

## "OUTSIDER" STATUS AND ECONOMIC SUCCESS IN SUHARTO'S INDONESIA

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I was struck recently [1998] by an exchange I witnessed in a Canberra restaurant, when an Indonesian visitor (Dede Oetomo) was explaining his background as a "Chinese" Indonesian, albeit with quite a few Javanese or Balinese ancestors from the eighteenth and nineteenth century on the mother's side. My Filipino colleague (Rey Ileto) noted with some surprise -- "in the Philippines you would simply be a Filipino; in Indonesia I guess I would be a Chinese." This was rather troubling to this important Filipino intellectual, interpreter of Philippine identity & son of a prominent Philippine general.

How is it that a substantial minority of urban Indonesian culture and language, and mixed ethnic background, is considered *Cina* and somehow alien in Indonesia, where the analogous group in Thailand or the Philippines is considered simply Thai or Filipino? And how is it possible that passions could be so strong around this single word that otherwise law-abiding Indonesian citizens should feel no shame in reviling, robbing, killing and raping their fellow-countrymen because of it? In other words, why has this category been constructed by many Indonesians to be outside their moral and political community, at least at times of social stress and breakdown? Perhaps most puzzling, why is it that the most terrifying outburst of anti-Chinese hostility since 1947, and potentially since 1740, should occur in 1998, a time when the whole Sino-Indonesian community is more culturally integrated into the mainstream than at any time in the past?

### Why "Chinese"?

To simplify, let me mention just two factors:

Firstly, in the Philippines there was almost a century (1756-1850) when immigration from China was forbidden and Chinese already there had to become Catholic and marry

locally. Once migrants from China began arriving again in the 1850s it was clear that the established group of Chinese mestizo had nothing in common with them. They dropped the label Chinese and eventually adopted a new imagining, "Filipino".

In Indonesia by contrast migration was never interrupted, and there was more of a gradual spectrum between one extreme of culturally Chinese and the other of culturally Javanese, Malay, etc. "Chinese". There was a consistent policy by foreign rulers (Dutch and still more Japanese) to regard these "Chinese" as a single group distinct from the native majority (*Indiers* or *inlanders* in Dutch usage). They encouraged this dichotomy by treating them as a single legal and administrative category, controlled by Chinese officers who were also the economically powerful collectors of colonial taxes, of which the most lucrative were those on opium sales. These tax farmers were a major prop of the nineteenth century colonial state, just as "court Jews" were of the eighteenth century modernising states in Europe. Like the court Jews, they needed the loyalty and control of impoverished, culturally different "outsider" immigrants in order to maintain their leverage with the colonial state (Butcher & Dick 1993). Hence they colluded with the Dutch in using the label *Cina*, despite the cultural chasm between themselves and the new *totok* (newcomer) sojourners.

Secondly, Filipino identity was created in the late nineteenth century by a Spanish-educated elite most of whom would have been considered *peranakan* (local-born Chinese) in Indonesia. The *peranakan* too have a reasonable claim to being the first Indonesians, as the largest element in the nineteenth century of that urban Malay-speaking culture which eventually became Indonesian national culture. There were about a quarter of a million of them in Java by 1900 (Skinner 1996: 56), far outnumbering the marginal, poor, visibly "different", immigrants. But the Indonesian national identity was imagined a generation later than the Filipino one, following rather than preceding the peak of Chinese nationalist enthusiasm in 1911. Idealistic young people searching for a dignified modern identity had grasped at the "Overseas Chinese" one, since the "Indonesian" alternative was not yet available to them. Had Dutch education and Indonesian nationalism begun in the late nineteenth century when Spanish education and Filipino nationalism did, Chinese-descended mestizos would have been the torch-bearers in both places.

## "Outsider" status

The retention of some attenuated form of Chinese religion was one of the boundary markers which kept these *peranakan* distinct from the local population. Conversion to Islam usually meant absorption into the majority after a generation or two. The other factor was the Dutch-dominated plural society, which not only permitted but encouraged an occupational and residential separation of ethnic groups. The Indonesian-Chinese symbiosis is certainly much older than the Dutch, between an "insider" elite whose political power is expected to bring economic benefits, and an "outsider" minority who are denied access to political power and therefore authorized and required to act entrepreneurially. But the colonial order froze these relationships and prevented any Chinese assimilation into the local elite, which became in the nineteenth century either Dutch-exclusive or aristocratically involuted Javanese-exclusive.

Colonial policy had the effect of reinforcing and fossilising an indigenous status hierarchy dependent on birth and government position, discouraged from taking commercial initiatives. In Java, where this policy had longest to work, the absence of a native middle class became a cliché of twentieth century social observers. By contrast status in the Sino-Indonesian community was determined primarily by wealth, since the social origins of that community were low and it was largely excluded from the bureaucracy and landholding.

The social hierarchies of Netherlands Indian colonial society fit rather well the theory of the **status gap**, developed primarily to explain why a Jewish entrepreneurial minority was essential in eastern European societies divided sharply between aristocrats and peasants. "Outsider" entrepreneurs are necessary, argues Irwin Rinder, when "the yawning social void which occurs when superior and subordinate portions of a society are not bridged by continuous, intermediate degrees of status" (Rinder 1959: 253). Status-conscious Dutch colonials and Javanese aristocrats both sought to maintain a social distance from the masses, and encouraged an outsider group, defined as Chinese to fill the intermediary roles. Chinese therefore became "essential [but] outsiders", to quote the title of a recent book (Chirot & Reid 1997). There was no doubt either that many European colonials identified Chinese in Southeast Asia with the category that had been developed for Jews in Europe. They used a familiar imagery to shift the negative, disturbing features of capitalism onto these minorities,

making it possible for Dutch colonials to see themselves (despite the evidence) rather in the role of paternalistic protectors of the passive natives.

The “ethical” direction of Dutch policy around 1900 turned much of its reforming zeal against , these Chinese roles as tax farmers and distributors, leading to a major assault on their position during the ensuing two decades. This was the first of many attempts in the twentieth century to "nationalise" or "normalise" the economy at the expense of old-style Chinese entrepreneurs (Butcher & Dick 1993: 38-39, 202-07; Shiraishi 1997: 188-90). By 1910, as Shiraishi (1997:190) puts it, the Chinese:

were no longer needed as the state's financiers, they became vulnerable to violent popular hatred, and they were politically powerless even as they became an economically prosperous 'middleman' minority in a society neatly structured along racial lines.

Like Jews in Europe after the French revolution, Chinese-Indonesians were freed from various restrictions around 1900, and ceased to be an economically-integrated “Chinese” ghetto controlled by a narrow elite of officers and tax-farmers. They became “emancipated” into the modern struggle of rival rootlessnesses, seeking new nationalist identities in the age of mass-based politics.

It was from increasingly rootless young Sino-Indonesians that the first threat of an anticolonial and nationalist kind began to trouble Dutch police around 1908, not from the officially-anointed harbingers of nationalism, the Javanese aristocrats of Budi Utomo. The Dutch were alarmed to find that Javanese workers were also beginning to join some radical, Chinese-dominated unions, of which one of the more extreme was the Kong Sing *kongsi* (association) in Surakarta. Dutch fears of a common radical front were ended abruptly in 1911, when Javanese members stormed out of the Kong Sing to form their own Reksa Rumeksa *kongsi*, and to fight their former comrades in the streets of Surakarta. This Reksa Rumeksa quickly developed into the beginnings of Sarekat Islam, the first mass racial/national movement under the banner of Islam (Shiraishi 1997: 187-205). Part of the reason for this fateful falling out was the effect of the Chinese revolution of 1911 on young Chinese-Indonesians, for whom it represented a route to national dignity as the equal of Europeans and Japanese (granted European status in the Indies a decade earlier). Young Sino-Indonesians suddenly began to dress like Europeans and see themselves as distinct from the

Indonesian majority. Separate Chinese and Indonesian nationalisms, in other words, were born on the streets of Javanese cities within the same turbulent period, even if both were for a time minority currents in their respective communities.

Rival Chinese and Indonesian nationalisms in the 1920s and '30s were each trying to imagine new identities that excluded the other, even though both began from similar origins. By the 1930s there was still no "Indonesian" or even Dutch nationality to belong to, but several rival national ideas in the air. On the other hand there was a colonial elite and its institutions, where people of Chinese, indigenous and European background mixed on the basis of Dutch and Malay language. Though not using the label, the dominant Sino-Indonesian figures of that time were in practice as "Indonesian" as anybody in that period. They spoke Indonesian and Dutch rather than local languages or Chinese, they were born in the ethnically mixed cities of the colony, and they identified with the Netherlands Indies as a whole rather than with a local nationalism such as that of Java, Minahassa or Minangkabau. Twang Peck Yang has shown that the "Chinese" business leaders of the late colonial period were almost exclusively local-born *peranakan* who identified locally and spoke no Chinese—in marked contrast to European business leadership, which was strongly oriented to a Dutch or German fatherland. The Sino-Indonesian business elite invested much in Indonesia, a little in Singapore, but very little in China, with which it had nothing in common but that awkward label (Twang 1998: 38-52). The politically stable (if repressive) conditions of late colonialism, in other words, favoured a business leadership which was also stable and locally rooted.

In the turbulent 1940s this localised Chinese elite lost its property and economic influence. The Japanese rulers of 1942-45 favoured "Chinese" Chinese who could write in Kanji, and their extremely autarchic economic policies gave opportunities to the "outsiders" ready to risk all in smuggling and bribing authorities. The struggling Indonesian Republic of 1945-50 proved even more damaging to old Chinese capital than to Dutch capital; at the leadership level because alienating Western capital was deemed fatal for international recognition; and on the ground because Chinese shops were more visible and vulnerable to angry mobs. On the other hand the Republic could not have survived without the help of a new Chinese business element. Despite the rhetoric of anti-capitalism and extreme nationalism, the military and political bosses of the revolution all had a Chinese at their elbow

to provide the essential supplies and finances, and these were almost invariably "outsider" Chinese-speaking *totok*, epitomised by the China-born Hok-chiu Liem Sioe Liong. They came from nowhere because they were willing to take big risks in smuggling goods under the Dutch guns, and bribing and bending rules. They had no property to protect under the Dutch order. They formed links with military power-holders which have served both sides well (Twang 1998: 178-81). Despite their (at least initial) "outsider" quality, they deserve the gratitude of the Indonesian Republic.

The expulsion of the Dutch from Indonesian economic life in the 1950s, and the takeover of the state by a new Indonesian intelligentsia, removed much of the status gap, and began to generate an indigenous entrepreneurial group in competition with Chinese. The bureaucracy expanded enormously to cater for the increasing numbers of educated Indonesians who wanted the status and security of government position. Mainstream nationalism had always found Marxism attractive as an explanation for Indonesian weakness, and right through the 1960s and '70s capitalism remained a dirty word, seen as incompatible with the kind of just society for which nationalism fought. Capitalism remained associated with alien evil, its harsh and greedy edges sheeted home to Chinese or westerners--much as they were blamed on Jews in Christianity's late Middle Ages.

Culture undoubtedly has a role in entrepreneurial success, but only if it is seen in the specific context of minority and national social construction. The precolonial Indonesian society, though highly entrepreneurial, did have a redistributive pattern whereby wealth was expected to be recycled into status through feasting and the assistance of relatives and clients. The colonial system and its nationalist mirror reified this elite preference to the point where status and business were almost mutually exclusive. Only moral "outsiders" (and at a micro-level, women) were allowed to be stingy with their money, by using it to build up a business. In the Sukarno years capitalism remained associated with alien evil, and there were moral constraints on any but Chinese getting seriously into it.

### **The Suharto years: the paradox of cultural assimilation and renewed pariahdom**

Officially the new Indonesian nation-state adopted a policy of assimilation, discouraging, and after 1966 prohibiting, public expressions of Chinese language or culture. The Indonesian censuses dropped colonial-style questions about ethnicity, and officially all

citizens are supposed to be equal - a situation similar to Thailand, and much more flexible than the racially bounded polities of Malaysia and Singapore. The Sukarno regime sought to incorporate Chinese like every other ethnicity into a diverse national community, with a few left-leaning *peranakan* politicians in most cabinets of that period (see Siau in this volume).

The 32-year regime of Suharto reintroduced a kind of economic and political stability that might have been expected to remove the business advantages of “outsider” status and to produce a more integrated business culture as had been happening in the 1920s and ‘30s. The virtual cessation of immigration after 1930, and the success of Indonesian as a unifying national language, should have made this easier. Yet an extraordinary ambivalence marked the Suharto regime in respect of Chinese, which has proved to have some very sinister results. This regime began in a revived mood of great hostility to all things Chinese, presumably based on its sharp reaction against Sukarno’s closeness to Beijing and a virulent anti-communism which provided the legitimation for Suharto’s rise to power.<sup>1</sup> New regulations in 1967 banned Chinese newspapers, indeed Chinese writing in any form, Chinese social organisations and schools, and the public celebration of Chinese religion and customs. A name-changing campaign persuaded most of those previously using Chinese names that they might escape the worst discrimination if they changed to Indonesian-sounding ones. This was immediately frustrated by the adding to identity cards of an extra zero, making Chinese ancestry clear to every official. In an atmosphere tolerant towards corruption, it became established practice throughout the bureaucracy to expect those of Chinese descent to pay under the counter for government services they received. Chinese were excluded from the bureaucracy, the army and political life, and only a small number were admitted to state universities (Suryadinata, 1992:145-64; Coppel and Siau in this volume).

But the opening to foreign investment and rapid economic growth gave unprecedented opportunities to Sino-Indonesian business, whose efficiency, capital, and networks were absolutely indispensable to the new economic climate. Those who flourished most were the famous crony capitalists, notably Liem Sioe Liong and Bob Hasan, both of whom were already heavily involved in smuggling and other shady business of the Diponegoro Division

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<sup>1</sup>While anti-communism marked the whole New Order regime, a degree of paranoia about Chinese influence appears to be specific to Suharto, often handicapping the foreign ministry in pursuing a flexible policy in Indonesia’s national interest.

back in the 1950s when Suharto was its corrupt commander.<sup>2</sup> They were mostly from the diminishing band of *totok* outsiders, who had built links with particular Suharto-related military units before 1965. But even these rent-seeking conglomerates with their palace connections could only do well because of their links with a broader base of efficient and predominately Sino-Indonesian small business.

As has been documented in relation to the timber industry, Suharto began by dealing with Sino-Indonesian loggers in consequence of their expertise as partners of foreign concessionaries. When he squeezed out the foreign firms after 1980 the handful of Chinese-Indonesian cronies (Bob Hasan, Prajogo Pangestu, Liem Sioe Liong) became absolutely central. Their vast extra-budgetary revenues from timber concessions gave Suharto a weapon he could use both to enrich himself and his family, and to pursue uneconomic pet projects such as the national petrochemical industry (Chandra Asri), Habibie's aircraft factories, Taman Mini and transmigration, without a head-on clash with the technocratic ministers in charge of the budget. Precisely because of their outsider status and lack of entree into the bureaucracy, these cronies posed no threat and had minimal capacity to resist the first family's demands.

Thus the Indonesian Chinese were included not only for their business expertise, international connections, and pre-existing business links with the armed forces, but also for their lack of status as an independent political force. Of course, the resentment of the Chinese on the part of the *pribumi* rose as a consequence, increasing the marginality of the Chinese should they ever lose the protection of Suharto, and thus increasing their dependence on Suharto (Ascher 1998: 55).<sup>3</sup>

On the positive side, economic growth and the liberalization of the economy gradually broke down the majority prejudice against private enterprise and money-making activity. There is now an indigenous middle class, admittedly mostly working in foreign or Chinese-managed firms, which often merges with the Sino-Indonesian middle class, though also competing with it in business. This period marks therefore the emergence of a more normal middle class, documented by Robison (1986), which might eventually lead to the kind of functional integration regardless of ethnicity which we find in some of the advanced

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<sup>2</sup>Bob Hasan differed from most of these operators in being a *peranakan*, born in Semarang in 1931, but was a nobody until attaching himself to General Gatot Subroto, Suharto's predecessor as Diponegoro commander. Hence he may still have played the "outsider" role.



economies. Ruth McVey (1992: 25) has pointed to a change in attitude of the regime itself during the 1980s, as it began to see that it was so involved with Chinese business that the periodic outbreaks of anti-Chinese popular violence were not so much an outlet for diversionary scapegoating as another way of attacking the regime itself.<sup>4</sup> In the 1990s, however, as Suharto identified a Benny Moerdani-led Army as the greatest potential threat to his and his family's power, he began to play with the fire of Islamic and racist resentment as never before. There is probably truth in the allegations of a Suharto hand provoking some of the worst examples of racial violence since 1966, particularly through son-in-law General Prabowo in January and February of 1998. While we may hope that those who deal in this dastardly currency will be repaid in kind, we should not imagine that eliminating Soeharto has removed the problem. As long as the more fundamental features of outsider status remain in Indonesian society, there will always be irresponsible politicians to exploit them.

The great expansion of the middle class over the past 20 years changed profoundly the dynamics of the relation between Sino-Indonesian and *pribumi*. If continued, it might eventually have lead to an easing of tensions on the Thai model. The present is however an extremely dangerous phase, because two still-distinct middle classes are now competing directly over a shrinking pie. It has always been the rise of a majority middle class which marks the greatest danger for pariah or outsider entrepreneurs.

### **Why is the violence occurring now?**

To a considerable degree the measures against Chinese culture of the Soeharto regime succeeded in reducing the remaining cultural features which had made some Sino-Indonesians very distinctive. Only the oldest and most marginal now do not speak fluent Indonesian. Sino-Indonesians are once again (as in the nineteenth century) an Indonesian ethnic group with one of the highest proportions using Indonesian at home--much higher than Javanese or Sundanese. So why was discrimination against Chinese more marked in the Suharto era than the Sukarno one, and why is violence of an explicitly racist character more marked now than for generations?

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<sup>3</sup> The same point is made more generally by Suryadinata (1992: 142): "These Indonesians in power feel safer using the Chinese rather than their pribumi counterparts".

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt makes the same point about anti-semitism being essentially directed against the state in nineteenth century Europe: "each class of society which came into a conflict with the state as such became anti-semitic because the only social group which seemed to represent the state were the Jews", Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p.25.

Some points are relatively obvious:

#### *Economic Crisis*

The current crisis is the kind of testing time for Indonesia that the 1930s were for Europe. Though Indonesia has by no means reached the bottom, a 15% GDP loss is already officially estimated for 1998, and by the end of 1999 will exceed the 24% GDP loss suffered by Germany over the whole depression period 1929-33. Moreover the boom which preceded 1998 had brought Indonesia to roughly the levels reached by Germany in the 1890s or Italy in the 1920s (derived from Maddison 1995). By 1997 the degree of urbanization in Indonesia (about 35%) was comparable to that which Europe as a whole had reached in 1925. In Indonesia's 1998 depression, like that in 1930s Europe but unlike previous Indonesian crises, there were millions of angry educated unemployed in the cities.

Such an economic crisis undermines confidence in the global financial system, and in the beneficence of ruling elites. Demagogues such as Hitler and Mussolini become plausible to far wider circles when they claim that the problems are all caused by racial, national or class enemies manipulating the system. Looked at with the advantage of hindsight, it was this political undermining of confidence which was the most fatal consequence of the 1930s, not the terrible but temporary suffering induced by the depression itself. To judge from the industrial countries which experienced radical political changes as a result of the 1929-33 depression, the most dangerous time politically may be three or four years into the depression, as conditions begin to improve and new messiahs can appear to have solutions.

#### *Democratization.*

Again it is an obvious point that pre-modern monarchies, empires, and autocracies generally allowed or encouraged their peoples to remain distinct, united only by the personal power at the top. Democratization involves not only lifting the lid on all sorts of buried hatreds, as we have seen in the ex-Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, but also allows politicians to exploit these hatreds cynically to win votes. At a fairly superficial level, this helps to explain why a kind of programmatic anti-Semitism developed in Europe only in the last quarter of the 19th century, as franchises were widened to include the whole population. Nobody should imagine that Indonesia has an easy task to survive a free and fair election without further exacerbating popular

hostilities and scapegoating. So far (in April 1999), one must congratulate the leaders of the major parties on having avoided such dangerous tactics, while wondering whether this is in part a consequence of an ingrained but endangered habit of seeing politics as an elite concern.

There are some more profound and complex difficulties, however, in the transformation of any plural society into a modern nation state. Hannah Arendt was one of the more acute observers of the same paradox in Europe, of anti-semitism reaching its height as democratization and cultural assimilation progressed. As she put this dilemma,

Equality of condition, though it is certainly a basic requirement for justice, is nevertheless among the greatest and most uncertain ventures of modern mankind. The more equal conditions are, the less explanation there is for the differences that actually exist between people; and thus all the more unequal do individuals and groups become. ....The great challenge to the modern period, and its peculiar danger, has been that in it man for the first time confronted man without the protection of differing circumstances and conditions. And it has been precisely this new concept of equality that has made modern race relations so difficult, for there we deal with natural differences which by no possible and conceivable change of condition can become less conspicuous. It is because equality demands that I recognize each...individual as my equal, that the conflicts between different groups, which for reasons of their own are reluctant to grant each other this basic equality, take on such terribly cruel forms (Arendt 1968: 54).

Daniel Chirot reminds us that the changes brought about a century ago in Europe by mass migration to the cities, privatisation of communal land, rationalisation of the law and the development of a new middle class "neither quite in the elite nor, any longer, a part of the peasant masses", both unsettled old identities and provided possibilities for a modern nationalism which could redefine ancient neighbours as outsiders. The political environment conducive to the rise of anti-Semitism in Austria and Germany was marked by a reaction against the liberal and progressive German culture [read today's globalisation], which helps explain why it was precisely the most assimilated, successful and cosmopolitan Jews who most provoked anti-Semitism. "Not only were they successful competitors in the economic and cultural marketplace, but they were also interpreted as insidious agents of antinationalism who poisoned the purity of the nation by introducing foreign--that is liberal and antinationalist--ideas and practices" (Chirot 1997: 8-9). To translate to the Indonesian situation, it is because people like the Wanandi brothers are so Indonesian that they can be the target of an explicitly racial kind of politics, which the real outsiders cannot.

### **Hopeful conclusions.**

My aim has been to explain that the racial hostility and violence occurring in Indonesia is not the consequence of a peculiar defect of national character, but of the particularly dangerous historical conjuncture the country faces. We should not despair, but we should be aware of the profound dangers, and take them as seriously as they deserve. There are real grounds for hope that Indonesia will get through this economic and political crisis less wounded than European societies were by theirs.

There are many specific reforms which will make a benign outcome more likely and a tragic one less so. Indonesia's wonderfully diverse social fabric is the greatest potential asset in negotiating the crisis. Pluralism is inescapable as long as Indonesia remains a vast Archipelagic country, and this established pluralism within an even quite assertive nationalism is the best guarantee that narrow ethno-nationalism of a Balkan type can be avoided. However the culture of the mainly urban Chinese-Indonesian minority, along with those of the hunter-gatherers and shifting cultivators at the other end of the spectrum, have been singled out as somehow unacceptable within that diversity. It is essential to the gradual removal of the "outsider" status of the minority both that their culture and symbols cease to be popularly seen as outside the moral community, and that the economy become more open and regulated. The second half of this equation is far harder in the badly regulated and corrupt environment from which Indonesia currently suffers. Overt discrimination against the minority is almost certain to produce opposite results as it has in the past, with an increasingly distorted economy requiring increasingly "outsider" solutions and special deals.

The first half can be more easily achieved by any government which seriously wants to address this problem, especially if it has intelligent support from community leaders in doing so. I want to focus on two particular initiatives which have not been much discussed.

#### *A New Label*

Throughout this chapter and in all my discussion of this issue, I am increasingly troubled by the tyranny of the term "Chinese" in English or "Cina" in Indonesian. The problem with this term is that it is used to cover too many contradictory things, including a minority which is patently Indonesian in every respect, as well as a language and culture most of this minority know nothing of and a foreign power often seen as a threat. Changing Cina to

Tionghoa in no sense solves this problem, unless one term (presumably Tionghoa) is used for the foreign reality and the other for the Indonesian one. The Filipino term “Chinoy” has been invented to get around just this problem there. If Chinese-Indonesians want to pursue the path of acceptance as one Indonesian minority among many, they first must agree on a satisfactory name. *Peranakan* and *Keturunan* will be among the candidates, but an even more artificial term with no prior associations might serve the purpose better. A country that solved so many problems by inventing the term “Indonesia” should be able to resolve this one.

*A legitimate place in national culture.*

The education syllabus and the pattern of national days and national rituals have been powerful tools to build a sense of Indonesian identity which embraces regional and ethnic identities of various kinds. The Sino-Indonesian absence from this system is a powerful symbolic exclusion from the definition of the nation. Like other ethnic groups (*suku*) the Chinese-Indonesian minority needs to make its case for inclusion in the syllabus and for the canonization of a particular national hero (*pahlawan*) of ethnic Chinese background. This is the established means to establish the legitimacy of a group within the national community, and within the educational system. There is no shortage of candidates for such an honour. By the usual criterion for official national hero status, leading a major fight against the Dutch colonisers, the leader of the Chinese-Javanese forces in the “Chinese war” of 1740-43, Tan Singko alias Singseh, is well qualified. So are the elected leaders of the Lan-fang kongsi of Monterado, north of Pontianak (West Kalimantan), who defied Dutch claims over them for many years until finally defeated in 1854. But in an era of reform it is time to look for national role models among those who more positively built the national culture, such as the *peranakan* writers and publishers who developed a Malay-language press and modern popular literature in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

This is but one way to redefine the national identity in a more inclusive and positive way. Another is to insist on a fair representation of the Chinese-Indonesian heritage in Indonesia’s many museums and the theme parks (Taman Mini) which now grace many provincial capitals as well as Jakarta. Through such means the next generation may do better than the present one to remove the “outsider” status of a minority crucial to Indonesia’s modernisation.

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