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# The Eternal Newcomer: Chinese Indonesian Identity from Indonesia to the United States

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## Abstract

*The construction of identity among the ethnic Chinese populations in Indonesia has been a complicated and incomplete process. The temporal and spatial formulation of identity has allowed for continual change in which marginalization and discrimination have resulted. This paper utilizes Stuart Hall's theory in which identity always multiplies and changes throughout history, determined by a "splitting between groups. From the colonization of Indonesia to modern times, the identity of ethnic Chinese has constantly been changing, while being kept apart from what Benedict Anderson calls the national imagined community. Indonesia's national dictum, "Unity in Diversity," has dismissed the small Chinese ethnicity that comprises about three percent of the population. This exclusion by the majority other and the inclusion formed within their group has allowed for the formation of various identities that have shifted and changed throughout time. This problem of defining "Chineseness," which was compounded during the New Order, currently is experiencing positive and negative changes due to looser government policies regarding the expression of Chinese culture. Current Indonesian state policies aim for multiculturalism, permitting the Chinese to publicly display and engage in Chinese culture, however, simultaneously it essentializes Chinese culture into stereotypes. This paper asserts an anthropological approach toward understanding Chinese identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia. It evaluates the ethnic group's self-identification, as well as the perception of the "natives," to investigate the formation of identity between the two groups. It then analyzes the experience of Chinese Indonesians in Los Angeles to show the transformation of their identity and how the concept of eternal newcomer may also apply outside of Indonesia.*

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The construction of identity among the ethnic Chinese populations in Indonesia has been a complex process. The temporal and spatial formulation of identity has allowed for continual change in which marginalization and discrimination have resulted. According to Stuart Hall, "Identities are never unified...never singular but multiply across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (du Gay and Hall 1996:17). Moreover, he states, "Identity is constructed through splitting. Splitting between that which one is, and that which is the other" (Back and Solomos 2009:201-202). From the colonization of Indonesia to modern times, the identity of ethnic Chinese has constantly been changing, while being kept apart from what Benedict Anderson calls the national imagined community (Anderson 2006). Indonesia's national dictum, "Unity in Diversity," has dismissed the small Chinese ethnicity that comprises about three percent of the population. This exclusion by the

majority “other” and the inclusion formed within their own group, along with relating race and ethnicity to identity, has allowed for the formation of various identities that have shifted and changed throughout time resulting in the perception that Chinese are, and forever will be, the eternal newcomer.

### From Dutch Rule to Modernity

Throughout Indonesia’s history, the identity of the ethnic Chinese has changed and been perceived as a separate group from the majority *pribumi* (native Indonesians). The term *pribumi* is rather problematic considering that Indonesia comprises of thousands of islands consisting of hundreds of various ethnic groups and languages. However, because all “native” Indonesian ethnic groups, whether Javanese, Ambonese, Balinese, or Dayak have been included in this imagined community, they are unified under the umbrella term *pribumi*.

Similar to the *pribumi*, the Chinese Indonesians themselves consist of a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The four predominant groups who migrated to Indonesia were the Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu, and Cantonese—each of them with a distinct language, economy, and culture. Due to their distinct specializations, each group populated different areas and islands in Indonesia. The Hakka migrated to West Kalimantan, the Hokkien located to Java and Sumatra, the Teochiu lived in Java, Sumatra, and the Riau islands, and the Cantonese spread across the archipelago (Turner 2003).

In the case of Indonesia, “the Chinese are positioned as newcomers forever, no matter how long they have settled in Indonesia” (Hoon 2008:138). Before Dutch colonization, the Chinese were able to absorb into Indonesian society, but after the arrival of the Dutch they began to be perceived as a threat to the “natives” well being. When the Dutch colonized Indonesia, they implemented a divide-and-rule policy. In the power structure, the Dutch were on the top and the native Indonesians were on the bottom. The Chinese “occupied an intermediate position” and were integrated as the “middlemen” between the Dutch officials and the native Indonesians (Vickers 2005:28). Due to the access of higher political and social status, the “natives” began fostering anti-Chinese sentiments. The negative effects of the Dutch system resulted in various Chinese groups to form clearer identities. During Dutch rule, the Chinese were identified as “Foreign Orientals,” but identified themselves separately through three primary groups:

The *totok* who manifested Chinese national identity were entirely oriented towards China in educational, cultural, and political matters. The CHH group [Chinese Association] was politically pro-Dutch but culturally remained as Chinese. Finally, the PTI [Chinese Indonesian Party] invested all its interest and hope in Indonesia alone. (Hoon 2008:32)

The *totok* (pure blood) were the so-called newcomers within the Chinese community. They still maintained strong ties to China and did not wish to assimilate into Indonesian culture. The PTI, were considered *peranakan* (mixed blood) and had developed relationships and intermarried with Indonesians over a longer period of time compared to the *totok* population. Chinese-Indonesians were not a unified group and had different agendas in how to develop their own ideas of ethnic identity. Yet, the fact that they were labeled as “Foreign Orientals,” and enjoyed better economic privilege by the Dutch, instilled the notion that the Chinese were greedy foreigners.

Besides *totok*, *peranakan*, and Foreign Oriental, several other labels have been applied to the Chinese to maintain frontiers. Many pribumi describe the Chinese as “Orang Cina” while labeling themselves as “Orang Indonesia.” This term holds a pejorative connotation, which was used as the official term during President Suharto’s regime beginning in the 1960s. *Orang Tionghoa* was also interchangeable with *Orang Cina*, but lost popularity. However, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century “the term *Orang Tionghoa* started to be reintroduced in the mass media to substitute for the offensive, but official term, *Orang Cina*” (Aguilar 2001:505). The term *pendatang*, meaning newcomers, was used to identify the Chinese as a “rootless” group that will never establish themselves in the Indonesian community (Hoon 2008). Although no longer used today, it mirrors the marker of foreign Oriental used during Dutch rule by reinforcing the perception of the Chinese as an eternal stranger to Indonesia.

During Dutch colonial rule, the ethnic Chinese, “natives”, and Dutch citizens were separated into distinct classes, with the formation of identity based in this social structure. However, it was not until the rise of the modern nation-state that the concept of identity would be transformed into racial policy used for political and financial gain by the government. It was during the modernization of Indonesia that identity transformed from something personal into something national. In this transition, as Clifford Geertz describes, “the aggregation of independently defined, specifically outlined traditional primordial groups into larger, more diffuse units whose implicit frame of reference is not the local scene but the ‘nation’—in the sense of the whole society encompassed by the new civil state” (Geertz 1973:306-307). What was once used to identify small social units within a society, the notion of identity was now being manipulated as a strategic tool for the building of a nation.

The ethnic differences among the Chinese were not noticed and they were continually grouped together as one homogenous group, the Chinese. To the majority, the Chinese looked and sounded the same, and originated from a common country, which would allow for the application of a standardized system of persecution toward them. The period known as the New Order (1966-1998) under president Suharto was a time when the government instigated racist laws that attempted to completely strip Chinese of their cultural identity while retaining them as a separate entity from the Indonesian nation. As Zygmunt Bauman mentions, “Racism is a policy first, ideology second. Like all politics, it needs organization, managers, and experts” (2009:286). The identity of the Chinese was reformulated by Suharto’s policies that reinforced racism through racial and ethnic stereotypes, widening the separateness between the two groups. During the New Order, the idea of “*Masalah Cina*,” or the “China Problem” was used to make a clear distinction between the *pribumi* and the ethnic Chinese. The “China Problem” stipulated that the Chinese were not participants in the national culture and in order for the nation to develop and become united, must be assimilated into the “national” culture.

In order to solve the “China problem,” forced assimilation was introduced to ethnically homogenize the nation and erase ethnic boundary markers between the ethnic Chinese and the *pribumi*. Through assimilation any cultural trait that was perceived as Chinese was to be removed from society. First, the Chinese were forced into changing their Chinese names into Indonesian ones. Second, the public practice of Chinese customs were banned and by “early 1979,” as Suryadinata states, “the Soeharto Cabinet also issued a decision, stating that Confucianism was not a religion” (Lindsey 2005:81). Because Confucianism was a Chinese religion it must be eradicated from Indonesian society. Third, any form of visible symbols that represented Chinese culture was to be eliminated. Such symbols included media, language, and Chinese characters. If one were to be caught speaking Chinese in public the punishment would

be severe. Even telephone lines were tapped by the government in order to monitor language use and if someone were to utter a word of Chinese, a monitor would interject, telling that person to cease the conversation or face a harsh penalty. In addition, if anyone were caught possessing books, medicine, or any other material goods with Chinese characters inscribed on them, they would be punished equally as if they possessed drugs, firearms, or pornography. Finally, and what formed the basis of Chinese Indonesian identity, was the three columns (press, organizations, and schools) of the Chinese community which were all banned. No longer could the ethnic Chinese organize and share in a common culture. They were to become part of the homogeneous nation by incorporating the national system of language, schools, and even names into their consciousness.

Although the stated goal was to assimilate the Chinese into the Indonesian nation, and was fairly successful in erasing particular ethnic boundary markers (language, religion), the underlying intention was to maintain separateness, which was performed through discrimination, marginalization, and stigmatization (Chua 2004). Discrimination was performed in several sectors of society. They were issued identity cards, unknown to them, noting their Chinese descent to distinguish the difference between themselves and the *pribumi*. The identification cards were an obvious device to maintain a boundary in order to identify the Chinese as a separate group from the “natives.” This identification system would allow the government to be able not only to track their activities, but also to discriminate against them concerning social privileges. One such privilege was education, which allowed a limited number of Chinese students, usually around 10%, to attend university. Many Chinese parents were forced to send their children to overseas institutions in order for them to obtain a university education. Regarding career opportunities, the Chinese were not permitted to work in the government, which led to them opening private businesses as one of their only options. Because the Chinese were only able to open private businesses, stereotypes reappeared asserting that Chinese have a proclivity for greed and power, with a myth arising that the “Chinese constitute only 3.5% of the population, but control 70% of Indonesia’s economy” (Chua:474). Such a stereotype was, in part, formulated by Suharto’s administration and propagated throughout society in order to divert attention away from his own corrupt and harmful practices toward the welfare of the country.

In 1998, massive riots erupted across Indonesia due to economic problems. However, the riots quickly turned into anti-Chinese riots in some areas and hundreds of Chinese Indonesians were killed. After the riots, Suharto resigned and the construction of ethnic Chinese identity was reexamined. At this time, ethnic Chinese believed they were Indonesian. They were born in Indonesia, had Indonesian names, and spoke Indonesian, with many not able to speak any Chinese dialect, but the riots revealed that many *pribumi* still perceived them as outsiders.

A reassessment of Chinese identity was occurring socially and politically. New laws were passed to revoke previous laws prohibiting the use of Chinese names, language, and media. Chinese were slowly being permitted to publicly display their culture and often encouraged to. Imlek (Chinese New Year) became an optional public holiday in 2001 and a state holiday in 2003 (Hoon 2010). The prohibition concerning the use Chinese language and characters was lifted and the Chinese could once again express themselves through cultural institutions including schools and media. During this time, the new policy taken up by the government was one of multiculturalism. Its aim was to portray Indonesia as a country encompassing varying cultures interacting in a constructive and congenial atmosphere. Whereas, the idea of multiculturalism may seem harmless in the fact that it aims to portray the multitude of cultures in a given society, the negative effects can have a far larger impact than the positive.

### Observations of Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesia

During my four months in Serang, Indonesia (west of Jakarta), I observed the demonstration of multiculturalism in various social stages. On television, I viewed shows that portrayed the Chinese as exaggerated cultural representations. First of all, the attire the actors wore represented those found during the dynastic periods. Men and women wearing long robes, women with elaborate hairpins, and men donning the Manchu queue hairstyle were the standard dress that depicted the Chinese. Not only is this interpretation historically inaccurate, but it also portrays to the audience that the Chinese are one uniform group. In reality, when people observe Chinese Indonesians on the street, they obviously do not wear such garments, but the idea that the Chinese exhibit particular characteristics making them a static and identical group becomes harmful. When I walked through the markets during Chinese New Year, I witnessed dozens of stores selling the standard Imlek decorations with the color of red flooding my vision. Although I observed similar decorations being sold while living in China, in Indonesia there was an atmosphere of separation present. Similar to the portrayal of Chinese on television, there was a splitting of identities in which the Chinese were viewed as that “other.”

Nowadays, both “native” Indonesians and Chinese continue to separate themselves through the labeling of names, spatial boundaries, and stereotypes formulated from the past. In, Indonesian Chinese in Crisis, Charles Coppel describes three stereotypes that have permeated throughout Indonesian society which still apply today. These are: Chinese are detached from society, do not adhere to Indonesian culture and only follow the culture of China, and do not identify with Indonesia (1983). The first stereotype describes the Chinese as exclusive with no desire to intermingle with the Indonesians. When viewing the layout of Jakarta today, I witnessed that the ethnic Chinese live primarily in West and North Jakarta. The Hakka Chinese, many of them descending from Kalimantan (north of Java), live in West Jakarta, whereas the Hokkien Chinese predominantly reside in North Jakarta. The Chinese tend to live close to the main roads, whereas the “natives” often reside in the alleys and back roads. This spatial differentiation reinforces the stereotype that Chinese are reserved from society.

Schools have become another source of sustaining the spatial boundaries between Chinese and “natives.” Many Chinese parents wish to send their children to private Chinese schools because, as C.Y. Hoon states, “Chinese schools have been important sites for transmitting Chinese culture and maintaining Chinese identity” (2011:1). Not only are they preferred for the preservation of their Chinese culture, but also they allow a space in which they feel safe and comfortable. In the public schools, the majority of students are Muslim *pribumi*, so the Chinese-Indonesians feel less secure. In addition, these schools are typically Christian, which becomes another ethnic boundary marker creating cultural distance.

Religion has continually been an issue relating to the identity of Chinese Indonesians. Under the rule of the Dutch, Sukarno, and Suharto ethnic Chinese have been defined by their religion, or lack thereof, resulting in persecution. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese organizations such as the Confucian Association (*kongjiao hui*) ardently attempted to establish Confucianism as an official religion (Coppel 1989). Later, president Sukarno recognized Confucianism as one of the six state religions, but in 1979 president Suharto outlawed the practice. Today, the practice of Confucianism is permitted, but many Chinese have adopted Christianity as their religion because of the international recognition it holds and the stark contrast from the Muslim *pribumi*. However, this separation has come at great costs. As

Melissa Crouch illustrates, “In 2005, an estimated 50 Christian churches in West Java alone...have been damaged or forced to close by radical Islamic groups” (2007:96). Through religious affiliation, the Chinese and the natives have further demarcated themselves from one another, leading to increased animosity and violence.

However, although racism is no longer state-sponsored, racist tendencies remain and, as Freedman points out, “many discriminatory policies remain in place” (2003:446). If one is Chinese, obtaining official documents such as birth certificates and passports can be a tedious and drawn out process, so many Chinese spend more money in order to expedite the procedure. Another example is that neighborhood taxes in communities will often be higher for the Chinese compared to the “natives.” As a resident of Jakarta explained to me, neighborhood gangs will intimidate Chinese residents into paying them protection money; otherwise the gangs may threaten them with violence or theft. Change is occurring, but anti-Chinese sentiments and stereotypes are very engrained into the mindsets of both the “native” Indonesians and the Chinese Indonesians.

The anxious relationship between majority and minority populations in modernizing societies has been observed throughout several communities across the globe. Arjun Appadurai’s concept of “anxiety of incompleteness” explains that the majority population of a country, which is also the one in power, views minority populations as the obstacle in obtaining an “unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted ethos” (2006:8). From these feelings of incompleteness arises “predatory identities”. Appudarai states,

I define as predatory those identities whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as a we. Predatory identities emerge, periodically, out of pairs of identities...which have long histories of close contact, mixture, and some degree of mutual stereotyping. (2006:51)

In the case of the Chinese Indonesians and the “natives,” their history from Dutch rule to present times has resulted in the binary opposition of these two groups with creations of stereotypes as a result. President Suharto’s reign during the New Order, reified these stereotypes and anxieties by transforming them into government polices. The anxious feelings created by the incompleteness of the majority groups in the newly formed nation-state allowed Suharto to implement racist policies geared toward the Chinese minority.

Mary Douglas’ (1966) notion of “pollution” in society, in which “persons in a marginal state...who are placeless” hold an ambiguous position in society, is also crucial to the discussion (1966:118). Such an indefinable identity is dangerous to society. In the case of the Chinese Indonesians, they are the marginalized and due to their perceived danger, prevent the nation from becoming the imagined community that Suharto so desperately tried to achieve during his reign.

Similar to other “ethnic” conflicts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Chinese in Indonesia were used as scapegoats for economic and political turmoil that arose during the period of modernization. However, we must remember that it was not only the Chinese that suffered racial and ethnic discrimination, but other ethnic groups throughout the massive archipelago also encountered unwarranted violence and intolerance toward them.

### **Chinese Indonesian Identity in Los Angeles**

In addition to my observations in Indonesia, I have been investigating the Chinese Indonesian community in Los Angeles, CA. The issue of eternal newcomer does not only exist in Indonesia, but in America as well. Within Los Angeles, racism is not a foreign concept, but the Asian experience is often ignored and pushed aside in favor of racial discussions concerning African-Americans, Latinos, and Hispanics. Therefore, whether racial discrimination or lack of attention, Asians in Los Angeles and all of America, are not included in the debate.

The issue of identity in Indonesia has been researched extensively, with scholars from many disciplines investigating the historical, psychological, anthropological, political, economical, and numerous other aspects. Moreover, Chinese Indonesians have been studied outside of Indonesia in places such as Australia due its close proximity or the Netherlands because of its colonialization of Indonesia. However, the examination of Chinese-Indonesians in America has been lacking, except for basic statistical information concerning the numerical populations and locations of most Indonesians in America. While researching this topic, I discovered almost nothing written about this population. I came across a couple of short newspaper articles, an unpublished dissertation concerning Indonesian immigrants in Philadelphia, and an article by Frank Cunningham, which turned out to be the most extensive, although it was only fifteen pages of basic information discussing demographics and organizations. However, Cunningham made a very important point, "Unlike the refugees...Indonesians have not received governmental assistance, thus little attention in research and writing has been paid to them" (Ling 2008:90). However, due to continuing persecution in Indonesia for being Chinese or being Christian, many Chinese Indonesians arrive in the U.S. hoping to attain asylum protection and begin a new life. Because of the evidence, the issue of Chinese-Indonesians in America is worth examining and how their identity as Chinese Indonesians affects their lives in America by relegating their social position as a newcomer.

Through months of participant observation, I have learned some of the processes that Indonesian immigrants take once arriving in America. Whether they are legal or illegal immigrants, the task of establishing a life in America is a daunting one. Unlike Chinatown, Koreatown, and other Asian communities in the Los Angeles area, Indonesians do not have a demarcated community found within this city nor an abundance of social organizations to assist them. However, most Indonesians tend to live somewhere in the Inland Empire, most notably Alhambra and Monterey Park. There is certainly a structured community of Indonesians in these areas, which is apparent in the churches, markets, and restaurants that I frequent. Thus, it has been through lawyers, churches, and a few experienced individuals, that offer the resources and knowledge needed to establish a life in America.

The main contributing factor is the assistance from churches and their congregations. Most Indonesian immigrants that arrive in Los Angeles already have connections with church members before even setting foot on American soil. Whether it is family or friends, arrangements concerning housing, work, and education are arranged prior to the immigrant entering America. As is the case with several parishioners from a particular church in Alhambra, the church is the structure that provides stability for recent immigrants. Most of the congregation consists of immigrants and many of the sermons spoken relate to their experiences in America as immigrants.

Because several of the Indonesian immigrants, especially the Chinese Indonesians, are asylum seekers, they give knowledge of how to obtain asylum successfully and have connections



with lawyers that have high success rates with asylum cases. One such person, Alex, has been living in America for several years and has been one of the main supporters in helping new immigrants with obtaining asylum and finding work. Because of his assistance, law enforcement, including the F.B.I. and I.C.E., regularly visit his house hoping to find illegal immigrants to deport. This person is committing no crime informing immigrants about legal avenues, but certain government agencies continue to harass and berate him. Yet, it is because of people like him, immigrants are able to get the help they need.

One immigrant who came to Los Angeles with her three children took advantage of his help. Currently, she and her family live at the minister's house from her church and her children are enrolled in school. The church she attends consists primarily of elderly immigrants who experienced the atrocities that occurred during the May 1998 riots in Indonesia. Like several others before her, she is currently applying for religious asylum. When I first met her, she was in the beginning process of claiming asylum. That day, she was gathering all of her family's legal documents and bringing them to Alex, who sifted through the documents making sure everything was in order. He then helped her get in touch with an immigration attorney who has extensive experience in helping Indonesian immigrants attain asylum.

Another story is of a person who came to Los Angeles, originally as a student, but ended up working illegally to provide money for her family back in Indonesia. This was all possible due to contacts given to her before arriving in America. The church she attended was different than the one mentioned above. Younger churchgoers frequented her church and most of them were not immigrants, but children of immigrants. She lived in a house that was specifically used as a place for illegal immigrants to reside. She has lived in Los Angeles for several years, but has also pursued various jobs in different regions of America. Dissimilar to Susie's family, her goal was not to seek asylum, but to remain hidden from the government, so she could support her family back home.

Overall, most Indonesian immigrants that I have spoken with who are seeking immigration assistance live in or around the Inland Empire, however, the Indonesian community is spread out across Los Angeles. There are organizations for Indonesians, but they pale in comparison to the larger Asian subgroups. Not much is known about this group and their source of identity is reflected in this. Government agencies, including USCIS and the courts that hear cases of asylum seekers, do not have the knowledge of Chinese Indonesian culture and identity. This often leads immigrants down a difficult path in order to become residents and/or citizens of the U.S. Due to different environments, ideologies, and laws, their identities have changed once again. There is once again a splitting of identities between the dominant group, as personified by the U.S. immigration system, and the Chinese Indonesians viewed as newcomers. However, more research must be completed before we can have a solid understanding of identity among the Chinese Indonesian population in Los Angeles.

### **Conclusion and Goals**

The question of Chinese Indonesian identity has never been more pertinent than at the current moment. After the creation of negative sentiments created during Dutch rule and the government run persecution under Suharto, the present time is allowing a space for dialogue. Unfortunately, members from both sides have not taken the necessary steps to build a bridge. In Indonesia, the Chinese populations encounter stereotypes and misconceptions concerning their culture. The stereotypes of the Chinese as greedy and aloof are certainly detrimental toward a

solution, but one must not forget that the Chinese themselves hold prejudices against the “native” Indonesians. Both sides hold prejudices; it is just that history has allowed for the persecution of ethnic Chinese due to the fact that they are a minority population never able to cross the boundary into power and politics.

Chinese Indonesians in Los Angeles have not experienced the genocidal and violent acts as their Indonesian counterparts have, but they are discriminated against due to the lack of knowledge concerning their history and culture. Because the government does not recognize Indonesian asylum seekers as refugees, there has been almost no help or attention given to them. Therefore, the lack of attention from the government leads to a lack of attention from the media, educational institutions, and the public. Concerning asylum seekers, many judges are not aware of the persecution that occurs among the Chinese Indonesians and Christians in Indonesia, so when trying a case, they do not have the proper information needed to grant or deny asylum. There are lawyers in the Los Angeles area that are aware of persecution in Indonesia, but that is just one social sector. Besides lawyers, the public and social organizations need to be aware, so that there can be a better understanding of this under appreciated culture that comprises a small, but important part of Los Angeles.

Chinese Indonesians continue to be excluded from the “imagined communities” of both Indonesia and the United States, while constructing their own imagined communities based on their varying concepts of “Chineseness”. The concept of “Chineseness,” and what it means to be Chinese differs across varying communities of the Chinese Diaspora. Influenced by environment and history, Chinese Indonesians in Indonesia and the U.S. are examples of how the concept of self is constructed within particular groups. However, as Chun notes, “Instead of simply asking how identity is constituted, one should also ask when and why identity is invoked” (1996:132). We must be asking why Chinese Indonesian communities invoke a particular identity. Are identities formed due to political, economic, or cultural factors? We must also be asking when does identity formation occur. Does it happen when Chinese Indonesians experience discriminatory practices or when they feel the need to maintain a connection to their imagined sense of “Chineseness?” Finally, we must question how the social constructs of race and ethnicity factor into its development. Is ethnicity and race the primary source of identity for this population? Are identity and ethnicity different sides of the same coin? Yet, what is certain is that Chinese Indonesians comprise of multiple ethnicities and identities, revealing there is no one absolute identity that we can place on these peoples. When discussing the identity of an ethnic group, we must be careful in our declarations and refrain from reinforcing stereotypes, or even worse, creating them.

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