fourth variable that this paper introduces is *Identity*. It is placed as an intervening variable in the model to comprehensively illustrate the generalization of discrimination and violence against the ethnic Chinese despite the differences among them, and to show how the ethnic Chinese identity had been constructed by outside forces which perpetuated stereotypes towards them and often became a

'self-fulfilling prophecy'. The lack of integration and discrimination against the ethnic Chinese is arguably consistent and uniform despite their internal differences. As indicated before, identity as a variable here consists of two dimensions: the resilience of this identity (despite the ambiguity of what it consists) and second the manipulation of this identity by external actors with various ulterior motives.

**Figure 1. Identity as a Variable**




The operationalization of *identity* in this study borrows from Abdelal, Johnston, Herrera & McDermott's work: "Identity as a Variable".[33] In this collaborative work the authors proposed an analytic framework for identity that addressed the conceptual and coordination problems in identity literature.[34] They put forward two dimensions to collective identity as a social category. The first was *content* which "describes the meaning of a collective identity" and the second was *contestation* which "refers to the degree of agreement within a group over the content of shared category."[35] It was claimed that this framework of identity will allow a comparison between types of identity (ethnic, national, religious, class, gender etc). This framework or operational definition of identity may be rather vague and not particularly strong in distinguishing between different types of identity. Nevertheless, its

[33] Rawi Abdelal, Alastair Iain Johnston, et al. "Identity as a Variable," *Perspectives in Politics* Vol. 4(4) (2006).
[34] Ibid, 2.
[35] Ibid, 8.

broadness or ambiguity works well for the purposes of this paper, as it became a modular definition applicable to the varying contents of the Indonesian Chinese identity in different regimes, time, and place that was based upon different types of identity (class, economy, racial, religious etc).

Based on this general definition of identity, this paper attempts to illustrate politics, economy and religion, the three casual factors which were commonly used to explain the problem, have also formed and defined the *content* of the ethnic Chinese identity from the outside in. The norms, goals, purposes, views and beliefs of members of the group from the inside out have often become irrelevant or to a certain extent non-existent. This happened for two reasons; (1) the heterogeneity of the group, and (2) the outside forces that shaped them, often through the direct manipulation by elites or other societal figures with ulterior motives to benefit themselves by constructing a caricature of the ethnic Chinese. On the other hand, the element of *contestation* that was supposed to occur from within the ethnic Chinese group was absent.[36]

The reason *identity* was placed as the intervening variable in the model is because one or more of the independent variables combined would not explain the lack of integration and persistence of Chinese Indonesian group identity as a whole. Without the resilience of identity shaped by the three factors, only certain incidents of violence against the ethnic Chinese can be explained by one or more of the independent variables. The intervening variable here helps to capture all the elements contributing to the problem of integration and violence against the different ethnic Chinese groups across periods and geographical areas.

The next section will be the case study assessing the role of all the variables in each of the three major periods of Indonesian history: the Colonial Period, Indonesia under Dutch and Japanese occupation, the Independence and Old Order Period (1945-1965), and the New Order regime (1966-1998).

[36] There was contestation between integrationist and assimilationist groups during the Sukarno period, but it was relatively short lived and any significant outcome was further precluded when the army took over

## The Colonial Period (late 19th Century – 1945)

*"They were too Indonesian to be Chinese but too Chinese to be Indonesian."*[37]

*"Indies Chinese were prevented from assimilating to either the indigenous society they lived in or to the Dutch colonial."*[38]

The Colonial era, in particular the early 1900s was the formative period in shaping both the identity of the Indies Chinese and all the problems that followed because of the ambiguity, incoherence, and contradiction in the content of this identity. The beginning of the 20th century marked by an emerging sense of nationalism in Southeast Asia placed the Chinese in Indonesia in a knotty and thorny situation in the middle of crossfire and crosscurrents of various domestic and international political turmoil and disturbance. The Indies Chinese's ambiguous position and identity became a source or tool for various political purposes by the Dutch colonials, Japanese occupiers, and Indonesian Republicans. As a result the group had never had the chance to internally define their position in the archipelago and was further divided among those who were supportive of the New Indonesian Republic, Dutch colonials, and the Chinese Republic.

*Politics / Government Policy*

The policies of the colonial Dutch were the earliest governmental policies that segregated the Chinese Indonesians from the rest of the society. The Dutch separatist policies structured the colonial society in the Indies into three broad categories. The Europeans were the top of the strata, next were the Foreign Orientals (Vreemde Oosterlingen, generally the Chinese), and last were the indigenous Indonesians (Inlanders).[39] These groups were kept from interaction and influence to each other and were directed to maintain their dress and customs. An

[37] This is in reference to the *peranakan* Chinese during the Colonial period. Quoted from: Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917-1942* (Singapore; Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore, 1976), 4.

[38] The quote indicates the ambiguity and unsettling position of the Chinese since the colonial era. Second quote from: J.A.C Mackie, "A Preliminary Survey," in *The Chinese in Indonesia*, ed. J.A.C Mackie (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii), 7

[39] Suryadinata, "Peranakan Chinese Politics 1917-42", 9.

example was the prohibition of cutting off the pigtail[40]. A discriminative legal system also was set in place such as the Zoning and Pass Systems (Wijkenstelsel and Passenstelsel), where the Chinese were kept within restricted areas and were required to get special permits when traveling outside of the designated areas.[41]

These regulations were mainly due to the Dutch motivation to maintain and consolidate its power in the archipelago with the strategy known as *'Devide-et-Impera'*.[42] The resulting policies were what Wertheim called the 'colonial caste structure' in which the Indies Chinese were "prevented from assimilating to either the indigenous society they lived in or to the Dutch colonials."[43] Colonial policies such as the Agrarian Law of 1870 which restricted land ownership to the 'natives' prevented the Chinese from ever taking root where they lived. The Indies Chinese were further confined through the Dutch system of pass and residential restrictions which required them to obtain passes to travel outside of their home town, and were required to live in specified quarters of the towns mainly in urban areas.[44] Takashi Shiraishi found that splits and antagonisms between the Chinese Indonesians and the indigenous communities particularly by 1911 were the result of manipulation by the Dutch government. He stated that "the rise of modern politics provided an opportunity for the Dutch Indies state to adopt a new strategy. It signified the 'awakening' of the Chinese as Chinese and the 'natives' as natives... It was no longer necessary to require the Chinese and natives to wear their own distinctive dress..."[45] This denotation of a new strategy by Shiraishi inferred that the Dutch no longer needed to accentuate differences by requirements to wear traditional clothing, but they simply needed to exacerbate the cleavages using the tide of intense nationalistic feelings (Chinese nationalism against Indonesian nationalism) that began at the beginning of the 20th century.

[40] Until 1911. See Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] The strategy of Divide and Conquer means to play different groups against each other to control them.

[43] J.A.C Mackie, "A Preliminary Survey", in *The Chinese in Indonesia*, ed. J.A.C Mackie (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii), 7-14.

[44] Ibid, 4-5.

[45] Shiraishi, "Anti-Sinicism", 205. Quoted from Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 6.

The Japanese occupation further entangled the condition of the Indies Chinese. During the Japanese invasion against the archipelago, in the midst of the confusion some violence against the Indies Chinese took place but was soon contained by the Japanese occupiers who did not want any disruption to the economy.[46] The Japanese authorities interned hundreds of Chinese political leaders, silenced the Indies Chinese press and banned all of its political organizations. But on the other hand a resinification of many *peranakan* was made possible when they were required to use and write their names in Chinese characters to comply with Japanese regulations. The Japanese authorities closed various Chinese associations and grouped all organizations together in a single federation, the Hua Chiao Tsung Hui (HCTH) in July 1942, allowing them to control the Indies Chinese.[47] This created a fabricated and inauthentic single unified group of Indies Chinese without ever resolving the ambiguity and problematic content of the identity.

*Economy*

In line with its political policies, the Dutch implemented divisions of labor that placed the Chinese in an intermediate position (buffer) between the European rulers and the great mass of their Indonesian subjects. The Indies Chinese were directed to particular occupations such as miners, pawnshop operators, salt monopoly, and the opium trade on behalf of the Dutch government.[48] The Chinese in Java were mostly involved in trade with very few involved in agriculture (result of the 1870 Land law), although outside Java in areas such as Padang, Bangka, Belitung, West Kalimantan, Riau, and East Sumatra the occupations were somewhat more diversified.[49] In general, the average Chinese was wealthier than the average indigenous Indonesian. Although the disparity was larger in Java than outside of it, the gap still existed.[50]

[46] Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia", 38.
[47] Ibid, 39.
[48] Mackie, "A Preliminary Survey", 4.
[49] Ibid, 7-8.
[50] Based on figures of 1920 and 1930 survey in Mackie, "A Preliminary Survey", 9.

A characteristic business association in this period was called the *kongsi*[51], which was originally Chinese economic organization.[52] *Kongsi* had become a word that until today referred as 'sharing'. At one time, ethnically mixed *kongsis* emerged in the early 1900s which were loose economic association between the *pribumis* and the Chinese that indicated the intentions of working together and sharing of wealth and resources. The Dutch colonials however were alarmed and saw this development as a "dangerous idea."[53] Dangerous, as prospective union and cooperation between different ethnic groups may pose as a challenge to the Dutch rulers. "It was the break up of one such ethnically mixed *kongsi*, the Kong Sing in Surakarta in 1911, to which historians attribute the origins of the first organized popular nationalist movement in Indonesia, *Sarekat Islam.*"[54] Elements of economic competition resulted in violent clashes with the Chinese when the Javanese members split from Kong Sing in 1911.[55]

The *Sarekat Islam* was originally an Islamic commercial union (*Sarekat Dagang Islam*-Islamic Trade Union), which was initially intended as a force for Muslim businessmen to counteract the commercial power of the Chinese.[56] Economic competition between the *pribumi* and the *Chinese* intensified as *santri*[57] Muslim businessmen began to get involved in areas of trade that were initially loathed.[58] An example of this was the *kretek* cigarette industry in Kudus in which the competition led to a racial conflict there in 1918.[59] Wertheim singled out economic competition as the "root of tension between the Chinese and the Indonesians."[60]

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[51] Chinese/Hokkien word for "association," variously described as chambers of commerce, associations and unions. See Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 6.

[52] For more detail on the *kongsi*, see: Mary Somers Heidhues, *Golddiggers, Farmers and Traders* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2003).

[53] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 6

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Charles Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1983), 22-23.

[57] More orthodox Muslims, as opposed to *Abangan* who practice more syncretic versions of Islam. A term arguable coined by Geertz. For more on this distinction see: Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1976).

[58] Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 22.

[59] For more on this riot see: Benny Setiono, *Tionghoa Dalam Pusaran Politik* (Jakarta: Elkasa, 2002), 375-381; Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java 1917-1942* (Singapore; Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Singapore, 1976), 40-41.

[60] W.F. Wertheim, *East-West Parallels*, (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1964), 78. Quoted in Leo Suryadinata, *Peranakan Chinese*, 22.

The core of the tension however, was far to complicated to attribute to economic competition alone. As discussed earlier on, political factors played a huge role, and furthermore the issue of racial and religious antagonism could not be dismissed.

*Religion / Culture*

The enmity against the Indies Chinese was not confined to reasons of economic competition. Charles Coppel noted that "their identification in the minds of many Muslims as alien, pork-eating infidels has aroused antagonism far beyond the ranks of the businessmen."[61] Even among the military ranks and nationalist circles, "anti-Chinese prejudice seems more often to take a political and sometimes a cultural form."[62] The Chinese language and culture had not been accepted as part of the diverse Indonesian national concept.[63] This had partly been because of the identification of the Indies Chinese with atheism or repulsive cultural attitudes by certain Muslim groups and lack of loyalty by the right-wing elements in Indonesian politics.

The establishment of the *Sarekat Islam* (SI) in 1912 and economic competition and rift with the Chinese was marked along religious and cultural lines. Kees van Dijk saw this as a time when "slumbering anti-Chinese feelings manifested themselves in a concrete form all over Java for the first time in the twentieth century. The founding of the *Sarekat Islam* was a consequence as well as a contributing factor to this".[64] The mass violence against the Chinese in Kudus in 1918 carried out by SI members with explicit Islamic identification was described by Purdey as a result of the establishment of "racialised structures."[65] These socio-cultural antagonisms were also influenced by the cultural revival or reawakening of each group where elements of intense Islamic feelings, Indonesian nationalism, and Chinese nationalism clashed.

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[61] Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 28.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Van Dijk, "The good, the bad and the ugly," in *Roots of Violence in Indonesia*, ed. Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), 286. Quoted from Jemma Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 6.
[65] Ibid, 7.

*Identity Resilience*

The resilience of identity of the Indies Chinese Indonesian as a group during this period was solidified with the advent of nationalism throughout the world in particular Asia.[66] The creation of nation-states such as China in 1911[67] provided a unifying force and an external identification for the diverse and communal Chinese in the Dutch Indies to view themselves as part of a larger entity.[68] This increasing consciousness of their Chineseness was indicated by the creations of organizations such as Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK: an organization to promote Pan-Chinese ideals established in 1900), Chung Hwa Hui (Chinese Association formed in 1928), *Partai Tionghoa Indonesia* (Indonesian Chinese Party: in 1932), and publications of Chinese and Malay language press catering to the self-conscious Chinese community such as the daily Sin Po, Keng Po, Siang Po, and Pelita Tionghoa.[69] Even among the *peranakan* Chinese groups who were "considerably Westernized, Dutch-educated and Dutch-speaking, many of them held strongly to traditional *peranakan* religious practices and advocated the teaching of Chinese language, history and geography."[70]

This shift from communalism to a more integrated view among the Chinese as a group had two potential implications: (1) a direction or the tendency of the integrated group to identify with the Chinese Republic instead of Indonesia, (2) or potentially becoming an internally coherent ethnic group of Chinese ancestry that will become one of the ethnicities in the multi-ethnic Indonesia.[71]

*Identity Construction*

The latter potential development as a group was prevented by the policy of divide-and-conquer by the Dutch colonials. At one time there had been the possibility of a "Chinese community that would embrace

[66] Anderson's Fourth Wave of Nationalism. See:Benedict O.G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, rev. ed.*, (London: Verso, 1991).

[67] Founding of the Chinese Republic by Sun Yat Sen and advent of Chinese Nationalism

[68] Thank you to Prof. James Ockey for pointing this out.

[69] Charles Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia" in *The Chinese in Indonesia*, ed. J.A.C Mackie (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii), 26-28, 38.

[70] Ibid, 33.

[71] A comparable example would be the African-Americans as a racial group in the multi-racial America, instead of Black Americans of origins in different parts of the African continent.

all speech groups and *totok* and *peranakan* alike."[72] The Dutch government responded to this 'awakening' by taking measures to maintain a sense of difference among the Indies Chinese preventing them from achieving political unity. The policies taken by the Dutch reflected this divide and rule policy; some Chinese were allowed to qualify for European legal status[73], a new type of primary school (HCS-Hollands Chineesche Scholen) conducted in Dutch was set up exclusively for certain Chinese children in 1908.[74] These policies precluded the Indies Chinese from shaping and forming the content of their identity as a group in Indonesia. The Dutch performed a "double" divide and rule strategy, first the Indies Chinese were: prevented from becoming a unified ethnic group; second, they were paradoxically treated as a whole to be separate from the indigenous Indonesians, preventing their assimilation into the local respective communities where they lived. The provision of (separate) exclusive Dutch primary schools separate from the Indonesians, distinction between 'Foreign Orientals' and 'natives', and the separate representation by race in the *Volksraad* (People Council) "all steered the politics of the Chinese in communal direction."[75] This became a legacy that has somehow continued until today[76], which resulted in a lack of internal cohesion but also "a view among the Indies Chinese that communal political action was the only logical course, feeling as a distinctive group with group interests to defend".[77]

The Japanese, on the other hand, for a short period reversed this fracturing of the Indies Chinese by the Dutch by establishing the Indies Chinese umbrella party under their control (HCTH). This however did not allow a shaping of the content of the Indies Chinese among themselves either, as the Japanese simply wanted control by hand picking leaders and officers for the organization, never resolving the inter-

[72] Ibid, 26.

[73] This new regulation accentuated the divide of the Indies Chinese community, many *peranakan* were directed to become European oriented but others like the *totok* were excluded.

[74] Ibid, 26-27.

[75] Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 37.

[76] Among the older ethnic Chinese generations we can see very diverse orientations: Dutch speaking and educated, Chinese speaking and educated, Malay/vernacular speaking, and those in between.

[77] The Chinese with Dutch schooling were further differentiated as "Foreign Orientals" as opposed to the "Natives." see Ibid, 37.

nal issues of the Indies Chinese. In order to maintain power and for economic reasons "the Japanese treated the Indies Chinese, whether *totok* or *peranakan*, as a unified group, separate from the indigenous Indonesians."[78] The Japanese thus magnified the crack and cleavage and further accentuated the separateness of the Indies Chinese from the rest of Indonesia.

## Independence and the Old Order Period (1945-1965)

*"The position of the Chinese in Indonesia was 'between the hammer and the anvil'"*[79]

The infant Republic of Indonesia had glimmers of hope for the ethnic Chinese to be legitimate sons and participants of the Nation. President Sukarno referred to the ethnic Chinese as a *suku bangsa* (one of the nation's ethnicities) and incorporated Chinese Indonesians in his government.[80] In his speech for the opening of the National Congress of Baperki[81], he stated that in nation building, Indonesia comprises of many ethnic groups and rejected even the term ethnic minority to refer to the smaller groups.[82] But the challenges were enormous and much hope was shattered when the three sources of problems (political, economic, and cultural) continued to complicate the formation and definition of ethnic Chinese identity in the new Republic.

### *Political / Government Policy*

The crux of the predicament for the Chinese Indonesians began with the dual nationality status problem which was a legacy of conflicting governmental policies of the Dutch and Chinese government from the previous period. It began with the Manchu government citizenship law in 1909 based on the *jus sanguinis* principle which regarded every child of a Chinese father or mother as a citizen of China regardless of birth place. The Dutch, previously identifying the ethnic Chinese as

[78] Ibid, 40.

[79] Expressed by Loa Sek Hie, a Chinese Indonesian leader during the period, quoted in Ibid, 42.

[80] Leo Suryadinata, *Political Thinking of the Indonesian Chinese*, 2nd ed (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1997), 8.

[81] The ethnic Chinese integrationist social political group during the period.

[82] Setiono, *Tionghoa Dalam Pusaran Politik*, 724.

'Foreign Orientals', countered with a 1910 nationality law based on the *jus soli* principle where all persons born in the colony were then considered as citizens or subjects of the colony.[83] Although resolved in 1960 with the Sino-Indonesian Treaty abolishing dual nationality[84], this dual citizenship issue solidified suspicion and reinforced perceptions and stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese as opportunists playing on both sides of the fence.

The early stage of the Republic developed into an exceptionally complicated and tumultuous period for the ethnic Chinese in finding their position in the newly born nation. The Republic established the citizenship law in 1946 automatically conferring Indonesian citizenship to ethnic Chinese born in the archipelago who had lived for at least five years there. Ethnic Chinese oriented towards China were allowed to reject Indonesian citizenship. The Republican government for the most part showed acceptance and desire to recruit ethnic Chinese support, but the efforts were hindered and handicapped by its inability to control nationalist irregular units that 'were prone to harass Chinese communities'.[85]

The Dutch government, which still attempted to regain control of its lost colony further muddled and complicated the issue. It used this suspicion against the Chinese to undermine the legitimacy of the nationalist government. The ethnic Chinese massacre from 1946-1948 can partly be attributed to this strategy. The Dutch military (NICA) while gaining the upper hand against the Indonesian military made calculated moves. In areas populated by the ethnic Chinese they often made prior announcements before advancing, intentionally giving ample time for the unorganized Indonesian militia to burn and loot before their retreat.[86] This burning and looting was exacerbated by the official 'scorched earth' policy of the Indonesian military which hurt the Chinese more and often went along with racial overtones particularly against the Chinese.[87] The worst attacks on the Chinese were in Tangerang in

[83] Mackie, "A Preliminary Survey," 9.
[84] With 65% (official sources) and 70-90 %(Chinese leaders) of the ethnic Chinese who opted in favor of Indonesian citizenship. See Ibid, 11.
[85] Coppel, "Pattern of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 41.
[86] Setiono, *Tionghoa Dalam Pusaran Politik*, Chapter 31.
[87] Coppel, "Pattern of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 41.

May and June 1946, despite the fact that the ethnic Chinese there[88] had lived and mingled with the local population for a long time, are physically indistinguishable, spoke Malay with the local dialect and tone, and had been for generations poor farmers or laborers without stark economic contrast with their neighbors. The only distinguishing factor was the Chinese traditional beliefs (Taoism or Confucianism) that they still retained to some extent.[89] It was "in the midst of a vacuum by the advancing Dutch forces and retreating revolutionaries"[90] that these attacks against the ethnic Chinese took place.

The Dutch government made the most of these anti-Chinese incidents in its propaganda while feigning a strategy to appeal to the minority groups to undermine the legitimacy and isolate the Republic.[91] The incidences of violence including burning, raping and killings "disillusioned even some of the most vocal sympathizers of the Republic among the Chinese".[92] Some of the ethnic Chinese were further cornered into seeking protection from the Dutch government and compelled to cooperate. A defense organization called the *Pao An Tui* suggested by the Chinese consul in Jakarta was set up to protect Chinese lives and property. These developments further reinforced the suspicion and resentment against the ethnic Chinese as many felt threatened by the militancy of *Pao An Tui* and saw evidences of cooperation with the KNIL (Dutch Royal military).[93] And "the continuing violence that suggested a depth of community resentment and hostility that left many ethnic Chinese wary of an independent state"[94] became a self-fulfilling prophecy to the anti-Chinese nationalists. Charles Coppell described this problem aptly: "the Chinese for reasons outside their control, and not because of opportunism or fence-sitting, were unable to choose between Indonesia and the Netherlands".[95] A cycle of mutual distrust and resentment towards each other by the ethnic Chinese and other Indonesians that resulted from this period continue until today.

[88] These rather assimilated ethnic Chinese are referred to as the *Cina Benteng*.
[89] Ibid, 586-587.
[90] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 7.
[91] Coppel, "Pattern of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 41.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 7.
[95] Ibid, 42.

After the position of the Republic was consolidated beyond the 1950s, political problems continued to plague the position of the ethnic Chinese. The internal struggle for power within the Indonesian government; "political antagonism from anti-communist, and anti-Sukarno elements particularly feeling threatened by the steady erosion of their power by Sukarno's increasingly close association with the PKI (Indonesia Communist Party) reinforced generalized anti-Chinese sentiments."[96]

*Economy*

Economic influences as the foundation of the Chinese problem during this period was manifested and took the most clear form in the *Asaat* movement in 1956 which was "a broadly based grouping of several organizations of the national businessmen demanding greater governmental assistance to 'national enterprise', which was defined in such a way as to discriminate in favor of *asli* (Native/Indigenous, directly translated as 'genuine') Indonesians and against WNI Chinese (the ethnic Chinese of Indonesian citizenship)".[97] Economic policies discriminating against the ethnic Chinese had started by 1953, "even where the law and regulation did not discriminate between citizens, officials often required Chinese to prove their Indonesian citizenship. This requirement was at worst impossible or difficult and expensive, and at best humiliating."[98] These discriminative economic policies were further institutionalized in three stages. It started with ban of Chinese trade in rural areas and residential restrictions in East Java enforced by the Siliwangi regional military command under Col. R.A. Kosasih. This was further implemented federally by the then Trade Minister Muljomiseno, and finally further consolidated as PP10 (Presidential Instruction Number 10)[99] was issued in 1959 and implemented in 1960.

A characteristic business arrangement during this period was the

[96] Mackie, "Preliminary Survey," 12.
[97] Ibid, 14.
[98] Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity," 45.
[99] It was argued that Sukarno established PP10 with clearer and less discriminative instructions, as he could not back up the previous regulation as abolishing the Ministerial regulation could undermine the government.

so-called 'Ali-Baba' firms, in which an Indonesian (Ali) obtains the licenses, while a Chinese (Baba) provides the capital and trading connections. This relationship, although mutually beneficial, had been used to perpetuate stereotypes of illegal and corrupt business dealings by the ethnic Chinese with the sole purpose of self-profit without consideration for others and the nation. These prejudices and perceptions disregarded the heterogeneity and variety of position and attitudes among the ethnic Chinese, with these 'myths' reinforced by business groups in furious economic competition against Chinese businesses.[100]

In addition to economic competition, the income and wealth disparity had also become a source of negative sentiment and resentment towards the ethnic Chinese. An example was the May 1963 'chain-riots' that occurred island wide all over Java in cities of Cirebon, Tegal, Bandung, Bogor, and other smaller towns mainly in West Java (excluding Jakarta), through Yogyakarta and to a certain extent, East Java.[101] The violence left hundreds of property and buildings destroyed that cost hundreds of millions Rupiah worth of material damage.[102] Mackie noted that this riot was triggered by the flaunting of wealth by the Chinese which highlighted the distinction between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. The causes of these outbreaks were additionally due to "difficult economic conditions of that time – price inflation, shortages and frustrations resulting from Sukarno government's disastrous economic policies and widespread resentment of Chinese wealth in the midst of Indonesian poverty" although "political manipulation as part of the struggle for power between the right and left-wing forces in Indonesian national politics" was obviously part of the equation.[103]

*Religion / Culture*

The *Asaat* movement for "economic nationalism fed rising anti-Chinese sentiment" and the movement spread its message and "established branches across Java and in the Outer Islands".[104] This movement named after a prominent Islamic businessman, although started

[100] Mackie, "Preliminary Survey," 12.
[101] On details of the May 1963 riot see: Setiono, *Tionghoa Dalam Pusaran Politik*, Chapter 44.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Mackie, "Anti Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 98-99.
[104] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 10.

as economic in nature, was driven by racial and religious sentiments. The economic overtones of the sentiment turned into other forms of antagonism. As described by Herb Feith as "the initiative had passed from businessmen who advanced economic claims with racialist arguments to army groups, youth groups and a sensational daily (newspaper), groups which shared no clear goals but a powerful inchoate anti-Sinicism."[105]

One of the most serious outbreaks of anti-Chinese riots in Sukabumi during the May 1963 waves of riots was allegedly precipitated from a prevailing mood and hostile relations between the strongly Muslim population there and the ethnic Chinese.[106] A few months before the riots, in February, when the main Chinese (*cap go meh*)[107] and Indonesian festivals[108] of the year took place around the same period, tensions between the two communities arose, leading to the violent riots mentioned before.[109]During this riot, university students joined in the demonstration calling Indonesians to unite against what they called 'a yellow danger for Indonesia'.[110] Religious, racial, and socio-cultural cleavages were definitely important factors, as Coppel noted that the nationalism of the Indonesian revolutionaries had "racial overtones which led to violence against the Chinese".[111]

*Identity Resilience*

In the midst of intense international, domestic, and local socio-political turmoil and pressures to conform to changing demands of those in power, the ethnic Chinese continued to show a resilience of their identity although what consisted of it differed substantially from group to group. Coppell agreed with Wang Gungwu that different elements of the ethnic Chinese groups such as the 'integrationist'[112] and

[105] Herb Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962), 484. Quoted from Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence," 10.

[106] Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 103.

[107] Peranakan Chinese festival (New Year) celebrated with carnival atmosphere, music, fireworks, and *barongsai* (Lion Dance).

[108] The Muslim fasting month (*Ramadhan)* which was followed by the celebration of *Eid-al-Fitr* and similar festivities.

[109] Ibid, 104.

[110] Ibid, 105.

[111] Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 41.

[112] 'Integrationist' refers to the ethnic Chinese with orientations to the Republic but strong com-

'Chinese nationalist'[113] (like the three groups of political Chinese in Malaya)[114] had a common "premise that they wanted to remain culturally distinguishable".[115]

This resilience was demonstrated in the creation and maintenance of various social political organizations with different orientations and platforms initiated by the ethnic Chinese themselves. The organizations during this period included, to name a few, the Sin Ming Hui, Persatuan Tionghoa, Partai Demokrat Tionghoa, Baperki, and Ta Hsueh Hsueh Sheng Hui. These organizations with various political orientations existed, even among those who were clearly supportive of the Indonesian nationalist movements. Additionally, despite the strong pressures to assimilate from within (Chinese assimilationist groups such as the LPKB) and without (disadvantageous government regulations against them, discrimination and violence directed at them), the strong sense of identity persisted. The fact that the content of this ethnic Chinese identity as a unified group was never clearly articulated became the main problem. A process of contestation from within the community that could lead to a clearer conceptualization of its content was perpetually suspended and shattered by those in power.

*Identity Constructed*

Charles Coppell in his book *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* surmised that the enmity towards the Chinese Indonesian was directed to them particularly as a group rather than simply a manifestation of anger between the downtrodden against the rich. He argued that "there have been xenophobic aspects of both Islamic and secular nationalism in Indonesia. In each case, the Chinese have on occasion been a convenient *out-group* against whom aggression could be vented."[116] There was a tremendous multiplicity of causal factors to the anti-Chinese resentment and outbreaks, as shown from the chain-riots in May 1963. Political, economic, and socio-religio elements could be attributed as

munal interest and patterns. See Coppel's six patterns in "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia", 21.

[113] 'Chinese Nationalist' refers to ethnic Chinese with political activity with orientations to China. See Ibid, 21.

[114] Wang Gungwu, "Chinese Politics in Malaya," *The China Quarterly*, No. 43 (1970)

[115] Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 31.

[116] Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, 28.

reasons or root of the outbreak of these riots in various places across Java.

It can be deduced that all those factors were mostly symptoms to a more specific problem, identity. Each factor served as gasoline to spark a wild fire by actors and groups with ulterior motives beyond simple antagonism and animosity against the ethnic Chinese. Power holders, business groups, and radical religious groups manipulated the ambiguous identity to server their respective purposes. A quote from Macke articulated this construction of identity clearly: "Indonesian business groups, in fierce competition with WNI Chinese as well as aliens, are eager to perpetuate the view that all Chinese are the same and, in congruence with their typically Islamic orientation, to define the sameness in religious and moral terms."[117] Mackie's question regarding riots during this period reflected the underlying assumption of the manipulation of identity by different actors: "were students mere puppets of more sinister elements manipulating from behind the scenes? Was this a spontaneous outbreak? Or other anti-Sukarno, anti-PKI elements, including army officers behind the scenes? Or was it Muslim businessmen who wanted to eliminate their Chinese rivals?"[118]

**Suharto's New Order (1966-1998)**

*"We have become a body without a voice."*[119]

In spite of all the internal strife and external challenges/problems the Chinese had regarding their position in the country during the previous period, there were channels and vehicles (schools, press, community organization, dialogue and participation in the government) where they could discuss and deliberate their aspirations (and) to potentially settle and resolve the ambiguity of their presence in Indonesia. This prospect, however, was thwarted when the New Order regime took control and put in place 'forced' assimilationist policies that failed to address the issue of heterogeneity among the Chinese Indonesians

[117] Mackie, "Preliminary Survey," 12.

[118] Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 110.

[119] A quote from Charles Coppel's interview with an ethnic Chinese when reflecting the condition of under the New Order compared to the previous period. See Coppel, "Pattern of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 65.

but was mainly implemented for ulterior political and economic motives by those in power.

*Politics*

Conflicting and incongruous policies and patterns were exhibited by the New Order government. Strong assimilationist policies and efforts to keep anti-Sinicism in check on the one hand (but) and contradictory undercurrents of discriminative policies on the other hand were evident. On 2nd October 1965, immediately after the coup, the entire Chinese-language press was closed down, while all Chinese language schools were officially declared as closed in May 1966.[120] Presidium cabinet ruling no.127/U/KEP/12/1966, instructed all the ethnic Chinese Indonesians to adopt 'Indonesian' names, and Presidential Instruction no. 14/1967 prohibited the open practice and celebration of any ethnic Chinese related traditions, which intended to essentially terminate any Chinese influence on the culture, tradition, and religion of the ethnic Chinese.[121]

In addition to the forced assimilationist policies, discriminatory ones were also implemented. The joint instruction by the Justice and Home Affairs department required all Chinese descendants to obtain a citizenship proof in the form of the SBKRI (Letter of Proof for Indonesian Citizenship) document which somehow still continued until recently[122] as a source of revenue for government officials to extract money from the Chinese. A more subtle discriminative policy was the instruction SE-06/PresKab/6/1967, which changed the term "Tiongkok" to "Cina", which until now has a derogatory connotation.[123] The use of the derogatory term *'Cina'* for China or Chinese, instead of the former *'Tionghoa'* was one indication of a broader New Order contradictory campaign of assimilating the Chinese but discriminating them at the same time.[124] The former reference to the Indonesian Chinese as

[120] Ibid, 64.
[121] Setiono, *Tionghoa Dalam Pusaran Politik*, 986.
[122] SBKRI had been formally abolished, but bureaucratic practices demanding this can still be found. The most recent prominent case was the Chinese Indonesian badminton player was prevented from going out of the country for not having the SBKRI.
[123] For further study and reasons why the term "Cina" is derogatory, see: Coppel and Suryadinata, "The use of the Terms 'Tjina': An historical survey," *Far Eastern History*, No. 2, (1970).
[124] Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 119.

*Tionghoa* had a general impression as an ethnic group in Indonesia on a par with the *Javanese, or Bataknese,* but *Cina* somehow emphasized and accentuated China as a foreign reference point for the group.

Although the government sought to restrain anti-Chinese violence and sentiments to prevent a mass exodus that can further damage the fragile economy, local regional military commanders 'continued to carry out their own campaigns against Chinese, particularly in Aceh, North Sumatra, West and East Java and South Sulawesi'.[125] The political issues pertinent to the anti-Chinese regulations and policies were the association of the ethnic Chinese with the Communists (PKI) and fears that the Chinese were potential financial supporters of former President Sukarno.[126] Early governmental policies and measures against the ethnic Chinese began with bans from the regional military commander in East Java, Major General Sumitro, who placed a head tax on the Chinese, banned their operations as wholesale traders from the province and prohibited of usage of Chinese characters and language.[127]

The mixed policies and intentions of the New Order regime left the Chinese Indonesians hanging. They were neither completely assimilated as Indonesians, but remained as a distinct *Cina* (Chinese) group that neither had a legitimate status as an ethnic group in Indonesia nor any social or political status in the eyes of the populace. The assimilationist policies appeared as a means to integrate the Chinese Indonesians into the society; on the other hand many of the other regulations accentuated their differences. William Liddle pointed out that "the New Order's long term strategy was to assimilate Sino-Indonesians directly into national Indonesian culture. That is, Chinese culture is not considered the equivalent of regional indigenous cultures, whose languages, artistic life, and great historical moments are celebrated within nationalist political culture."[128]

Politically marginalized, the Chinese Indonesians as a whole then

[125] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence and Transitions in Indonesia," 19.
[126] Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 121.
[127] Ibid, 120-121.
[128] William Liddle, . "Coercion, Co-optation, and the Management of Ethnic Relations in Indonesia," in Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (eds.), *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 309.

became an easy prey for corrupt bureaucrats, as "most officials prefer to do business with Sino-Indonesians, who are still not fully accepted as Indonesians and thus are politically vulnerable."[129] They "served as 'Grade A pariah entrepreneurs', meaning their executives have neither the interest nor the capacity to pursue political ambitions inside Indonesia. These corporations present no direct political threat to the state, as a powerful indigenous business class might do."[130] With this interest to create a politically non-threatening economic class, Suharto's government systematically created policies detrimental towards the Chinese Indonesians. Anderson described the conflicting policies against the Chinese Indonesians as "the ghettoization of citizen-Chinese – political exclusion and economic privilege."[131]

*Economy*

A characteristic of the Chinese Indonesian relationship with the political world during this period became known as the *'cukong influence'*[132], which referred to an association by Chinese businessmen (*cukongs)* with Indonesian power-holders.[133] A patron-client relationship "which was essentially the exchange of money for security."[134] The New Order "kept in place a mutually beneficial system for members of the elite and for many Chinese Indonesians, whilst increasing their underlying vulnerability and dependence upon the elite in military and government for protection."[135] Another kind of relationship described was the 'Baba-Ali' (as opposed of the Ali-Baba from the previous period) where "Chinese businessmen manage money held by Indonesian powerholders or engage in joint commercial ventures with them."[136] These relationships and business dealings by few very

[129] Ibid, 301.

[130] Benedict O.G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 113.

[131] Benedict O.G. Anderson, "Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 42(3) (1983), 491.

[132] A widely-known term that Coppel characterized as one of the Chinese patterns of political activity.

[133] Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia", 65.

[134] Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, as quoted in Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence and Transition in Indonesia", 21.

[135] Ibid, 21.

[136] Ibid, 66.

wealthy Chinese businessmen somehow came to be viewed as a conventional and stereotypical role of the social and politically inactive Chinese Indonesians. Shady and unethical dealings by some irresponsible businessmen with corrupt power holders that disadvantaged the Indonesian poor was often typecasted against the Chinese Indonesians as a whole.

Anti-Chinese violence that occurred in Bandung[137] in 1973 and the 'Malari incident'[138] in Jakarta on January 1974 was described by Mackie as an "extension of generalized antagonism towards Japanese 'economic imperialists' and the wealthy groups in the Indonesian community in general, an outbreak of hostility by the frustrated, 'have not' elements of Jakarta society against the most conspicuous symbols of wealth and high living among the Indonesian elite, the Chinese and foreigners."[139] The 1973 Bandung incident was different than the prior 1963 conflict in that the assault "stemmed less from student groups than from the urban poor and lower – ranking soldiers. Even in this incident there were rumors that the rioting had a political background that represented a power play or threat by anti-Suharto faction in the army against the regime's close association with wealthy Chinese *cukongs*."[140]

The *"4-70 myth"* or what George Aditjondro called the "Myth of Chinese Domination" had been one of the most widespread assumptions regarding the Indonesian Chinese that was derived partly from fact. This 'fact' of the control of seventy percent of the Indonesian economy by the 3.5 percent of Indonesian Chinese had been repeatedly cited and stated in various academic and popular media. Aditjondro found two problems with the perpetuation of this 'fact'. First, many erroneously understand it as a control of 70% of the Indonesian economy by the Chinese who only constitute 3.5% of the population. Many miss the important "footnote which explains what is meant by 'market capitalization'. Control by market capitalization has been determined after listed firms controlled by governments or foreigners

[137] An anti-Chinese riot incident was sparked by a traffic accident between a Chinese driver and an Indonesian horse cart driver.

[138] An anti-Chinese violence rose out of the demonstration against the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka to Indonesia.

[139] Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 137.

[140] Ibid, 138.

had been discounted."[141] The second problem was that this exaggerated fact of the absorption and monopoly of the Indonesian economy by a minority group had become "a convenient and racist way of blaming the victims."[142] It was true that most of the top conglomerates were owned by an Indonesian Chinese family or person, but generalizing a domination of economy to the hands of the whole ethnic group is erroneous. The handful of Chinese conglomerates that managed to hog much wealth does not represent the ethnic Chinese as a whole. Furthermore Aditjondro pointed out that the control of economy was in actuality between "a handful of Chinese-Indonesian business families in tandem with the extended Suharto family and elements of the armed forces."[143]

The New Order period ended with a bang, an economic reason, the Asian financial crisis beginning in 1997 began to "push prices of basic goods across Indonesia, and violent incidents against Chinese Indonesian shops and other property in Java became more frequent and condoned by the government"[144].

*Religion / Culture*

The event of the alleged coup by the Communist party (PKI) exacerbated the perceived untrustworthiness of the Chinese Indonesians, as many were members of the party. The Chinese Indonesians were seen as Atheistic communists and many were massacred in the purging of the Communist party, an estimate of up to 2000 (a large percentage of the many killed during the Communist purging) during the ethnic Chinese were killed. [145] After consolidating his power, Suharto developed a new way in dealing with the Chinese Indonesians. Charles Coppel termed it an unspoken agreement between the political rulers and the Chinese entrepreneurial class. Mobilization of mass support under Islamic banners was viewed as the greatest threat to the New Order regime, and the main competitor of the Chinese entrepreneurs

[141] George J. Aditjondro, "The Myth of Chinese Domination", *The Jakarta Post*, Aug 14, 1998.
[142] Ibid.
[143] For a more detailed account of the patron-client relationship of these conglomerates see Ibid.
[144] Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia.*
[145] Setiono, *Tionghoa Dalam Pusaran Politik*, 956.

were the Islamic entrepreneurial class.[146] Again indirectly the persistent difference in religion became or was rather used to continue the division between the Chinese Indonesians and the rest of Indonesia.

An example of religio-socio-cultural difference as a source of strife during this period were the *barongsai* (Chinese lion dance) and funeral processions in East Java and Jakarta in April 1967 as 'triggering mechanisms' leading to violence against the ethnic Chinese which originated in cultural and ethnic differences. Mackie noted that "processions have been the most provocative of such occurrences" as it was "the public demonstration or assertion of Chineseness on Indonesian soil that was seen as an affront to Indonesian nationalism, arousing sentiments which have previously been dormant."[147] The October 1968 riots in Surabaya were provoked when four Indonesian marines were hung by the Singapore government; this was also seen as an extension of the racial and cultural antagonism.[148] The Surabaya riots against the ethnic Chinese resulted from the association of the ethnic Chinese to the majority Chinese Singapore that executed *pribumi* Indonesian soldiers. Similar examples were given by Coppel of an anti-Chinese outbreak in Menado that allegedly began with an insulting remark against the prophet Muhammad by an individual Chinese.[149]

*Identity Resilient*

An important thing to note that marked the resilience of the Indonesian Chinese identity was the fact that for thirty years the census no longer identified ethnicity, thus the *Tionghoa,* or ethnic Chinese were virtually or technically non-existent. Despite of the contradictory policies set in place by the New Order, the weight and pressure against the Indonesian Chinese indicated that they would be better off to shed any Chineseness. The disadvantages[150] of retaining a Chinese identity outweigh the advantages, if any. Nevertheless many prominent Chinese in business and other areas retained their Chinese names such as

[146] Coppel, "Indonesian Chinese in Crisis," 155.
[147] Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 136.
[148] Ibid.
[149] The Surabaya (October 1968) and Menado (March 1970) incidents are discussed briefly in Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis,* Chapter 7.
[150] The disadvantages include, among others, citizenship documents required, harder processing time, and negative sentiments.

Liem Soei Liong, The Ning King, Lie Mo Tie (Mochtar Riady), Kwik Kian Gie, and Yap Thiam Hien. Especially those in business with supposed incentives to simply obscure or leave their Chineseness. More importantly among the Indonesian Chinese with extreme assimilationist views who wanted to erase their Chineseness by intermarrying, changing their religion, and names somehow remained Chinese. Prominent Chinese Muslim such as Jusuf Hamka (alias A Bun), and Junus Jahja remained identified and known as Chinese to this day. Although banned, there were still some cultural organizations and Chinese media that were in place during the New Order regime. Examples of the few organizations were: the Young Buddhist Association, the renewed LPKB (Integrationist party), and certain Chinese media that were controlled by the government.[151]

The stronger indicator though of the resilience of this identity, was the mushrooming of political, social, and cultural organizations that sprung out after the fall of Suharto. Political Parties such as Parti (Indonesian Chinese Reform Party), Parpindo (Indonesian Assimilation Party), Partai Warga Bangsa (Indonesian citizen-nation party, and an integrationist based on Sukarno's nation building concept in Indonesia), and Partai Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (PBI – Indonesian unity in diversity party).[152] In addition various NGOs, cultural organizations and Indonesian Chinese media were set up right after the fall of Suharto, with many still standing today.[153]

*Identity Constructed*

The Indonesian Chinese identity under the New Order was constructed in a very tangled sense. It is somewhat erased on one hand, but kept alive, singled out as an economic class. Purdey described this New Order strategy as a

> "... new *status quo* in which it could take advantage of an economically successful and skilled ethnic minority, which was also

[151] For more details, see Andreas Pandiangan, "Chinese Press after the New Order: Caught Between the Continuity of Idealism and the Logic of the Market," *Asian Ethnicity* 4, no. 3 (October 2003), 401-419; Leo Suryadinata, "Chinese Politics in Post Suharto's Indonesia: Beyond the Ethnic Approach?" *Asian Survey* (2001), 502-524.

[152] Ibid, 509-510.

[153] For details of all the organizations see Ibid, 512-515.

> highly vulnerable and in need of protection. Subject to these constraints, Suharto encouraged Chinese Indonesian business through 1970s and 1980s. These businesses played a large part in the success of Suharto's economic development programme, which in turn allowed the government to strengthen its hold on power while at the same time restricting political and social freedoms."[154]

The change of the term and use Cina instead of Tionghoa (ethnic Chinese) was placed to distinguish and associate the Indonesian Chinese as from China, instead of one of the ethnic groups. Purdey noted that "an evidence of political manipulation..., was seen in 1990."[155] Suharto set up a highly publicized meeting with the most prominent businessmen in Indonesia that were mostly Indonesian Chinese at Tapos, Suharto's private ranch in West Java. "Despite the fact that Suharto and his family then ranked among the richest in Asia, Suharto played the part of the champion of the poor. He called the conglomerates to give 25 per cent of their shares over to cooperatives."[156] A second similar meeting was staged in 1995 were the wealthy businessmen were "instructed in the meanings of Pancasila. These signals combined to reinforce suspicions and resentments of Chinese Indonesians among many pribumi."[157]

Additionally the so-called *'4-70'* myth that had been perpetuated consciously and unconsciously worked in the favor the New Order oligarchy which concealed the "oligopolistic and monopolistic system which had mainly favored the Suharto clan and its affiliates."[158] This supposed myth that had partial grounds in reality became a convenient way to further construct an image of an invidious small group of people that neither cared for the country nor the people, but managed to absorb much resources illegitimately. A stereotype that if continued can be used and manipulated to the advantage of various groups with their own political or economic motives, as had been done by the New Order regime.

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[154] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence and Transition in Indonesia", 21.
[155] Ibid, 23.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid, 23.
[158] Aditjondro, "The Myth of Chinese Domination."

## Conclusion

As shown from the case study, each explanation derived from common approaches explained before (political, economic, socio-cultural), fell short in accounting for the heterogeneity of the Chinese Indonesians and had to implicitly lump the group together as one. Each variable on its own cannot capture the complexity of the Chinese Indonesians and explain the 'simplicity of the problem'.[159] And not one single variable appeared to be the dominant factor across the three periods under study and across the incidence of violence. Even in one outbreak of violence such as the May 1963 riot, many contending explanations can be derived for the various reasons behind the equally wide range of victims across different locations (for example, in Sukabumi, the flaunting of wealth was the problem – an economic one, in Tegal it was the *barongsai* and funeral processions that incited cultural animosities). The study of the Anti-Chinese Violence from 1996-1999 by Jemma Purdey showed a similar picture.[160] More detailed studies of the major outbreaks of anti-Chinese violence will still need to be done, but will arguably show the same complicated picture of a mix of root causes.

Under the Dutch and Japanese occupiers the content of the Indonesian Chinese identity was largely defined along the lines of racial and ethnic identity. During the Independence period / Old Order the problem was around the political identity of the Chinese. Lastly under the New Order the Chinese identity were particularized and differentiated based on their economic status. The Dutch who wanted to maintain power by a divide and rule accentuated the separateness of the Chinese, radical Islamic nationalists typecasted the Chinese as disloyal to the Indonesia, and business competitors sometimes use racial and religious sentiments to incite hatred and sentiment against their Chinese rivals. There had been conscious and continuous stereotyping of Indonesian Chinese identity and role from the outside with no serious and significant contestation, conceptualization, and definition from within the group itself. The various stereotypes and prejudices over

[159] The Chinese problem as a whole group and aggression they experience across different economic conditions, religious and cultural predispositions. In short the problem applies to all the Chinese despite the different characteristics each have.

[160] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence and Transition in Indonesia."

the three periods have formed much of the perception of the Indonesian Chinese that had often been self-fulfilling. Politically and socially marginalized, the Chinese Indonesians tend to focus on their economic personal and communal wealth being. Considered and frequently treated as alien (even the WNI), many ended up with no feeling of attachment and interest to better their supposed 'home'.

The fact of that the Chinese were and are very heterogeneous had been always overlooked. The content of the Indonesian Chinese identity had perpetually been manipulated by outside actors to achieve their goals and purposes by typecasting and constructing the Chinese identity based on a single class, economic, racial, or political identity. It is perhaps true of any ethnic or other kind of group that there is no actual homogeneity of a group, and variations will always exist in a group. But in the case of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, they had never been a single group initially. Perhaps the only thing they had in common was that they originally came from a huge geographic expanse now known as China. The ethnic Chinese in Indonesia came from different regions of varying cultural heritage, communal structures, and religion, with diverse political views, economic conditions, values, goals, and aspirations. Those who have lived and settled in their respective local homes in the archipelago for generations could actually have more in common with their neighbors than other Chinese in different parts of Indonesia.

The problem of integration, discrimination, and incidents of violence had thus mainly started from the exploitation of the ambiguity of the Indonesian Chinese identity by actors motivated by a variety of reasons (political control, economic competition, radical racial and religious resentment). This manipulation of identity and stereotyping by small powerful groups perpetuated over a period of time created a generalized anti-Chinese sentiment even among those who may have personal friendships and no particular grudge or enmity against the Indonesian Chinese. "There are significant mechanisms by which the attitudes of individual Indonesians toward the Chinese they know personally become transmuted into more general stereotypes as a whole – and in more extreme cases into racial prejudice toward them."[161] Per-

[161] Ibid, 129.

ceptions such as quoted by Adam Schwartz in his chapter 'The Race that Counts', regarding the Indonesian Chinese: "To most Indonesians, the word 'Chinese' is synonymous with corruption"[162], reflected the ingrained view of the Indonesian Chinese.

*Framework Evaluation and Identity as Intervening Variable*

As shown in the case study across the three periods, hopefully a new perspective and framework can be used in assessing the problem of the Indonesian Chinese. Each of the three commonly cited factors / independent variables leave questions unanswered. The Structuralist argument, "solely blaming a systematic structure or state sponsored violence for political reasons do not hold. The May 1998 riot, although systematic, was preceded by somewhat more spontaneous riots in July 96 – April 98, and continued after the fall of New Order, from June 98 – October 99."[163] The Rationalist argument based on economic competition or envy cannot adequately explain the many incidents of violence against obviously impoverished Indonesian Chinese. And the Culturalist approach is rather too broad and vague to explain such an antagonism towards a very heterogenous Indonesian Chinese group. Furthermore the view of religious difference as a factor undermines the sensibility and rationality of the majority Muslim groups as a whole.

The independent factors are various, interrelated and muddled as J.A.C Mackie articulated: "The diversity of causal factors behind the outbreaks of anti-Chinese violence has been one of the most striking features"[164] in the study of Indonesian Chinese problem. The multiplicity of causal factors and problems are captured in the ambiguity of the self awareness of the Indonesian Chinese of their own identity which had in turn been used as tool and manipulated by a variety of actors for their own purposes. Mackie's question again illuminates the inadequacy of any single factor to account and generalize the source of the problem: "do the poorest Indonesians feel the strongest resentment against the Chinese – or is it found among the wealthy, or among struggling Indonesian businessmen? Or among the intellectuals and

[162] Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia's Search for Stability* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 98.
[163] Purdey, "Anti-Chinese Violence and Transition in Indonesia."
[164] Mackie, "Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Indonesia 1959-68," 129.

politicians who need to rationalize their people's relative poverty or to exploit easily fanned passions for their own political purposes"[165]

The framework proposed by this paper still need to be tested to other cases for its generalizability. However, at first glance, it may have clarified some confusion in finding the "one" factor to start with in solution of the problem. Politics, Economy, and Culture or Religion are not variables that can simply be changed or constructed in a society. Neither is identity - however, elements of that identity can be shaped and shifted, at least the reality of the complexity of the identity when illuminated can create understanding between various conflicting groups. The framework may prove useful in explaining different outcomes in the condition of other overseas Chinese groups in other Southeast Asian countries, or even other ethnic minorities in other countries. For example, the case of Malaysia can arguably be surmised to be similar with the Indonesian case. There were definitely political struggles involving the Chinese, economic competition and disparity, and religious socio-cultural differences. Malaysia had its share of Chinese problems in the past, but proved to be much more stable. Anti-Chinese violence had not occurred periodically. The position of the Chinese as part of Malaysia through consociation may have its own problems, and is far from ideal, but proves to be much more stable for the ethnic Chinese and the economic stability of the country. This framework may explain the different outcome: the content ethnic Chinese identity in Malaysia had been shaped much more from inside of the group, thus not allowing insidious actors manipulate this identity for their own purposes. The Chinese in Malaysia had retained much of their Chineseness but are very much Malaysian and had settled with a clearer status as part of Malaysia. A much more detailed study of other cases will still need to be tested against this framework to prove its usefulness.

*The Road Ahead*

Indonesia post-Suharto had shown much positive prospects for the Indonesian Chinese as many discriminative policies and measures had been formally abolished. In practice, though, it may be a process

[165] Ibid, 130.

that may take effort and time before all the institutionalized discrimination may be completely put to an end. More fundamental challenges still loom ahead for the Indonesian Chinese. Decades and centuries of manipulated and constructed stereotypes regarding the Indonesian Chinese will not disappear easily. General discriminative and prejudiced sentiments that had often found confirmation in some irresponsible actions by some of the ethnic Chinese not representative of the group as a whole will take much effort to bring into a more objective perspective. It will take the conscious effort of the.Indonesian Chinese to redefine themselves and of the "political scientists and historians in breaking down prejudice similar to that played by the sociologists in cracking the myths of the supposed uniformity and changelessness of the Overseas Chinese."[166]

The position of the Indonesian Chinese remains ambiguous in Indonesia. Thus many fundamental and critical questions remain to be resolved and answered. Assimilation as a solution to the problem had proven to produce more problems than providing any solution. Assimilation becomes problematic particularly in the multi-ethnic Indonesia based on the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). If the Indonesian Chinese were to assimilate, to what culture and group should it assimilate? Is there no place and freedom to choose their own identity in a democratized Indonesia? Charles Coppel was mostly correct in his argument that the Indonesian Chinese "were not in any position to determine their fate."[167] This was however written during the iron rule of the New Order regime. Today, however, the Indonesian Chinese have the opportunity to re-construct and re-define themselves under a supposedly more open and democratized Indonesian government. It requires prudence to maintain a delicate balance between political participation and the modesty of a minority. The Indonesian Chinese also carry a huge responsibility to contribute back to the nation they call home and help restructure and strengthen the Indonesian economy.

[166] Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," 20.
[167] Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis*, ix.