

# The Chinese Minority in Indonesia

*Adil Rakindo*

Available sources indicate that from the first conception of the idea of nationalism in Indonesia at the beginning of the present century up to the time of the proclamation of independence on 17 August, 1945, very little thought was given to the question of the Chinese element in the country's population composition. Things were then made more complicated by the insistence on the part of the former regimes of China, basing their policy on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, to regard all overseas 'Chinese' as her rightful citizens. These, as we remember, had later given birth to the infamous problems arising from the case of 'dual citizenship'.

The first mentioned, neglect of the said question by the nationalist regimes of Indonesia, has to a great extent enabled the perpetuation of an absurd policy towards the Chinese element of Indonesia's population up to the present time—28 years after Indonesia's independence and about a century since history taught us for the first time the futility of similar policies.

The attitude of Indonesia's ruling class in regard to its citizens of Chinese descent has so far been analogous to that of the mythical ostrich. Continually refusing to accept the fact that the Chinese element is part of the national legacy, the rulers of Indonesia are trying ever to avoid even mentioning it. That is, except

when they have to and this, more often than otherwise, is in times of crisis. The late Dr Sukarno gave a somewhat different picture. But when one probes into the realms of motivation, one cannot help suspecting that even his occasional mentioning of the Chinese was induced by the desire to keep or win, whichever the case may be, the support of the community for his political ventures more than a genuine attempt to solve the problem itself. This is indicated, for one, by the fact that, between 1964-65, when demanded by a representative body of Chinese-descent Indonesians—the BAPERKI—to erase the word 'native'<sup>1</sup> from the national constitution as one of the electoral requirements to sit for the presidency, Sukarno wilyly replied that the

1 From '*asli*'. The literal translation would have been 'pure'. Originally the proviso was intended to exclude any possibility of a Japanese sitting for the presidency. This makes sense when one recalls that Indonesia's declaration of independence was made possible thanks in no small degree to the indirect cooperation of the remaining Japanese forces charged with maintaining the status quo prior to the transfer of authority at the end of the war. Even the drafting of the text of the declaration on the night of 16 August 1945 was done in the house of a Japanese naval officer. Rear Admiral Maeda, in the presence of some Japanese observers (see Bernhard Dahm, *History of Indonesia in the Twentieth Century*, p.112; and J. D. Legge, *Sukarno: a Political Biography*, p. 201). With such a degree of collaboration, the Republicans were naturally not unaware that they would be in an extremely difficult position indeed should a Japanese demand to be made President. The spokesmen of BAPERKI argued that such a proviso should have been dropped from the constitution now that the justification no longer exists. Reservation should be made, they maintained, on the basis of citizenship.

**Adil Rakindo**, a student of Asian studies now living in England, was born in Indonesia.

community should 'struggle' for such abrogation. Here again, one cannot help wondering as to the extent of Sukarno's sincerity. Like virtually all the rest of the ruling class, Sukarno had never taken the necessary steps towards meaningful solution. He continued to shift from the school of thought propagating complete absorption—with the idea of eliminating the Chinese element altogether through the so-called assimilation process—to that which championed the acceptance of the community as it was—tolerating it, if necessary, as a culturally separate group. Sukarno must have been aware of the fact that the Chinese question, thus left unsolved, would provide him with an additional lever that from time to time could come in handy.

As a result of such a negative attitude, only a crisis could bring the question to public attention and, probably because the hypocrisy had been maintained for too long, even a nasty jolt was sometimes not enough to create more than mere ripples, soon to be forgotten again. Early in 1968, for example, a commando unit of the Indonesian army, RPKAD<sup>2</sup>—dressed in full uniform and combat regalia—conducted pogrom against the Chinese population of Glodog, the Chinatown of Jakarta. Although the crime—in broad daylight—took place within less than five miles from the presidential palace *Istana Merdeka*, no official statement of real meaning was issued by the government.<sup>3</sup>

Self-deception, of course, does not cure ills. Similar incidents, some worse and many which were not as bad, had happened to the Chinese community of Indonesia since the first recorded Chinese massacre in Batavia (the Dutch name of Jakarta) in 1740. What is important, one fears that the same will happen again, and again, if the question is let to remain unsolved. The whole business is inter-necine: it saps the nation considerably of energy and time crucial for its further development. Energy and time that could have been used in much better ways and

for more meaningful purposes.

### *A Colonialist Tradition*

Many of the prejudices against the Chinese, as the propagators must have been aware, are stereotyped clichés. All sums up to saying that the Chinese element constitutes a threat to national security owing to its 'alien' character. In one word, sinophobia. What some seem to have failed to realise, however, is that this sinophobia was acquired from Western colonialism, particularly that of the Dutch. And, by adhering to these prejudices, the present sinophobes are actually taking over the colonial policy and practices of the Dutch—and the Japanese for that matter—against which the Indonesians profess to have stood during the 1945 Revolution.

For those readers not yet familiar with the subject, a brief look back at Indonesia's historical past is perhaps expedient here. The Dutch traders, not being the first to come into the area, encountered many types of competition when they arrived in Indonesia in 1596. A fact which

2 *Resimen Para-Komando Angkatan Darat*, Army Para-Commando Regiment. This is the regiment infamous for the killing of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians during the witch-hunt against Communists and alleged Communists shortly after the military takeover of October 1965.

3 The only statement was that issued by the officer in charge of the barracks where the unit was stationed, denying any responsibility on the pretext that the whole operation had taken place without the knowledge of the commanding officers. This is as hardly plausible as the explanation of Governor-General Valckenier for the massacre of Batavia's Chinese in 1740 because, for one, the use of four army lorries and no less than one hundred bayonet-fitted automatic rifles must have required some sort of fiat from the barracks commandant. And it became less convincing with the circulation of rumours that the Governor of Jakarta, Marine Lieutenant-General Ali Sadikin, was so piqued that he demanded the banning of the initials RPKAD inside the jurisdiction of the Jakarta Municipal Government. Due to the fact that since 1965 there has been no free press, the diminutive reportage was on the whole a cover-up and at best an attempt to justify the crime. This virtual blackout made the writer unable to obtain any verification on the number of casualties which, it was widely rumoured, was in the brackets of three figures.

seems to have had no small bearing on Dutch policy and practices of the years to come. The Chinese, the Indians, the Arabs, and to a lesser extent the Spaniards and the Portuguese, had been conducting business with the natives of what is now called Indonesia for some considerable time before the Hollanders' arrival. Soon, however, the late-comers became the unchallenged masters of the whole area. European competitors were driven away, and non-European ones reduced to becoming the servants of the Dutch.

At first one particular group of servants was very much sought after by the Dutch. This was the Chinese. The primary concern of the Dutch, and indeed the very reason that had induced them to cross the oceans to such a remote place, was quick money. In conducting their business, partly because of their own limited numbers, the Dutch had to rely on indirect management. Practically everything was conducted on the basis of the farming system. This required the type of labour force which had had some tradition of working more or less on its own initiative and of being accustomed to money-economy.<sup>4</sup> And all this was of course virtually unknown to the natives of Indonesia, who were then still in the early stages of agro-feudalism. Whereas, on the other hand, the other Asians were out of the question on account of their inaccessibility.

Having picked the only candidate, the Hollanders proceeded in a spirit and manner not unlike those of the zealots. The first Dutch governor-general, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, for example, repeatedly stated that there was no people he desired to have more than the Chinese and that there could not be too many of them in Batavia.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, in pursuance of this and not much given to scruples, Coen even went so far as to resort to the method of abduction. Quoting Boxer Purcell writes:

... he [Coen] carried out a series of piratical raids on the coasts of Fukien and

*Kwangtung in an endeavour to seize large numbers of able-bodied Chinese for transportation to Batavia, Amboyna, and Banda.*<sup>6</sup>

In time such practice led to the trafficking of Chinese slaves, the notorious 'pig-trade'.<sup>7</sup>

Although the 'pig-trade' itself did not end until the beginning of the present century, the influx of Chinese soon reached a level that alarmed the Dutch authorities. Moreover, themselves not unaccustomed to free enterprise, the Chinese were in fact reported to have put up stiff competition vis-à-vis the Dutch in the latter's capacity as entrepreneurs. Understandably, therefore, complimentary adjectives gave way to derogatory epithets. From verbal abuse to physical harassment was only a step. And the limit was reached in 1740, when the Dutch lost their sanity and massacred some 10,000 Chinese within the walls of the city fort.

In retrospect, the Dutch had every reason to harbour sinophobia. Amongst all the non-European subjects under their rule, in commerce it was virtually the Chinese alone who could really compete with, and not seldom even outbid, the Dutch. It was the Chinese, for example, who repeatedly succeeded in breaking the system of monopolistic trade arbitrarily imposed on the area by the Dutch. Characteristically, the colonial authorities then began to be quite liberal in the use of the term 'smugglers' when referring to the Chinese merchants and any of their acti-

4 This pattern remained consistent, on the whole, throughout the Dutch rule in Indonesia. Even after the development of local Chinese bourgeoisie as a result of the expansion of capitalism in the Western world, the Chinese—as 'middle-men'—were kept in the same position as that of farmers.

5 Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, p. 395.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 397. The Dutch were by no means the only ones to adopt this technique of acquiring a labour force. The native rulers of Palembang, for example, are known to have used Chinese miners recruited by special agents sent to the southern provinces of China (see Victor Purcell, *ibid.*, p. 426).

7 For the term, see Lois Mitchison, *Overseas Chinese*, p. 18.

vities which did not please the Dutch.<sup>8</sup> With practice, these two originally unrelated words—'Chinese' and 'smugglers'—became so wedded that until today one is hardly separable from the other. Earlier, as another example, it was the Chinese, too, who frustrated the Dutch attempt to colonise the place with European settlers. The free burghers from Europe, very probably because these people originated mostly from the non-productive classes such as ex-soldiers, turned out to be no match for their Chinese rivals in any free enterprise<sup>9</sup> and in no time were ousted. It might not be too fanciful to conjecture that, had the plan been successful, Indonesia now would possibly have become somewhat like South Africa of today.

The chauvinism of old China, 'once Chinese forever Chinese', provided sinophobia with its political reasoning. It enabled China, in theory at least, to lay claims over the whole Chinese population of the Indies. The Dutch, on the other hand, did not do anything positive to remedy the near comical status of their Chinese population in this respect. Although on the whole the Chinese were always classed as 'Foreign Orientals', to counteract China's claims the Dutch in 1910 enacted a law declaring all persons born in the Indies of parents domiciled there were Dutch 'subjects'. However, to circumvent the duty of providing them with the prerogatives, the term 'subjects' was not necessarily to be interpreted to mean 'citizens'. What was achieved by such an ambiguity, if anything, was more confusion because it meant that:

*... the Indies-born Chinese, who had been assigned Chinese citizenship by Imperial [China] decree just a year before, now acquired the status of Dutch subjects as well.*<sup>10</sup>

### *Sinophobes*

In connection with the indigenous population, this typically colonial atmosphere produced what is popularly known

as the 'colonial mentality'. And this colonial mentality, as all the indications show, unfortunately lingers on long after the condition that warranted it no longer exists. Today an important symptom of such mentality is the lack of self-confidence. A jailbird, accustomed to his limited confinement and the absence of the need for decision-making, often gets frightened when let loose in the open world of freedom. Similarly, being used to the absence of making their own decisions, nations with long spells under colonialism like Indonesia may at times find themselves longing for, if subconsciously, the simpler carefree life under the colonial rule: protected, if subjected.<sup>11</sup> And this is especially true of countries with pockets of alien groups like Indonesia where such 'protection' used to be provided not only against external foreigners, but also applied internally amongst the ethnic groups of the country.

Before the presence of the Dutch, arriving at natural rates, these aliens were in the process of being absorbed into the existing majority population of Indonesia. Around the region human migration from the north was a phenomenon that had been taking place since time immemorial. And modern Indonesians themselves are the descendants of the last two major such migrations, the Proto- and Deutero-Malays, who came from Yunnan on the Asian mainland. Dutch

<sup>8</sup> Boxer (C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborn Empire, 1600-1800*, p. 198) mentions, 'Chinese merchants were likewise very active in the Sumatran pepper-trade throughout the 17th century and it was a Chinese *'interloper'* who prevented the Dutch from achieving a pepper-monopoly in Borneo during the 1730s.' (quotation marks Boxer's original, emphasis added by the present writer).

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> Donald E. Willmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia, 1900-1950*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Hence, the persistence of the phrase 'the good old days', which in Indonesia—at least among the generation that has 'tasted the Dutch cheese'—do have psychological implications. Shortly after the declaration of independence, therefore, this phrase was actually considered as anti-national and officially discouraged.

power politics stopped this natural process altogether. Not only because they brought in too large numbers of foreigners in too short a space of time, totally disrupting the balance of nature but, more destructively, the Dutch also deliberately practised many rigid forms of segregation. Under the Dutch apartheid policy, to cite an example, the population of Indonesia was thoroughly fragmented from the time of their birth—babies were registered separately as Europeans, 'Foreign Orientals' with sub-divisions for Chinese and 'others', or *Inlanders* (natives) who were exempted from the registration requirements—up to the time of their death—there were separate burial grounds for Europeans, *Inlanders*, Chinese, Indians, Arabs<sup>12</sup>, and perhaps 'others'. Within the context of such rigid segregation, favouritism became a *sine qua non*. As regards indigenous Indonesians, partly to justify their self-appointment as 'possessor-cum-protector' of Indonesia, the Dutch always maintained that the natives of Indonesia were incapable of taking care of themselves. So much so that even the Indonesians themselves eventually came to forget that they had always managed without this unsolicited protection, as their history before the Dutch intrusion amply shows.<sup>13</sup>

In connection with the attitude towards the ethnic group to the concern of this article, such lack of confidence today manifests itself in various forms of persisting sinophobia. This, *nota bene*, in spite of the fact that there is no longer any ambiguity regarding citizenship. In April 1955, at the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung, Chou En-lai and the Indonesian Minister for Foreign Affairs Soenario signed a treaty to end the case of dual citizenship. China ratified the treaty in 1957 and thus, for the first time, relinquished her tradition of claiming automatic suzerainty over all overseas Chinese on the ground of their so-called 'Chinese blood'. Many are of the opinion that this was a magnanimous de-

monstration of good-neighbourly attitude on the part of a big power toward its smaller neighbour.<sup>14</sup> The implementation of the treaty had to wait until 1960, however, because Indonesia did not ratify her part until late in 1959. Generally speaking, the prolonged debates in the Indonesian legislature indicate a reluctance on the part of the ruling class for a real settlement of the problem. An extreme view was the issue raised by a member of the Moslem party MASJUMI that 'recognition of Chinese as Indonesian citizens would endanger the Indonesian nation.'<sup>15</sup>

Many native businessmen have the unflattering habit of demanding government protection and special privileges vis-à-vis their Chinese counterparts on the grounds of an alleged 'weaker' economic position. Although the fact shows that even in intermediary trade—the field

12 By the turn of the century segregation with regard to burial grounds came to be based on religious considerations and, thus, there came into being Christian and Moslem burial grounds. The Chinese, however, were kept apart and Chinese cemeteries survive to date.

13 'Two vast Indonesian-Malay empires are believed to have flourished—Sri Vijaya from Sumatra (about AD 650-1300) and Majapahit from eastern Java, overlapping Sri Vijaya but continuing to the fifteenth century. These kingdoms are reputed to have made vassals on the mainland (Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Malaya) and at times reached out to Taiwan (Formosa) and New Guinea.' (Guy Hunter, *Southeast Asia: Race, Culture, and Nation*, pp. 27-28) Then there was Demak, the first Muslim kingdom of the country which put an end to the Hindu era by defeating Majapahit in the 15th century. Demak was noted for its vigour as catalyst for the spread of Islam in the whole country, making Indonesia one of the centres of the religion outside the Middle East.

14 On the whole China practically let Indonesia have a free hand in this matter. Willmott (*op. cit.*, p. 62), for example, writes '... the major procedures embodied in the treaty were those advocated by the Indonesian side.' A legal analyst, Ko Swan Sik (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 62) says, '... the Chou-Ali exchange of notes even gave the Indonesian Government what amounted to unilateral power to abrogate the Chinese citizenship of any group of dual nationals.' Even the strongly anti-Communist paper, *Keng Po*, said that China had 'given in' to almost every proposal made by the Indonesian delegation (*Keng Po*, Jakarta: 26 April 1955).

15 See Dnoald E. Willmott, *ibid.*, p. 57.

in which the Chinese are traditionally assumed to excel—the Sumatrans, for one, can match the Chinese in any measure.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, perhaps thanks to similar policies of favouritism from the government, it is now the native capitalists who control a major portion of the nation's capital.

Several native rulers unofficially endorse the arbitrary remarks on the alleged reluctance of the Indonesian-Chinese to serve the country during the struggle for independence and on their assumed pro-Dutch sentiments. Such, of course, is an un-funny case of making public remarks with tongue in cheek. The Chinese, suffering much during the Japanese occupation time, tended to view the Allies—Dutch inclusive—as their liberators. The indigenous nationalists, on the other hand, pampered and encouraged by the Japanese in return for their collaboration<sup>17</sup> regarded the Allied powers—particularly the Dutch—as a threat to national 'independence' as promised by the Japanese. Even in the short span of time from the moment the independence movement became truly national<sup>18</sup> to that of the landing of the first batch of Allied troops, the number of Chinese that did identify themselves with and take part in the struggles was still more than a mere token. Thus, a number of Chinese, both citizens of Indonesia and alien, are in possession of *Bintang Gerilja*, Indonesia's *croixes de guerre*. Names such as Tan Ling Djie,

countries into one family with a common well-being, under the leadership of Dai Nippon.' (*Djawa Baroe*, Vol. 1, No. 14, pp. 12f; *Asia Raya*, July 8, 2603 (1943), pp. 1, 2. Quoted in Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence*, p. 250). In his radio speech to the Japanese people on September 7, 1944, Sukarno coined a phrase that would become a slogan to be repeated again and again in the months that followed: 'Life or death with Dai Nippon until we are independent; life or death with Dai Nippon when we are independent!' (see Bernhard Dahm, *ibid.*, p. 278). Sukarno was far from being alone in his collaboration with the Japanese. All the Ministers of Sukarno's first cabinet, formed on 31 August, 1945—except Amir Sjarifuddin who was under arrest till after the Japanese surrender for refusing to compromise his anti-fascist attitude—had in one way or another collaborated with the Japanese (*ibid.*, pp. 117-18). Some are more unforgivable because—unlike Sukarno who was dead earnest in believing that collaboration with the Japanese was better than that with the Dutch—they collaborated with the Japanese contrary to their principles. Hatta, for example, wrote an article in December 1941 calling for struggle against the Japanese: '... Even if we believe that Japan will probably win, it remains our duty to come to the defence of our endangered ideals. It is better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees.' (See *ibid.*, p. 216). For all that chest-beating, a year later Hatta chose the second option. For their collaboration, Sukarno, Hatta, and Dewantara were received by the Tenno in Tokyo on 16 November, 1943, and decorated with the order of the Holy Treasury—second-class award for Sukarno and third-class ones for Hatta and Dewantara (see *ibid.*, p. 258). Up to the very end of Japanese rule, the nationalists were consistent in identifying their 'national independence' movement with the Japanese war efforts. As late as June 1945, Sukarno and Hatta still maintained the importance of co-operation with the Japanese to 'lay the foundation for forthcoming independence.' (W. H. Elsbree, *Japan's Role in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements*, p. 115).

16 'In most of Sumatra, but in particular on the west coast, Chinese never developed as strong a position in intermediary trade as they held in Java or West Kalimantan, for enterprising Sumatrans pre-empted that role.' (Mary F. Somers, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia*, p. 4).

17 On the occasion of the visit of Prime Minister Tojo, Sukarno spoke before a rally at Gambir Park in Jakarta on 7 July, 1943: 'Your Excellency, our loyalty to Dai Nippon is greater and greater, we are more and more convinced that the present war of Dai Nippon for Greater East Asia is a holy war that will give Asia back to the Asian peoples, that will give the Asian countries back to the individual peoples, and that will join all these

18 Only well after the official announcement of the Japanese surrender did the nationalists manage to extricate themselves from relying on Japanese cooperation and support. This is the stage when the independence movement began to acquire a true 'national' character. And this was when people from the anti-fascist circles and those who for reasons of their own felt antipathetic to the Japanese began to see the justification to support and join in the movement. A well-known case is perhaps that of Sutan Sjahrir, who refused to be present at the drafting of the proclamation because 'he regarded the drafting of the proclamation in a Japanese officer's house as a betrayal of the Indonesian revolution.' (Bernhard Dahm, *History of Indonesia in the Twentieth Century*, p. 112).

Liem Koen Hian, Tjoa Sik Ien, and Siauw Giok Tjhan, are among the more widely known as unequivocal supporters of the Republican cause.<sup>19</sup> Besides, such remarks hardly do justice to the fact that from the early Dutch colonial era up to this date, the tacit policy of the ruling class has always been to discourage the Chinese from entering the armed services. Such is of course in keeping with the old fear, originating from as far ago as 1740, that the Chinese would 'revolt' as soon as they had the means to do so.<sup>20</sup> Even General Nasution, one of the few well-informed military rulers of the present regime, confused the notion of race with that of ideology. He is remembered for his statement that the Chinese population pose an ever present threat to the country because of their inherent potentiality as China's fifth column. Nasution, therefore, stated:

. . . that the real danger of Malaysia to Indonesia was that it offered the Chinese of the region an opportunity to establish their dominance and it therefore represented an opportunity for Peking to increase its influence[!]<sup>21</sup>

Among the first measures taken by the military regime after General Suharto obtained substantial power as chief executive resulting from the military takeover in 1965 was the sanctioning of the use of the term 'Tjina', in place of 'Tiong-hoa', to denote 'Chinese'. Although etymologically correct, the word 'Tjina' has come to be regarded as highly tendentious<sup>22</sup> and had been generally avoided in accepted circles. Without the boundaries

until 1919 in the case of Java and 1926 in the Outer Provinces (for the years, see Donald E. Willmott, *op. cit.*, p.7). In his banned book, *Hoakiau di Indonesia*, the noted Indonesian author Pramoedya Ananta Toer—now, together with thousands of other Indonesians, exiled without trial by the military regime on the remote Buru Island—said that the original Chinese ghetto was placed within the range of the cannons mounted on the Dutch fortress of Batavia. Obviously for reasons originating from the same fear. The services remained closed to Chinese until the very last days before the Japanese invasion of Indonesia in 1942. When their defences crumbled all over the place, the Dutch frantically recruited every able-bodied male, including Chinese. Even then the latter were assigned only for civil tasks, such as manning the fire brigade and first-aid stations. Prominent Indonesian-Chinese interviewed by the writer during the period 1961-65 maintained on the whole that as a rule live ammunition was never issued to Chinese. In fairness, however, it must be said that part of the reason was perhaps the scarcity of the commodity. Another part of the reasoning, though, must have been because the Dutch did what now, from the vantage point of hindsight, seems rather stupid, *viz.* they regarded their Chinese subjects as potential Japanese collaborators. The attitude of the Japanese authorities to the Chinese population of Indonesia was, to put it mildly, worse. Although probably not subjected to the most brutal of Japanese treatment like their compatriots elsewhere in the region, the Indonesian-Chinese were no doubt put under considerable pressures. Kuroda (cited in Willard H. Elsbree, *op. cit.*, p. 140f) writes, 'Everywhere the Chinese became the lowest social class, if one excludes Westerners who were interned soon after the Occupation began. They were subjected to a rigorous screening process and to the sharpest scrutiny by the Japanese secret police. . . . In general, the policy toward the Overseas Chinese was marked by extreme severity.' Generally speaking, the Japanese made good use of the myth of the Chinese being an ominous threat. Thus, albeit the Japanese trained and armed the other Indonesians through their many sponsored bodies such as *Peta* and *Hizbullah* (see J. D. Legge, *Sukarno: a Political Biography*, pp. 177-78, 192; Bernhard Dahm, *History of Indonesia in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 92, 98), the Chinese were again assigned only to the civil tasks. Perhaps to add ridicule to gall, the Japanese issued wooden muskets for the 'training' of the Chinese population (from the writer's interviews).

19 These names, generally omitted in national history books issued under the nationalist regimes, are literally tabooed now. Because of their Leftist leanings, two of them are known to be languishing in infinite detention under the present regime, one rumoured in exile abroad, one missing.

20 Under Dutch rule, the Chinese were not only excluded from the armed services but also, as a result of the 1740 troubles, segregated by special regulations within well-defined ghettos. This ghetto-system was in effect

21 J. D. Legge, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

22 'Today the use of the term *Tjina* is likely to be considered insulting by many Indonesian Chinese.' (Lea E. Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism*, p. 61).



of sinophobia<sup>23</sup>, such a drive looks totally inexplicable.

Very recently, an unnecessary amount of racket is again being made by the sinophobes in their attempt to whip up sentiment against the current use of Indonesian-sounding names by some Chinese-Indonesians. It seems only yesterday that these same superpatriots busied themselves pestering the unfortunate minority people to drop their personal names altogether and replace them with more 'appropriate' names, the so-called 'Indonesian names'.<sup>24</sup> Quite apart from the breach of personal freedom with regard to the choice of one's own name, the apparent success of the earlier drive which led to the prevalent usage of Indonesian-sounding names among the Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent<sup>25</sup> created a better footing for further and more complete integration. With the elimination of what was about all that differentiates the Chinese element from the rest of the Indonesians, a condition not unlike that of the pre-colonial era had been achieved. This should have helped the resumption of the artificially stopped integration process. It should be noted here, however, that even without the disruption by the sinophobes concerned, the effect of this promising process had been somewhat mitigated by the habit of the Indonesian-Chinese themselves, who up to this date

harbour such animosity. The army paramilitary regiment RPKAD mentioned earlier, for example, has most of its Javanese members from West Java and is corporately noted for its Moslem devoutness. The reason for Islam's particular antipathy towards the Chinese itself is basically economic. Islam has always been the religion that effectively freed the Indonesians from their traditional magico-mystical ties with the land and introduced them to the world of commerce. In commerce the Moslem businessmen directly, and to a certain extent daily, encounter Chinese competition. It was therefore not a mere coincidence that among the first indigenous organisations in Indonesia was the *Sarekat Dagang Islam* (Moslem Business Federation) and that its *raison d'être* was originally to combat Chinese competition in business, particularly that of *batik*.

24 Futile debates and polemics have arisen in the attempt to define what is an 'appropriate' or, indeed, an 'Indonesian', name. Personal names in Indonesia are derived from Sanskrit, Arab, European, or Chinese origins. Those from Malay, or what used to be Malay, origin have become so out of fashion amongst the literate that they are nowadays becoming less and less common. Although the drive was at first alleged to be applicable to any 'foreign sounding' names, the preposterousness of the idea became so obvious as soon as it was started that eventually none bothered to try keeping up the pretence. A considerable amount of cash must have been collected from the sale of *Surat Ganti Nama*, certificates of new names, through the local courts of justice by the end of 1969.

25 It is interesting to note that during the Sukarno period, mindful of the failure of a similar venture—the attempt to discourage the use of Dutch-sounding names during the anti-Dutch campaigns before the return of West Irian (because in the eastern parts of Indonesia, including West Irian itself, the use of Christian (read: Dutch) names is the rule rather than the exception—the Chinese always resisted any such attempt. At the time their resistance carried sufficient strength to render most attempts along that line abortive, thanks largely to sympathy from the socialist camp which now, retrospectively, seems to be the only group of the indigenous population suffering from no diffidence vis-a-vis the Chinese, or even the Dutch who for 3 centuries had been the master race of Indonesia. It was the Communists, for example, who staged the first uprising against the Dutch colonial rule back around the 1920s. Now it was also this sector of the nation, represented by the *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, that had enough generosity to accept unequivocally the Chinese citizens as they were (for PKI's acceptance, see Mary F. Somers, *op. cit.*, p. 52). After the army takeover of 1965, the Chinese as an ethnic group was in an extremely vulnerable position. Deprived of its only formidable ally and carrying the stigma of having maintained close relationship with the now banned party, the group was in effect outlawed. Many Chinese-Indonesians told the writer that to continue resisting such a triviality as changing their names would then be just as good as committing suicide.

23 It shows rather too obviously the animosity of the military class toward the Chinese. For this élite group animosity, Mary F. Somers (*op. cit.*, p. 40) says, 'Certain army leaders are deeply suspicious of the Chinese. This suspicion stems, in part, from a fear of Chinese support for communism or for Communist China's power politics.' In another part of her book (*ibid.*, p. 29) she writes, 'These leaders [Islamic teachers] look with greatest distaste on the Chinese, who are their business competitors, in addition to being of a different religion. This attitude might be extended to many of the military in West Java . . . ' It should be noted here that the mention of West Java, being the present stronghold of Islam on the island, is not merely fortuitous. For even among the army commanders, animosity towards the Chinese is by no means widespread. As a rule it runs along the lines of the religion: only Moslem army personnel



often put their Chinese names, usually in parenthesis, as well as their 'Indonesian' names in public announcements such as marriages or deaths.

As for sinophobia itself, Thailand provides a good example that, although the number of her Chinese subjects in comparison to the total population is much greater than that of Indonesia<sup>26</sup> and, despite the fact that until a brief period of Japanese occupation during World War II, that country was never 'protected' by any foreign power, and, again, despite the fact that China is just across the border, Thailand is far from being 'dominated' by the Chinese. The current history of the wars in the Indochinese Peninsula all these years has been refuting the allegation of overseas Chinese becoming Sudetenlanders in times of crisis. In spite of the comparative proximity, China, to begin with, does not seek among the local Chinese population for alleged 'recruitment' of communist cadres. Neither did the local Chinese become willing 'agents of Peking' overnight.

The history of Indonesia itself shows that, given the right conditions or, rather, not given the prohibitive situation, the Chinese community of Indonesia had produced at least one of the most famous statesmen of the country's history, Raden Patah, founder-monarch of the 15th century Moslem kingdom of Demak.<sup>27</sup>

### *Whipping Boys Wanted*

As has been implied briefly earlier, Indonesia's rulers are not unaware of these basic truths and simple facts. Indeed, to suggest that all these are unknown to them would be as preposterous as to assume that the ruling class is comprised of *hominis ignorami*. General Nasution, for example, said back in 1962 that with the settlement of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict over West Irian, the Chinese would find themselves in the position—previously filled by the Dutch—of scapegoat for Indonesia's troubles.<sup>28</sup> With such a

scheme thus publicly endorsed, it therefore becomes quite obvious that the so-called 'complete assimilation' of the Chinese element into the Indonesian majority—despite the protestations of the more histrionic parties among the ruling élite—might well be exactly the last thing the ruling class wants.

Under colonialism, the Chinese were kept as a buffer between the ruling powers—the Dutch and later, perhaps to a lesser degree, the Japanese—and the ruled mass, to absorb the brunt from both sides. The institutionalisation of sinophobia became both unavoidable and necessary. Today the Chinese minority is still kept in the same place, this time to be manipulated by the nationalist ruling class. Integration in its real sense would of course blur this neat arrangement, and in time might altogether deprive the ruling class of its handy whipping-boy. Therefore, not only is no attempt ever made to combat sinophobia but, quite the contrary, it is deliberately maintained by the ruling class.

The keeping of the Chinese minority thus as a political lever must have been of such usability that the nationalist rulers, knowing full well the consequences, appear to be willing to carry on with it at all costs. Within the context of colonialism, official discrimination is just a cornerstone of rule by division. The very survival of the system depended on it. Furthermore, it was practised by an alien power which was transient both in nature and intention. Unlike the Chinese,

26 Using round numbers, in Thailand more than one person in ten is Chinese whereas in Indonesia around one in forty. See, for example, Lois Mitchison, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

27 According to the version during the writer's school-days in 1950s, Raden Patah's mother was a Chinese concubine sent directly from China as a gift to one of the last monarchs of Majapahit. Another version (Prof. Dr Slamet Muljana, *Runtuhnja Keradjaan Hindu-Djawa dan Timbulnja Negara Islam di Nusantara*, p. 96) maintains that the same 'Princess China' was the Indonesia-born daughter of a Chinese trader. Raden Patah is accredited with pioneering the spread of Islam in Indonesia.

28 See Mary F. Somers, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

for an obvious example, the Dutch did not come to Indonesia to emigrate. And, like most other versions of the trade, Dutch colonialism was run essentially on the morals of *après nous le déluge*. Under self-government, official discrimination against citizens is quite obviously self-destructing. In the 1950s, to cite an example, government policies of favouritism accorded to indigenous businessmen as opposed to those of Chinese descent undertaken by the then Minister of Economic Affairs, Iskaq Tjokrohadisurjo, created an almost comical economic situation. The reservation of the allocation of foreign credit, 'import licences', to indigenous businessmen created an unproportionately great demand in the Chinese sector of importers in Indonesia. The situation eventually reached such proportions that the sale of these licences became more profitable than conducting the business itself. The indigenous 'importers', therefore, simply sold their licences to their Chinese colleagues, thus collecting 'net incomes' without performing the required amount of work, and asked for more licences. In turn, of course, such a system created an area for corruption and bribery, involving 'party leaders and members of Parliament'.<sup>29</sup> At the other end of the line, such discriminatory measures created—in the words of a contemporary opposition party, the rightist Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI)—'a class of economic parasites instead of a 'national middle class'.<sup>30</sup>

It would appear now that, in aspiring for the creation of an industrial economy, the Indonesian Communist Party and other progressive groups of the country were not concerned with developing capital for its own sake. And, aware of the limitations of even the aggregate total of the national capital, the said groups believed that the mobilisation of all components of the existing domestic capital—indigenous or otherwise—is a *sine qua non*. So was the encouragement of the nascent domestic industry, even if a major part of it was

in the hands of citizens of foreign descent. To these groups, therefore, discriminatory economic measures based on racial considerations were not only undemocratic but also nationally disastrous.

Now, however, the picture appears to be quite different. To accuse Suharto's 'New Order' of completely abandoning the idea of national industrialisation is perhaps to indulge in a sweeping statement. Yet the fact remains that Suharto flung wide open all doors to foreign capitalism. Exactly the sort of economic policy that would damage any national economy, the foundation of industrialisation. The damage is, of course, more disastrous in the case of an inchoate national economy like Indonesia's. Yet, instead of being alarmed, the present regime ballyhooed the *flooding* of foreign investments as the 'proof of international confidence' towards the regime. It is not clear here whom the regime tried to fool but it ought to be quite clear that when it comes to making profits, investors in general are not bothered with regimes any more than wolves with the owners of the lambs. Besides, the fact remains that none of the foreign investments up to date is of any long-term nature.

One need not be an economist to foresee the long-term effects of these grab-now-talk-later business ventures. Official reports spoke, for instance, of vast tracts of timber forests and sea-fishing grounds being farmed out to foreign capital indiscriminately.<sup>31</sup> Soon, however,

29 Donald E. Willmott, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

31 Parenthetically, this is reminiscent of the habit of native potentates of the past. On traditional extortion by proxy, Clive Day (*The Policy and Administration of the Dutch in Java*, p. 21) says, 'The higher officials spent their time at court, drawing revenue from their lands through agents, but visiting them rarely, and sometimes, it is said, ignorant even of their geographical location.' And the system must have been so well established that even the lowest office in the native village administration was rigged, as Day says further (*ibid.*, p. 33), 'It was notorious that the office of *bekel* was for sale to the highest bidder, . . .'

unofficial reports reached the public on the callousness of these foreign farmers who, using technologically advanced equipment, squeezed the in-shore waters barren and reduced the 'forests of giant trees to a wilderness of weeds and scrub.'<sup>32</sup> In 1969, as another example, the Suharto regime granted permission to an Australian firm for operating a sweetened milk factory in the suburbs of Jakarta. Predictably, domestic firms which had already been in the field were unable to compete and forced to close down business. The popular quip was that by calling it a 'joint-venture'—whereby the Indonesian part was in no position beyond providing merely the labour force and fresh water—the Australian firm was able to enjoy a three-year tax exemption<sup>33</sup> on top of gaining a cleared market in Indonesia. A similar fate befell domestic industries dealing with the products of the areas farmed out to foreign capital mentioned earlier. Boards made from Indonesian timber and canned fish from Indonesian waters reached the Indonesian market as imported goods, draining ever further the country's pathetic reserves in foreign currency as well as forcing the domestic industries concerned into unemployment. The list would be too long to continue.

In the pursuit of capital accumulation for its own sake, speed is of prime importance. The participation of the domestic sector is not only of no concern but also—because of its slowness which, in turn, is due to its embryonic stage—has no place in such an economy. Discriminatory measures against Chinese-descent businessmen, therefore, become justifiable as well as possible. Thence, for instance, attacks against Chinese were often justified by some on the pretext of 'eliminating the gap between the rich and the poor'. The idea being that every Chinese in Indonesia is rich. This seemingly naive justification, however, actually implies more than just meets the eye. Attacks against Chinese are actually a manifestation of the desperate attempts, if subcon-

sciously, by the native capitalists to keep alive in the tightening stranglehold of foreign capitalism. Unfortunately, however, by thus destroying what is in fact part of the national economy, such racist schemes are in effect stripping bare the soft belly of the nation's economy and making it still more vulnerable to the tentacles of foreign capitalism. Thence develops the vicious circle.

Under foreign capitalism, compradorship is the only opening left for many. Only brokers working for foreign capital and, especially, comprador-bureaucrats can survive.

*Meanwhile, the military-bureaucrat élite has prospered from close association with investment concentrated in the country's cities, mines, and plantations; it has formulated a Five-Year Plan (1969-74)—costing the equivalent of half of one year's national income and 66 per cent supported by foreign aid—to expedite 'development'; and it has put the country still deeper into debt by borrowing [US] 1.5 billion in five years, on top of 1.3 billion foreign debt inherited from Sukarno—now, 20 per cent of Indonesia's foreign currency earnings go to debt repayment.<sup>34</sup>*

Bureaucracy, as we know, produces nothing other than more bureaucrats. Similarly, brokers beget nothing—aside from the inflation of prices—but more brokers. Now Indonesia's economic situation has reached such a level that even the one-time productive classes, such as domestic manufacturers and capitalists investing in cottage-industries, are compelled to join forces with the army of brokers. In this way is rounded off the process of national looting.

32 'Planet Earth', *The Sunday Times*, London, 1971, p. 86.

33 The so-called 'tax holidays'. In complete disregard of protests from domestic circles, the Suharto regime scattered around 'incentives' which included many privileges never enjoyed by domestic investors.

34 Keith Buchanan, 'South-East Asia', *The Far East and Australasia* 1973, p. 364.

Although it might sound like crying wolf, one cannot help anticipating that this process of pauperisation will eventually make Indonesia a country of servants. Or, to use a disparaging catch phrase from colonial times, 'a nation of coolies and a coolie among nations.' And, incidentally, a portent of such national tragedy has been spelled in a press conference by no less than the then Minister of State for Economic, Financial and Industrial Affairs, now Vice-President, Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX who,

*... addressing a selected group of US and European businessmen assembled in Geneva by Time-Life, spelled out the attractions of Indonesia; they included 'the abundance of cheap labour' and 'a treasurehouse of resources'.<sup>35</sup>*

The Sultan's mention of 'a treasurehouse of resources' brings us to another gloomy picture. Now, with more and more people becoming suckers, there will soon be no more wealth to suck but that which comes directly from the soil. This includes the exploitation of natural resources which, *nudis verbis*, is no more than a primitive 'gathering economy'. So much for the progress of Indonesia's economy the generals have been vaunting about. Besides, the trouble with 'gathering economy'—such as timber-felling, fishing, mining, etc.—is that it is non-recuperative: once consumed forever consumed. Compared to this, even the colonial plantation system is blessing itself: it reproduced what it consumed.

### *The Responsibility*

Never becoming the ruling class themselves nor the possessors of real political power, the Chinese of Indonesia have always been on the receiving end. Their influence, if any, is infinitesimal in the making of any particular situation. Rather, they are made by the situation they find themselves in. In a non-prohibitive situation such as that prevailing in the

pre-Dutch era, they have never been reported to have caused any major trouble to their hosts. Dutch power politics, later to be aggravated by the bungling political performance of chauvinistic China, made Indonesia's Chinese a group apart—aliens in their own country.

Now China has relinquished her destructive attitude, opening the way for a real solution. This means that the solution, or non-solution, of Indonesia's 'Chinese problem' now lies entirely in the responsibility of whatever group of the country happens to be in the possession of political power at any given time. In turn that depends very largely upon the purpose and intention of the governing body.

The intention of the colonial powers was to draw off the wealth of the colonised country. Its basic motivation was that of self-interest. Because the mother-country was abroad, outside Indonesia, the colonial economy in Indonesia had always been export-oriented. In order to be competitive in the world market, the domestic standards of the economy had to be kept at the lowest possible level. This is why, no matter how 'enlightened', colonial governments had never really bettered the lot of the colonised people as a whole. This is also why, after so many centuries of colonial 'guidance and protection', no former colonial country has been any better off than before the intrusion of the exploiters.

Up to now the whole political setup of Indonesia remains colonial. The economy is still run on the basis of servant-master relationship, because the basic intention of the native governments remain the same; self-motivated, to serve the needs of their own interests rather than the people as a whole. Export-oriented economy, therefore, remains the backbone of the so-called 'national economy' of present-day Indonesia. And this is largely because of the fact that in order to bring about a

<sup>35</sup> Keith Buchanan, *loc. cit.*, p. 388 (with emphasis added by the present writer).

complete economic re-orientation—like that necessitated by an industrial economy for instance—the domestic standards must of absolute necessity be raised in the first place. This, needless to say, requires a great amount of reconstruction work whose results might not be yielding to be savoured in one's own lifetime. Such great sacrifice, of course, has no place in the domain of governments concerned solely with their own immediate self-interests.

As long as the politics of Indonesia remain geared to fulfilling the self-interests of the rulers, the Chinese question will remain unsolved. This is because such politics by necessity divides the society into two, due to the conflicting interests, opposing groups. Servants as opposed to masters, the ruled and economically oppressed as opposed to the economically op-

pressive ruling class. The end result is an ever present tension. In order to mitigate this tension, and thus forestall a direct showdown between the two opposing factions, the need of a scapegoat's services is a *sine qua non*. The Chinese, remaining a distinctly separate group as a result of the power politics of preceding rulers, is nowadays the most likely candidate to provide such services. Had not the Chinese been thus distinctly apart, it would have been difficult for the rulers to find an excuse for making them a scapegoat. As it is, the excuse that the Chinese are 'different' and, therefore, 'alien' is quite sufficient. It is therefore in the immediate interest of the ruling class to see that the Chinese remain a group apart. That they remain a problem.

*Subscribe to*

## Magazines from China

<b>PEKING REVIEW</b>	<i>weekly</i>
<b>CHINA PICTORIAL</b>	<i>monthly</i>
<b>CHINA RECONSTRUCTS</b>	<i>monthly</i>
<b>CHINESE LITERATURE</b>	<i>monthly</i>
<b>LITERATURE</b>	
<b>CHINOISE</b>	<i>quarterly</i>
<b>PEOPLE'S CHINA</b>	<i>monthly</i>
<b>EL POPOLA CINIO</b>	<i>monthly</i>
<b>SCIENTIA SINICA</b>	<i>bi-monthly</i>
<b>THE CHINESE MEDICAL</b>	
<b>JOURNAL</b>	<i>monthly</i>

**Distributors:**

**PEACE BOOK COMPANY**

**TEL. H-234616**



**a beautiful Chinese calendar  
free with each subscription**