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Chinese Indonesians : Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting, edited by Tim Lindsley and Helen Pausacker

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Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker, eds. *Chinese Indonesians : Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting*. Singapore: ISEAS, 2005. 208 pages.

Sharon A. Carstens

The nine papers in this volume were written by students, colleagues, and friends in honor of Charles Coppel, whose wide-ranging research on Chinese Indonesians is reflected in the broad range of topics addressed.¹ Not surprisingly, about half of the papers examine the position of Chinese Indonesians in the post-Soeharto period; the rest probe issues of historic representation and Chinese interactions with Indonesian cultures over time. Although these papers are diverse in topic, approach, and writing style, their common theme is the determination, as in the work of Charles Coppel, to question various stereotypes of Chinese experiences in Indonesia, and to offer instead new evidence of the conditions and challenges that Chinese have faced at different periods of time.

The book begins with four chapters that focus on the transition of Chinese Indonesians from the discriminatory and assimilationist policies of the Soeharto era to the loosening of restrictions in the current period. The violent attacks on Chinese Indonesians in Jakarta in May 1998 and subsequent shifts in official policies toward cultural recognition are both fairly well known to those interested in Southeast Asian-Chinese issues. What this means for the future positions of Chinese Indonesians, however, appears to be far from settled. Jemma Purdy's chapter on anti-Chinese violence from 1996–99 opens the volume with a cautionary tale of entrenched stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians at local levels that once spurred mob violence and could do so again.

Although the economic disruptions that occurred when Chinese fled the violence of 1998 prompted calls to bring them home, this reminder of their key role in the Indonesian economy put them once again in an ambivalent position. Purdy argues that the anti-Chinese sentiments nurtured by the government during the New Order period will be difficult to dispel, particularly the idea that violence against Chinese is expected and will not be punished. She also cautions that the post-Soeharto legal changes to Chinese status have not been systematically implemented, signaling the topic of editor Tim Lindsey's chapter, which focuses on institutional discrimination against Chinese Indonesians over time.

Lindsey describes how systems of legal discrimination that developed during the colonial period, with Chinese classified as "Foreign Orientals," were carried over into the post-independence state. Onerous and expensive procedures for obtaining citizenship left many Chinese as aliens, and thereby deprived of basic rights. Even Chinese with Indonesian-citizenship identity cards experienced this status as a marked category under laws and regulations that banned public expressions of Chinese culture, and which limited certain educational and economic opportunities to native Indonesian citizens.

¹ See Charles A. Coppel, *Studying Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia* (Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies, 2002).

Pressures to alter these discriminatory policies in the post-Soeharto period led to a variety of reforms, including eliminating restrictions on Chinese social and cultural activities; making it possible for a native-born Chinese Indonesian to become president; declaring Chinese New Year a national holiday; and inserting a new, liberal Bill of Rights into the Indonesian Constitution. Like Purdy, however, Lindsey characterizes the effects of these legal reforms for Chinese as limited and superficial, and argues that full implementation of the new Bill of Rights will require judicial challenges to current laws and practices, which is something that Chinese Indonesians have so far not dared to undertake.

In the third paper, Leo Suryadinata examines institutional changes for Chinese at the religious level, focusing on developments within Confucianism and Buddhism during the Soekarno, Soeharto, and contemporary periods. The assimilationist policies of the New Order eliminated Confucianism as one of the six recognized national religions of Indonesia and transformed Chinese Buddhism from a religion of multiple deities to one which adhered to the Indonesian model of one god. Even before the end of the Soeharto era, new Buddhist temples modeled after those being developed in Taiwan attracted considerable human and financial support. Confucianism reemerged after the fall of Soeharto and received official recognition under Gus Dur. However, once again, Suryadinata observes that local practices have not necessarily followed the new guidelines, and Indonesian Chinese must still go through the courts to get their Confucian marriages recognized. He concludes with Indonesian census figures that show the drastic decline in the number of Confucianists over the past thirty years while Buddhists have held even and Christians have increased—a pattern that suggests, according to the author, that many Chinese have abandoned Confucianism as part of a strategy to escape persecution.

The brief chapter by Arief Budiman explores the psychological effects of official policies and events on both Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians. Budiman asserts that the New Order assimilationist approach, rather than truly integrating the Chinese into Indonesian life, left them feeling inferior. Shunning politics, Chinese Indonesians felt more like guests, without a truly legitimate place in Indonesian society. According to Budiman, the suffering of poor Chinese in the Jakarta riots in 1998 earned them new sympathy from native Indonesians. In the aftermath, many Chinese became convinced that their previous passive acceptance of their position had been a mistake, and they have since become involved with new social organizations and political parties that assert their rights as Indonesian citizens. Nevertheless, Budiman notes that Chinese also fear that if they push too far, they will incite a backlash from some Indonesians, and thus they remain cautious in a situation he describes as socially and politically unstable.

Shifting away from the current dilemmas faced by Chinese Indonesians, the last five chapters take up historical issues, including topics of historical representation and transformations within Indonesian Chinese society over time. Mary Somers Heidhues examines the Makam Juang Mandor Monument in West Kalimantan, which commemorates Japanese massacres of civilians from 1943–45. Although Mandor was an important Chinese gold mining town during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Chinese farmers continued to reside in the area, the Chinese were driven out in 1967 by Dyaks, incited by army authorities. Heidhues describes conflicting

accounts of the Japanese massacres from Japanese, Dutch, Chinese, and Indonesian sources. It appears that a majority of the 1,500 victims were ethnic Chinese, targeted by the Japanese because of their wealth. Yet the official account of the massacre, memorialized in bronze bas reliefs at the monument, draws on a questionable 1940s Japanese newspaper account of resistance by a multi-ethnic group of local leaders and citizens, killed when their plot was uncovered by the Japanese. Interpreted as a nascent sort of nationalist movement, the monument celebrates local heroes from all ethnic groups working together for the common good, while the relative severity of Chinese suffering is forgotten.

Writing about Chinese Confucianists in Surabaya between 1880 and 1906, Claudine Salmon argues that Confucian reformers were active in eastern Java earlier than has usually been appreciated. The first Confucian calendar was developed by an Indonesian Chinese scholar in Surabaya in the 1880s and printed in Shanghai, long before its advocacy by Kang Yuwei, in China, in 1898. Salmon traces the founding of the Temple to Wenchang, God of Literature, in 1884, who was converted into a Confucian Wen Miao in 1899. Influenced by the founding of a Confucian association in Yokohama, Japan, Surabaya Chinese leaders raised money to build a larger Confucian temple in 1906, and the inscriptions of donors' names reveal support for this temple from Chinese linked with both reformist and revolutionary movements.

Shifting away from Salmon's detailed examination of Chinese sources, Jean Gelman Taylor draws on the works of Western scholars in her interpretive discussion of the connections between Chinese and Islam in Indonesia. Taylor begins by noting that Muslims in the port cities of Java and Sumatra, between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, were identified as Chinese and Arab, but she chooses to avoid the politically sensitive question of whether Chinese brought Islam to Indonesia. She proceeds instead to explore the similarities and differences between Chinese and Arab Muslims who journeyed to the Indonesian archipelago as single men, married local women, and assimilated children to their male line. While Chinese brought trade and commercial development to Indonesian ports, the Chinese government saw other countries as vassals, and often discouraged and even forbade Chinese from traveling abroad. By contrast, some Arab Muslims were able to marry into royal families, and the nomadic quality of Islam encouraged travel not only to Mecca, but also in search of religious knowledge. As Taylor notes, "in the end, Chinese entrepreneurship exposed Indonesian societies to Muslim knowledge, not Chinese knowledge" (p. 157). I personally found Taylor's juxtaposition of the two grids—Arab and Chinese—both compelling and insightful, and will assign this chapter to my students to read this fall.

The final two chapters examine aspects of Chinese Indonesian society and culture in more recent historical contexts. Christine Pitt writes about changing patterns of courtship and marriage as evidenced in advice columns between 1939 and 1942 in the *Star Magazine*, a *peranakan* monthly written in Sino-Malay. Pitt links the increased involvement of young people in choosing marriage partners to the influence of Western education. By contrast, Helen Pausacker focuses on Javanese influences on *peranakan* Chinese culture in her study of Chinese patrons and participants in *wayang purwa*, shadow-puppet performances based on the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics. Pausacker describes how *wayang* performances from the nineteenth century up until the 1960s were an important component of specific Chinese public celebrations, with

audiences often including a mix of Javanese and Chinese. Some *peranakan* Chinese also became personally involved in *wayang purwa*, both as scholars and as *dhalang*, or puppet masters. And a Chinese character, personified as a traditional medical practitioner, was integrated as a comic figure into *wayang purwa* performances. Unfortunately, the New Order policies that banned Chinese public displays also eliminated these Chinese-sponsored public *wayang* performances, halting “a long-standing social and cultural exchange” (p. 190), which Pausacker believes would be difficult to resurrect.

Given the great variety of topics and approaches in the various papers of this volume, different readers will undoubtedly find some chapters more interesting, accessible, or useful than others. Although the political, legal, cultural, and historical issues addressed here contribute important insights into the past and present positions of Chinese Indonesians, what is generally missing are the voices of Chinese Indonesians themselves. As an anthropologist, I was anticipating more detailed descriptions of the varied experiences encountered by diverse Chinese Indonesians in both the New Order and post-Soeharto period, and especially insights into their own understandings of these experiences. My hope is that future scholars, inspired by the writings of Charles Coppel and his friends, will take up this sort of research in the coming years.