



# A COMPARISON OF POLICIES AND MEASURES IN GOVERNING ETHNIC CHINESE BY THE GOVERNMENTS OF THAILAND AND INDONESIA

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 It was estimated that, out of some 40 million overseas Chinese population in 2011, Indonesia and Thailand accounted for some 8 million<sup>1</sup> (19.9%) and 7.5 million (18.6%) respectively, which topped the number of overseas Chinese around the world.<sup>2</sup> The respective proportions of ethnic Chinese within the populations of these two countries may therefore be estimated to be about 3%<sup>3</sup> and 11%.<sup>4 5</sup> Historically, even though overseas Chinese in these countries had been subject to assimilation policies especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, vastly different outcomes are apparent – with assimilation of local ethnic Chinese considered to be rather successful in Thailand, and coined by the renowned anthropologist G William Skinner that “*in Thailand, where even fourth-generation Chinese are practically nonexistent*”,<sup>6</sup> whereas those in Indonesia had unfortunately been subjected to periodic anti-Chinese violence, the latest major one being only in 1998, rendering such assimilation process being far from over. It is therefore of great interest to the author in finding out the reasons why there was such a significant difference.
- 1.2 A comparison of the government policies and measures in governing ethnic Chinese in these two countries has been carried out. Section 2 will first look

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<sup>1</sup> Even though the 2000 census of Indonesia reported a much lower figure of 2,411,503 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_Indonesians#Demographics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Indonesians#Demographics)), this is believed to be an underestimate as the census employed the method of self-identification in which many could have refused to identify themselves as ethnic Chinese, or chose to report a different identity, either because of assimilation, mixed-parentage, or fear of persecution. A separate survey made by the Overseas Community Affairs Council of Taiwan reported 8.36 million in 2014 which supports the figure of 8 million ([https://www.ocac.gov.tw/OCAC/File/Attach/10/File\\_54.pdf](https://www.ocac.gov.tw/OCAC/File/Attach/10/File_54.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> Poston, Jr Dudley L and Juyin Helen Wong, 2016, “The Chinese diaspora: The current distribution of the overseas Chinese population”, *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2016, Vol. 2(3) 348–373. In this paper, an overseas Chinese was defined as born in or claim ancestry from China.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, 2013, *World Population Prospects – The 2012 Revision: Highlights and Advance Tables*, New York. Population of Indonesia was estimated to be 249.866 million in 2013.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, 2013, *World Population Prospects – The 2012 Revision: Highlights and Advance Tables*, New York. Population of Thailand was estimated to be 67.011 million in 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Other estimates of the percentage of ethnic Chinese in Thailand include Selway, Joel, 2007, *Turning Malays into Thai-Men: Nationalism, Ethnicity and Economic Inequality in Thailand*, South East Asia Research, 15:1, 53-87 which stated “Chinese make up just under 8% of the population, although the Sino–Thai (Thai speakers of Chinese descent) would take this figure closer to 11%”.

<sup>6</sup> Skinner, G William, 1960, “Change and Persistence in Chinese Culture Overseas: A Comparison of Thailand and Java”, in *The Chinese Diaspora in the Pacific, The Pacific World, Lands, Peoples and History of the Pacific, 1500-1900, Volume 16*, Edited by Anthony Reid, 2008, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 409pp.

into the demography of ethnic Chinese in the two countries which will provide basic data for the subsequent study. The immigration laws will also be discussed in tandem. Section 3 will highlight the assimilation policies and measures adopted by the two countries up to the beginning of the 20th century and provide a comparison. Section 4 will examine the anti-Chinese policies and measures since the first decade of the 20th century, in response to various social, political, economic changes, with vastly different results. Section 5 will provide concluding remarks.

## 2. DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND AND IMMIGRATION POLICIES

- 2.1 While direct sea trade between the Middle Kingdom and Southeast Asia took place as early as the Northern Song Dynasty as evidenced by the Pulau Buaya wreck in Indonesian waters,<sup>7 8</sup> it is believed that up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the overseas Chinese were largely Huashang (華商) who travelled to and fro, carried out trade and sojourned in Southeast Asia. Only after mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, in the case of the Dutch East Indies, did they turn into migrant workers, or Huagong (華工), when the Dutch colonial government needed labour for their plantations.<sup>9 10</sup> In the case of Siam, based on a tablet in the Bayon, a temple in Angkor Thom built not later than the first decade of the 13<sup>rd</sup> century, showing a Chinese junk highly resembling those built by the Chinese in Siam, it is believed that Chinese traders were already established in the ports of the Gulf of Siam. Substantial immigration of Chinese into Siam started after mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, similar to the case of the Dutch East Indies.<sup>11 12</sup>
- 2.2 As regards the demography in Indonesia, according to Victor Purcell,<sup>13</sup> there were estimated to be about 100,000 ethnic Chinese at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequent changes from 1860 to 1930 are given in Figure 1. The number of Chinese in Indonesia continued to increase throughout this period, with Chinese accounting for 1.1% in 1870 and 1.4% in 1930 respectively of the population in Java and Madura, suggesting influx. In particular, the number of Chinese in the whole of Indonesia increased from 563,000 in 1905 to 809,000 in 1920 (44% increase), and further to 1,233,000 in 1930<sup>14</sup> (another 52% increase). This tremendous increase is believed to be related to the

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<sup>7</sup> Ridho, A. and McKinnon, E. E., *The Pulau Buaya wreck: Finds from the Song Period*, The Ceramic Society of Indonesia Monograph Series No. 18, Jakarta, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Flecker, Michael, 2019, *Sister Ships: Three Early 12th Century CE Shipwrecks in Southeast Asia*, *Current Science*, Vol. 117, No. 10, 25-November 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Wang Gungwu, 2009, "Chinese History Paradigms", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 10, No. 3, October 2009, pp. 201-216.

<sup>10</sup> <https://chinese.binus.ac.id/2015/02/18/indonesian-peranakan-chinese-the-origins-and-their-culture-by-prof-a-dahana/>

<sup>11</sup> Skinner G William, 1957, "Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History", Cornell University, 459pp.

<sup>12</sup> Sng, Jeffery and Pimpraphai Bisalputra, 2015, *A History of Thai-Chinese*, Editions Didier Millet, 447pp.

<sup>13</sup> Purcell, Victor, 1965, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, 623pp.

<sup>14</sup> Purcell, Victor, 1965, p.385, estimated that out of the 1.2 million ethnic Chinese in 1930, about 750,000 were born in Indonesia (known as Peranakans), while some 450,000 were immigrants (known as Totoks).

unsettled conditions in China due to civil war (see further reasons in para. 2.4 and 2.5 below). In response, the Dutch imposed a head-tax which was payable by every Chinese entering the Indies starting 1924, with the tax being 50-100 florins<sup>15</sup> between 1924-1931 and increasing to 150 florins after 1931. These were not small amounts. Nevertheless, there were still continuous influx of some 9,000 – 31,000 Chinese annually into the Indies from 1932 to 1938. Figure 2 shows that there was still influx of about 8,000 Chinese in 1939, but it turned into outflux (both Chinese and all races) in 1940, one year before Japanese occupation. There is little data available during the Japanese occupation and the ensuing years but it is known that the outflux of Chinese continued had continued. This outflux was further enhanced with the application of new laws in 1959 onwards prohibiting aliens (especially Chinese) to engage in certain occupations (see para. 4.10). It was estimated some 300,000 ethnic Chinese were displaced by the new laws and a large proportion of them were repatriated to China in the 1960s.

*Indonesia: Population in Various Years<sup>8</sup>*  
(in thousands)

Year	Indonesians	Europeans	Chinese	Arabs	Other Asiatics	Total
<i>Java and Madura</i>						
1860	12,514	..	149	6	..	..
1870	16,233	37	175	8	..	..
1880	19,541	44	207	11	..	..
1890	23,609	55	242	14	..	..
1900	28,386	72	277	18	..	..
1905	29,979	73	295	19	..	..
1920	34,429	134	384	28	3	34,978
1930	40,981	193	582	42	11	41,719
<i>Total Indonesia</i>						
1860	..	44	221	9	..	..
1870	..	49	260	13	..	..
1880	..	60	344	16	..	..
1890	..	74	461	22	..	..
1900	..	91	537	27	..	..
1905	37,348:	95	563	30	..	..
1920	48,300:	168	809	45	22	49,344
1930	59,138:	240	1,233	71	45	60,727

Figure 1: Population in Indonesia from 1860 to 1930

<sup>15</sup> Between 1914 and 1938, the exchange rate was 1.82 - 2.46 florins (i.e. Dutch guilders) to 1 US dollar. From Herod, Andrew (2009), *Geographies of Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 1st ed., John Wiley & Sons. p. 13.

*Indonesia: Migration*

	<i>Arrivals (Chinese)</i>	<i>Total (all races)</i>		<i>Departures (Chinese)</i>	<i>Total (all races)</i>
1938	66,705	119,818	1938	44,804	102,961
1939	46,654	95,573	1939	38,875	87,899
1940	36,190	69,693	1940	49,616	81,372
..	..	..	..	..	..
1951	20,701	57,165	1951	21,141	71,095
1957	10,658	74,782	1957	14,870	81,414
1958	7,432	57,776	1958	9,532	7,995

Figure 2: Migration in Indonesia in 1938, 1939, 1940, 1951, 1957 and 1958.

- 2.3 Nevertheless, if we consider the change in the percentage of Chinese in the whole Indonesia with time, Figure 1 shows that it increased from 1.5% in 1905, to 1.7% in 1920, and to 2.1% in 1930. The latest percentage is 3% in 2011 (see para. 1.1 above), even though Indonesia still adopts a strict immigration policy and thus there is no influx of new Chinese immigrants into the country.<sup>16</sup>
- 2.4 Demographic data in Siam in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is far less comprehensive compared to the East Indies. Purcell provided the following guesstimates based on foreign observers at various times,<sup>17</sup> and Skinner made further supplements and corrections<sup>18</sup> (Table 1). Purcell noted that the Chinese had been visiting and dwelling in Siam for centuries, but their immigration in large numbers was only a matter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the time of King Phra Narai (1656-88) there were only about 3,000 Chinese permanently settled in the country, coming mostly overland from southern China. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they arrived more and more by sea from Hainan and other adjacent mainland ports. From 1840 to 1850 Chinese immigration averaged 15,000 annually.<sup>19</sup> By 1909, the growth of Chinese in Siam had already reached 10% of the entire population (Table 1). Purcell also pointed out that the surplus of Chinese immigrants over emigrants in Siam from 1918 to 1929 was 400,000. This increase in flow in more recent years may be attributed to the expansion of Siam's export trade, to the Revolution of 1911 and the disordered state of China that ensued from it, and also to the barriers raised against the Chinese in French Indochina. It is interesting to note that according to French ethnologist Léon de Rosny, the Chinese population was comparable to the Siamese population in 1884, and the number of Chinese

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<sup>16</sup> Suryadinata, Leo, 2004, "Indonesian State Policy towards Ethnic Chinese: From Assimilation to Multiculturalism?" in *Chinese Indonesians: State Policy, Monoculture and Multiculture*, edited by Leo Suryadinata, Eastern Universities Press, pp.1-16.

<sup>17</sup> Purcell, Victor, 1965, p.84.

<sup>18</sup> Skinner, G William, 1957, p.81.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, Virginia, 1941, *Thailand: the New Siam*, New York, p.103.

even exceeded the number of Siamese in Bangkok. Missionary Jacob Tomlin's estimate in 1828 (after correction by Skinner) was even more extreme: 47% of the population of Bangkok, the capital city of Siam, was Chinese, with only 10% being Siamese. This predominance of Chinese population in Bangkok in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was supported by other figures quoted by Skinner, which revealed a huge contrast with the Chinese demography in the Indies. Such tolerance by the Siamese of this Chinese predominance in Bangkok is remarkable.

Year	Siam			Bangkok		
	Chinese (thousand)	Siamese (thousand)	Total (thousand)	Chinese (thousand)	Siamese (thousand)	Total (thousand)
1821 <sup>20</sup>	440	1,260	2,790	—	—	—
1822 <sup>21</sup>	—	—	—	31	—	50
1828 <sup>22</sup>	—	—	—	36 <sup>23 24</sup>	8	77.3 <sup>25</sup>
1884 <sup>26</sup>	1,500	1,600	5,900	200	120	404
1909 <sup>27</sup>	700	—	7,000	200	—	—

Table 1: Guesstimates of Chinese population in Siam based on foreign observers at various times

2.5 Skinner provided further demographic data and analysis for Siam for the period 1918-1955 (Figure 3), showing unprecedented influx of Chinese into Siam during 1918-1931, with about 0.5 million total influx. He attributed this

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<sup>20</sup> Crawford, John, 1830, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin-China*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols, London.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Karl Gutzlaff, *Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China in 1831, 1832 and 1833, with notices of Siam etc.*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1840), p.23, from p.21 of Tomlin's *Journal of a Visit to Siam* (1828).

<sup>23</sup> Comprising 310,000 Chinese (paying tax) and 50,000 descendants of Chinese.

<sup>24</sup> Corrected by Skinner, G William, 1957, p.81.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Leon de Rosny, *Le Peuple siamois ou thai* (Paris, 1885), p.116.

<sup>27</sup> MacNair, H.F., *The Chinese Abroad* (Shanghai, 1924), p.47.



influx to favourable conditions in Siam<sup>28</sup> and unfavourable conditions in China.<sup>29</sup> For the sharp decline in Chinese migration into Siam during 1930-33, Skinner attributed primarily to worsening economic conditions in Siam, and as secondary factors, more peaceful conditions in South China after 1930 and the beginning of immigration regulation in Thailand. Skinner pointed out that Thai government's immigration policy was also a contributing factor in the decline, in particular the introduction of the first Siamese Immigration Act in 1927/28.<sup>30</sup> Thus the Chinese influx during 1932-1935 was drastically reduced. However, as the Chinese immigration rebounded in 1937/38, the Thai government introduced yet another Immigration Act to raise the residence fee to 200 baht and to require the immigrants to have an independent income or support, with the effect to reduce the arrival rate. After WWII, the Chinese influx rebounded tremendously and the Thai government reacted to introduce a quota system for the first time in May 1947, fixing the annual quota for Chinese immigrants at 10,000. This was reduced in early 1949 to only 200 per year, same as other nationalities. Yet another Immigration Act in 1950 maintained the annual quota for all nationalities and further increased the residence fee to 1,000 baht, and exerted severe restrictions and controls in immigration. Thereafter both arrivals and departures dropped to the lowest levels in over a century. Skinner also estimated that, despite the extensive migration of Chinese into Thailand, the proportion of Chinese in the total population of Thailand never surpassed one eighth (12.5%) during the period 1917-1955 and he even noted a declining trend afterwards. The latest percentage is 11% in 2011 (see para. 1.1 above).

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<sup>28</sup> Boom in rubber and tin production in South Siam in the 1920s, expansion in rice milling, sawmilling and foreign trade, and resumption of railroad construction. Quoted in Skinner G William, 1957, p.174.

<sup>29</sup> Social order and crop yields reaching a new low by mid-1920s, due to typhoons and droughts, and political unrest, banditry and military strife. Quoted in Skinner G William, 1957, p.174.

<sup>30</sup> The Act introduced an immigration fee of 4 baht in 1927, raising to 10 baht in 1928/29, plus additional residence fees of 30 baht and return permit fee of 5 baht in 1931 which were increased to 100 baht and 20 baht respectively in 1932. The Act also prohibited immigration of persons suffering from certain diseases (notably trachoma), those not vaccinated against smallpox, and those "who are of bad character or are likely to create disturbances or to endanger the safety of the public or the Kingdom of Siam". The Act also empowered the Minister of Foreign Affairs to fix a quota on immigration of any nationality and to fix an amount of money which an alien entering Siam must have in his possession, but the Minister never utilized these powers. Quoted from Skinner, 1957, Note 12, p.405.

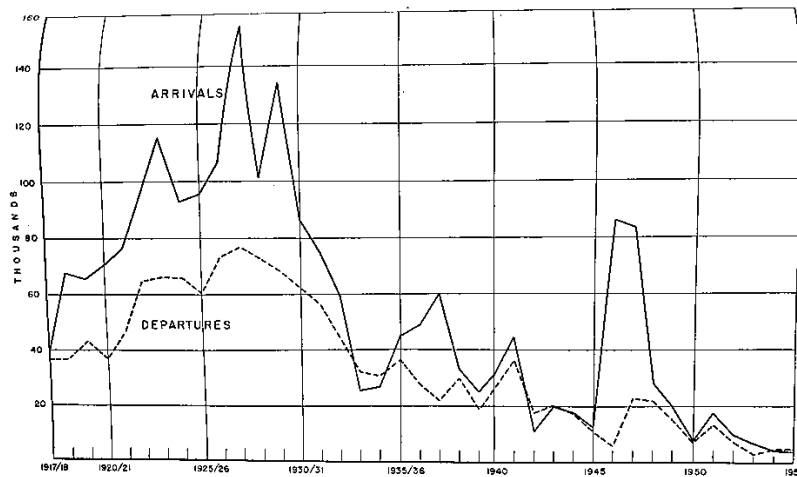


Figure 3: Estimated annual arrivals and departures of ethnic Chinese in Thailand, 1918-1955.

2.6 From the above relatively simple accounts, it can be seen that both the East Indies and Siam experienced significant influxes of Chinese into their countries, partly due to the common factors in Southern China, including social unrests, unfavourable crop yields, and natural disasters. Both countries started to impose immigration policies (1924 in the Indies and 1927 in Siam) to restrict the influxes of Chinese, with varying successes. Ultimately, after WWII, migration of Chinese into these two countries was reduced to very low levels or even reversed, either due to more stringent immigration laws in Thailand and Chinese discrimination policies and measures in Indonesia. We will elaborate on them in the next Section.

### 3. ASSIMILATION OF ETHNIC CHINESE

- 3.1 To compare the Chinese assimilation issues in Indonesia and Thailand up to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, one needs not go any further than the very important paper of Skinner.<sup>31</sup> An account of the issues based on this work, supplemented by information from other available sources, will be presented.
- 3.2 Skinner contrasted upfront the very different situation of the identity of Chinese in the two countries: in Java, *“there are thousands of Chinese who trace back their descent in Indonesia for as many as twelve generations”*, whereas in Thailand, *“where even fourth-generation Chinese are practically nonexistent”*. Obviously, the assimilation of Chinese into Indonesia was not very successful despite the high-handed policies and measures. On the other hand, different approaches employed by the Thai government achieved much better assimilation results.
- 3.3 Before discussing the different policies and measures, Skinner argued against the view by Mallory that factors inherent in the Chinese, such as the loyalty of Chinese to their culture, could explain such differences in assimilation. Skinner noted in particular that the dominating speech group of Chinese migrants in Thailand was Teochiu whereas it was Hokkiens in Indonesia – their cultural differences would not be large. The reasons for the differences must therefore lie in the receiving end, i.e. in the two countries.

#### **Colonization and cultural confidence**

- 3.4 First of all, Skinner pointed out that the Javanese and the Thai differed in a significant way in their ethnic confidence or cultural vigour, owing to the fact that the Javanese was colonized by the Dutch for centuries, witnessing the downfall of their kingdom of Mataram, and thus gradually picking up a sense of inferiority and became culturally withdrawn. On the other hand, the Thai managed to remain independent from the colonial forces and thus maintained their cultural confidence, vigour and sense of

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<sup>31</sup> Skinner, 1960.

superiority. The tolerance of the Siamese, including the imperial court, of the predominance of Chinese residing in Bangkok in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also supports this view (see para. 2.4 above). Therefore, Skinner argued that it would be natural for the Chinese migrants to eventually succumb to the Thai culture and successfully assimilate, while it would be very difficult for those in Indonesia to be culturally associated with the Javanese who were concerned about racial definition of their own ingroup. Assimilation of non-Javanese indigenous people in Java was equally unsuccessful as noted by Skinner.

### **Stratification of ethnic classes**

- 3.5 Under the Dutch rule, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the society of Java was stratified into three classes: “European”, “Foreign Oriental” and “Inlander” (i.e. the indigenous Javanese). They were not just stratification of the major ethnic groups but people belonging to the different classes had different legal rights and privileges. The ethnic Chinese occupied the middle class. With the Chinese immigrants having the traits of industriousness, social ambition and venturesome, they tended to seek higher social status in trying to move towards the upper class, and thus staying away from the Javanese in the lowest class. This Dutch policy of social stratification, with ethnic groups legally separated, did not only discourage the Chinese from assimilation into the indigenous Javanese, but also formed a social barrier for movement across the different classes. This policy was only abolished by the Indonesian government in December 1966.<sup>32</sup>
- 3.6 In contrast, Siam remained independent and under the rule of the imperial court. For centuries, the most prominent and rich ethnic Chinese in Siam were ennobled by the Thai court and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this practice appeared to be a conscious policy. Therefore Chinese ancestry was common among Thai bureaucratic nobles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century which continued to encourage the movement

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<sup>32</sup> 周南京，2006，《印度尼西亞華僑華人研究》，北京大學華僑華人研究中心叢書之三十三，香港社會科學出版社有限公司，524頁。第143-144頁。

of Chinese towards the Thai upper class. Furthermore, there were no such legal nor social class barriers in Siam, as in the case of Java, for Chinese to move across different social classes in Siam. Thus assimilation of Chinese into indigenous Thais was more or less unimpeded.

### **Segregation policy**

- 3.7 Again under the Dutch rule, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Chinese in Java were only allowed to live in ghettos and could not travel freely without passes. The main reason for this policy was to prevent the Chinese traders to travel to the rural areas where they might disrupt the ongoing social order of the indigenous Javanese who were being exploited by the Dutch to cultivate export crops without paid. The Javanese were under control indirectly by local nobles.<sup>33</sup> Apart from the above economic consideration, the segregation policy was also intended to prevent political collusion between the Chinese and the indigenous Javanese – clearly it was a “divide-and-rule” political tactic. As a result, without much contact between the two ethnic groups, assimilation of Chinese in the Indies was retarded. This segregation policy was maintained until the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 3.8 On the other hand, the Chinese in Thailand were never restricted in their physical movement. Instead the Thai rulers had long been adopting a laissez-faire policy where Chinese were free to reside and travel throughout the country. In particular, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kings Mongkut and Chulalongkorn maintained the policy to allow free travel and residence of Chinese in the remotest villages so as to develop upcountry Thailand to bring economic growth and prosperity. Again, this policy had promoted the dispersal of Chinese throughout the country and thus even more effective assimilation.

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<sup>33</sup> This system was known as the Cultivation System, for example, see Schendel, Willem van, 2017, *Embedding Agricultural Commodities: Using Historical Evidence, 1840s–1940s*, Routledge, 193pp.

## **Institutionalized change of ethnic group**

3.9 According to Skinner, another difference which accounted for the difference in assimilation of Chinese was institutionalized procedures adopted in Thailand for Chinese to choose freely, upon maturity, to identify oneself as either Chinese or Thai. There was however no such policy in Indonesia<sup>34</sup> and thus Chinese, including their descendants, would always remain as Chinese and subject to the law for “Foreign Orientals” (see para.3.5). This policy was particularly important as Skinner pointed out, before the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were very few Chinese female migrants to the Southeast Asia and thus the male migrants commonly mated with indigenous women. Due to the influence of these indigenous mothers and grandmothers, and coupled with a general lack of Chinese education, these Chinese descendants became acculturated, i.e. progressively incorporation of the way of life of the local society. Therefore as the Chinese descendants in Thailand became more Thai rather than Chinese, they would naturally make use of the institutionalized procedures to officially take up the Thai identity. Such possibility was not available in Indonesia, constraining the acculturated Chinese descendants to remain in the Chinese identity, even though they had become more Javanese than Chinese. Because of this, the peculiar Chinese social group known as “Peranakan” was developed in Indonesia. Even though there is little reliable information on the latest population of Peranakans in Indonesia, Leo Suryadinata has provided

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<sup>34</sup> Even though under the New Order regime, Indonesian Chinese were “encouraged” to adopt Indonesian citizenship, they needed to obtain a Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia (SBKRI) Certificate of Indonesian citizenship – a legal paper that showed a Indonesian Chinese had given up ones Chinese citizenship. The government also introduced an apartheid-like administration, as Indonesian Chinese were identified extra prefix “A01” in their identity card to indicate their foreign origin. To obtain SBKRI one must spend around Rp. 5,000,000. or around US\$ 500. Although recently repealed by the government of Megawati Soekarnoputri, it is still required by schools, universities, banks, the immigration office, land office etc. (See Leveau, Arnaud, 2007, “*Investigating the Grey Areas of the Chinese Communities in Southeast Asia*”, Proceedings of the Symposium organised by the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, 6-7 January 2005, 167pp. and Sidjaya, Calvin Michel, 2014, “*Forced Assimilation and Development: The Chinese-Indonesians under Soeharto’s New Order (1965-1998)*”, research project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of International Development, Massey University, New Zealand, 80 pp.)

estimates of the Peranakan (and also Totok) population between 1920 and 1971 (Figure 4).<sup>35</sup> The estimates show a continuous increase of Peranakans, despite the stabilized number of Totoks after the 1960s due to anti-Chinese policies. This trend of increasing Peranakans supports the foregoing reasoning of Skinner.<sup>36</sup> Of course, there was little attraction for the Peranakan to choose to identity as Javanese due to their low social status and legal disabilities, as mentioned in para. 3.5 above. As a result, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, descendants of Chinese immigrants in Thai would become Thais whereas those in Java would move into the Peranakan society. Skinner also added the important factor of religion, viz Buddhism in Thailand vs Islam in Java, which also tended to make the assimilation barrier of Chinese in Thai (who had similar religions) easier. On the other hand, as the majority of indigenous people in Java was only “nominally Muslim”, the drive of conversion of Chinese male descendants into Muslim in order to marry indigenous women in Java was much lower and thus they would tend to still remain as Peranakans.

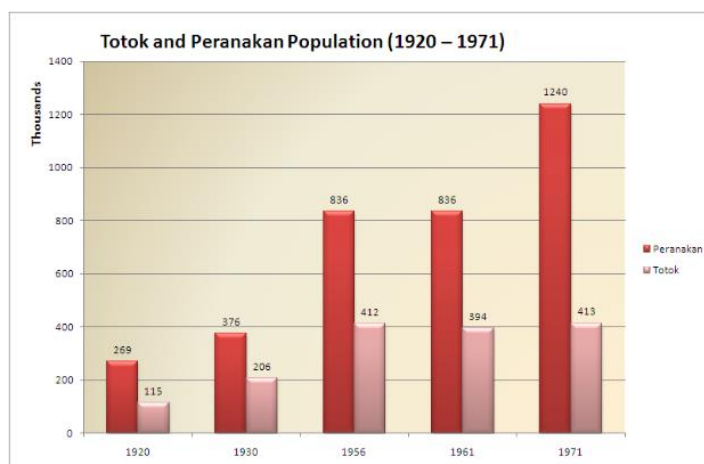


Figure 4: Totok and Peranakan population in Indonesia between 1920 and 1971

<sup>35</sup> Leo Suryadinata, 1984, *Dilema Minoritas Tionghoa*, PT Grafiti.

<sup>36</sup> Even though the estimates of Peranakan and Totok population for 1930 (750,000 and 450,000 respectively) by Purcell (1965) were double or more than double of Suryadinata’s estimates for the same year, Skinner (1960) estimated some 700,000 Peranakans in Java at the time, which was more consistent with Suryadinata’s estimate of 836,000 Peranakans for 1961.

#### **4. ANTI-CHINESE POLICIES**

- 4.1 The above-mentioned assimilation trends in the two countries, however, changed for the worse in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The common factors were that the Chinese immigration rates to both countries increased to all-time high in the 1902s (see demographic analyses in para. 2.2 and 2.5 above). At the same time, the proportion of women in these immigrants also increased to a significant level after WWI. These two factors combined resulted in a tremendous increase of all-Chinese homes. During the same period, Chinese nationalism flourished, with Chinese-language community schools, Chinese press and other Chinese cultural developments spreading in the two countries. The assimilation process in Thailand was retarded as a result. While assimilation had all along been negligible in Java under the Dutch rule, the foregoing changes had the effect of deterring the movement of Chinese immigrants into Peranakans – instead they became Totoks who considered themselves real Chinese.
- 4.2 The above changes led to policy changes in both countries, manifesting in anti-Chinese policies and measures to different extents. Firstly, in Indonesia which was still under Dutch rule, the divide-and-rule stratification policy had made it impossible for ethnic Chinese (in the “Foreign Oriental” class) to move upwards to the elite European class. For example, Chinese were not allowed to speak Dutch among themselves, nor to wear Dutch clothes. But as the Chinese nationalist mindset grew even among Peranakans, the Dutch reversed their policy in 1908 to facilitate the elite Peranakans (and later the entire “Foreign Oriental” class) to acquire the Dutch culture. Dutch schools were quickly opened throughout Java for Peranakan children and the civil law of the European was also applied to the Chinese starting in 1919. As a result, by WWII, an important segment of the Peranakans had become associated with the colonial regime and adopted a Dutch way of life. This however was a time-bomb as we will see below.
- 4.3 Coincidental with the significant increase in Chinese population with more Chinese cultural and nationalist mindset, unfortunately,



indigenous nationalist movements happened at about the same time. In Java, political nationalism condemned the pro-Dutch turn of the Peranakans. In both countries, economic nationalism singled out Chinese businessmen as competitors, with foreign interests, of the inferior indigenous counterparts. No doubt, anti-Chinese movements subsequently prevailed in both countries with discrimination policies developed, but to different extents.

- 4.4 In Thailand, the anti-Chinese discrimination policies were far less severe compared with those in Indonesia. As highlighted by Skinner before (see para. 3.4 above), the Thai elite possessed cultural confidence, vigour and sense of superiority. Probably because of this, Skinner<sup>37</sup> suggested, the Thai prejudice on the Chinese only focused on cultural matters such as certain un-Thai posture or behaviour, and the resulting discrimination policy was only targeted towards the China-born Chinese, or the culturally aliens within the second-generation Chinese. For example, certain regulations in 1952 discriminated against second-generation Chinese still using Chinese names. Such policies, though discriminative, served to enhance assimilation.
- 4.5 Despite what Skinner suggested above that the anti-Chinese discrimination policies in Thailand were relatively mild, one would need to recall the strike on 1 June 1910 initiated by the Chinese in response to a decree introduced in March 1909 to significantly increase the head tax for Chinese in order to align the capitation taxation for the whole population.<sup>38</sup> Even though it did not lead to serious riots, it sounded an alarm for the Thai rulers and also induced prejudices against the Chinese among the average Thais. Coupled with other developments (e.g. the Chinese Nationality Act

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<sup>37</sup> Skinner, GW, 1960, pp.66-67.

<sup>38</sup> Chinese had been paying less head tax for years due to the historical reason of the need for labour.

of 1909)<sup>39</sup> and anti-Chinese influences by Europeans,<sup>40</sup> King Wachirawut (Rama VI), who came to the throne only a few months after the Chinese strike, adopted a Thai nationalism approach and aroused anti-Chinese sentiments, for example, by giving his infamous “*The Jews of the East*” statement in 1914. Further policies during his reign, especially the first Nationality Act in 1913/14, which claimed “every person born on Thai territory” as Thai, and the first Private School Act and the Compulsory Education Act, promulgated in 1919 and 1921 respectively,<sup>41</sup> were also targeted towards the Chinese. Further revisions of the Private School Act were made in 1936 and 1954 to further “Thai-ify” Chinese education<sup>42</sup> and to tighten monitoring and control of Chinese schools,<sup>43</sup> but their details will be omitted here.

#### 4.6 Imposing Immigration Act starting since 1927/28 to control and reduce the substantial immigration of Chinese into Thailand, and

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<sup>39</sup> Skinner, G William, 1957, p.159: “In 1909, the Manchus promulgated the first Chinese Nationality Act, which provided that offspring of a Chinese parent were Chinese nationals – a move designed to keep natural-born Chinese from falling under foreign domination”.

<sup>40</sup> Skinner, G William, 1957, p.160: “Warrington Smyth, a British Director of the Royal Department of Mines, wrote in 1898: “The Chinese... are the Jews of Siam... they have on the whole enjoyed an immunity from official interference which they have neither merited nor appreciated.”... J.C.D. Campbell, educational advisor to the Thai government, also compared the Chinese to the Jews and was of the opinion that the “quiet-loving [Thai] natives... have virtually sold to them [the Chinese] their birthright for a mess of pottage””.

<sup>41</sup> Skinner, G William, 1957, p.228. These laws were: (a) The Private Schools Act promulgated in January 1919, which stipulated that all schools established by aliens must register with the Ministry of Education (MoE), that principals of such schools must be educated to the standards set by the MoE for the second year of secondary school, that all alien teachers must study Thai and pass examinations in the language... The regulations did not single out Chinese schools... but they nonetheless shocked the Chinese and led to considerable protest and agitation in the Chinese press; the law was, in fact, unprecedented in all Nanyang; (b) The Compulsory Education Act of 1921 required all children aged 7 to 14 to attend primary school for at least four years. They could meet the requirements of the law only by attending government schools or private schools which followed the regular Thai course of study and used books approved by the MoE. The law, however, was to be put into effect gradually in various jangwats... and was never applied in Bangkok and certain other centers of Chinese population, so that its main effect up to 1932 was to limit the growth of Chinese education in selected outlying regions”.

<sup>42</sup> Skinner, G William, 1957, p.230.

<sup>43</sup> 《泰中研究》，《泰國華僑華人史》第三輯，泰中研究中心出版，2005，第33頁。

the subsequent tightening of the control measures in the 1940s has been discussed in para. 2.5 above and will not be repeated here. But it is worth mentioning here that the immigration regulations were not only intended to curb the influx of Chinese migrants, but also had political considerations. With the development of underground communist party in Siam, growing strength of leftist elements, organized movements aiming at the British, and the introduction of nationalist and anti-Western doctrines of Sun Yat-sen into Chinese schools, anti-Chinese feeling among the Thai elite was stirred up in the late-1920s. The Thai government reacted by stricter enforcement of the education laws and the passage of an immigration act which specifically excluded those “who are of bad character or are likely to create disturbances or to endanger the safety of the public or the Kingdom of Siam”. Furthermore, in 1927, the treason and riot laws were broadened and a more stringent press law was promulgated, again not without political objectives.

- 4.7 The above-mentioned anti-Chinese policies continued to prevail after the 1932 revolution, and under the backdrop of the Great Depression since 1929, and more notably during the regimes of Plaek Phibunsongkhram (Phibun). While their details will not be elaborated here, it may be useful to note that, apart from assimilation and political considerations already mentioned above, economic nationalism was also one of the major reasons for these policies. For example, strikes by Chinese rice-mill workers and taxi drivers in the 1930s invariably ended up with laws requiring opening up or even limiting these jobs to Thai workers.<sup>44</sup> In the larger picture, Chinese domination of the Thai economy was evident by the 1930s where it was estimated that 90% of the country’s commerce and trade was held by Chinese.<sup>45</sup> It was all but natural for the Thai rulers to adopt anti-Chinese policies to lower their economic influence and to use the Chinese economic

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<sup>44</sup> Skinner, G William, 1957, pp.219-220.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

domination as the scapegoat for diverting negative public sentiments in unfavourable economic, social and political situations.

4.8 In huge contrast, the anti-Chinese discrimination policies were much more severe in Indonesia, especially after its declaration of independence in 1945. The indigenous Indonesians were formerly in the lower class of the “Inlanders” and inferior to the Chinese, but after independence their social status changed drastically. Under the circumstance, however, Skinner suggested that they had a “burning inferiority complex vis-à-vis Chinese as well as Europeans”, “when coupled with an inner conviction of cultural superiority”.<sup>46</sup> Affected by this, the indigenous Indonesian would tend to stereotype Chinese, Peranakans and Totoks alike, as arrogant and boasting their superiority. Chinese would be labelled as the those who treated the Indonesians unfairly and lorded over them during the colonial period. The previous segregation policy of the Dutch further enhanced this labelling – Chinese were seen as outsiders, foreigners and aliens. The Chinese playing the role as middlemen in colonial intermediary trade and having economic privileges during the Dutch rule had also led to jealousy, anger and hate by the indigenous Indonesians. Therefore before Indonesia’s independence, the concept of an Indonesian nation tended to exclude the Chinese.<sup>47</sup> <sup>48</sup> As a result, Chinese were categorically discriminated, with preferences given to indigenous Indonesians, no matter it was education, financial facilities, import and manufacturing licenses, wholesale rights, foreign exchange, etc. Not just the assimilation of Chinese into the society was continually impeded by these discrimination policies, but anti-Chinese massacres, mass exodus of Chinese, and riots repeatedly occurred,

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<sup>46</sup> Skinner, G William, 1960, p.66.

<sup>47</sup> Suryadinata, Leo, 2004, p.7.

<sup>48</sup> It was only in March 1963 when president Sukarno openly stated that the Peranakan Chinese was an Indonesian *suku*: ““Suku” means “leg”. The Indonesian nation has many legs, just like a centipede, which possesses Javanese leg, Sundanes leg, ... Peranakan Chinese leg. Peranakan leg is one of the Indonesian national legs”. However, this statement did not have significant impact as Sukarno was toppled two years later.

e.g. in 1946 (massacre at Tangerang with hundreds of Chinese killed), 1960s (exodus of some 300,000 Chinese back to China), 1965-66 (mass killings of between half a million and perhaps a few millions of communist sympathizers and alleged communists including local Chinese) and 1998 (anti-Chinese riots causing some 1,200 deaths)<sup>49</sup>, during regime changes in Indonesia.<sup>50</sup>

4.9 One notable example of an economic discrimination policy was the so-called Benteng (fortress) programme during 1950-1957 under which only indigenous Indonesians were allowed to have licenses to import certain items. The objective of this programme was to foster the creation of a class of indigenous Indonesian businessmen by providing privileges to them (e.g. by requiring at least 70% of the shares of the importing companies should be owned by indigenous Indonesian) while discriminating against the existing Chinese importers. But this programme failed due to a bypass utilizing the so-called “Ali Baba” arrangement where partnerships were formed with indigenous Indonesian as “foremen” whereas the Chinese traders still remained in the background.<sup>51</sup>

4.10 Following the unsuccessful Benteng programme, Sukarno stepped up measures against the Chinese. Sukarno issued the Presidential Regulation 10 of 1959 to prohibit foreign nationals from doing retail business in rural areas and to require them to transfer their businesses to Indonesian nationals by 1 January 1960 or relocate to urban areas. 25,000 traders,<sup>52</sup> mostly Chinese, was expected to be affected and some 300,000 to 400,000 Chinese would consequently

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<sup>49</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20150704215956/http://www.library.ohiou.edu/indopubs/1998/05/31/0029.html>

<sup>50</sup> Ravando, 2014, “*Now is the Time to Kill all Chinese: Social Revolution and the Massacre of Chinese in Tangerang, 1945-46*”, MA Thesis, Cosmopolis Program, Colonial and Global History, Leiden University, 129pp.

<sup>51</sup> Lindblad, J. Thomas, 2002, *The Importance of Indonesianisasi during the Transition from the 1930s to the 1960s*, Itinerario, Volume 26, Issue 3-4, November 2002, pp.51–71.

<sup>52</sup> Some other sources of information suggested larger number, e.g. according to an investigation of the Tempo magazine (“Peraturan yang Menggusur Tionghoa”. Tempo (in Indonesian). 13–19 August 2007. pp. 94–95), the law affected 866,690 foreign retailers listed, of which 90% were Chinese.

be displaced and deprived of the means to earn a livelihood.<sup>53</sup> This issue was escalated to the level of China-Indonesia diplomatic relation with the PRC government demanding compensation for the affected Chinese and undertaking to repatriate them to China. The repatriation started in 1960 and lasted for many years in the 1960s. Diplomatic relation between China and Indonesia was suspended on October 30 1967.

- 4.11 A discussion of anti-Chinese policies in Indonesia would not be complete without a discourse of the “New Order” regime of Suharto starting in 1966 after he rose to power following the abortive coup d'état on 1 October 1965, and the subsequent massive killings of at least half a million of communist sympathizers and alleged communists in 1965-1966. The New Order regime discriminated the ethnic Chinese through laws, government regulations, presidential decrees, ministerial regulations, and cabinet circulars. There were some 64 regulations and laws considered discriminative against Chinese culture, names, language, worshipping, characters, schools, publishing, media etc. Notable regulations and laws were:<sup>54</sup> (a) Cabinet Presidium Decree No. 127/U/Kep/12/1966 on regulation for Indonesian citizens with Chinese names to change to Indonesian-sounding names; (b) Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 on Chinese Religion, Beliefs, and Traditions effectively banning any Chinese literature and cultures in Indonesia, including the prohibition of Chinese characters, and banning of all Chinese religious ceremonies, banquets and celebrations in public;<sup>55</sup> (c) Cabinet Presidium Instruction No. 37/U/IN/6/1967 prohibiting further residency or work permits to new Chinese immigrants, their wives, or children; freezing any capital raised by "foreigners" in Indonesia; closure of

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<sup>53</sup> Purcell, Victor, 1965, p.489.

<sup>54</sup> Leveau, Arnaud, 2007, *“Investigating the Grey Areas of the Chinese Communities in Southeast Asia”*, Proceedings of the Symposium organised by the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, 6-7 January 2005, 167pp.

<sup>55</sup> 周南京，2006，《印度尼西亞華僑華人研究》，北京大學華僑華人研究中心叢書之三十三，香港社會科學出版社有限公司，第 146 頁。

"foreign" schools<sup>56</sup> except for diplomatic corps and their families; requiring the number of Indonesian students to be the majority and in proportion to "foreigners" in any state schools; and making implementation of the "Chinese issue" be the responsibility of the minister for political affairs; (d) Cabinet Presidium Instruction No. 49/U/8/1967 on the utilization of the Chinese language in media; (e) Cabinet Presidium Circular SE-06/Pres-Kab/6/1967 on Changing the Term China and Chinese, requiring the usage of the term "Cina" instead of "Tionghoa" or "Tiongkok"; and the list went on throughout Suharto's rule, until 1990.<sup>57</sup> Figure 5 shows the affected areas of these anti-Chinese laws and regulations, which may be classified as pertaining to citizenship, language, religion, culture, politics, economy and education. Obviously, Suharto launched all-round discrimination policies and measures against the Chinese, with a view to **forcing** the Chinese to assimilate. However, it should be noted that rather than "assimilation", as in the case of Thailand as discussed above, this high-handed forcing of the New Order should actually be regarded as "incorporation", as rightly pointed out by Donald Horowitz and quoted by Leo Suryadinata that there are two types of assimilation – "incorporation" and "amalgamation", with the former meaning that one group assumes the identity of another, while the latter meaning that two or more groups united to form a new group. Apparently, Indonesia took on the first approach while Thailand adopted the second approach, with vastly different results.<sup>58</sup> The anti-Chinese riots as recent as May 1998 clearly shows that the Chinese assimilation issues are still deep-rooted in Indonesia.

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<sup>56</sup> 周南京, 2006, 第 144 頁 reported that the banning of Chinese schools actually took place in July 1966, rendering 272,782 Chinese students without schooling.

<sup>57</sup> Sidjaya, Calvin Michel, 2014, "*Forced Assimilation and Development: The Chinese-Indonesians under Soeharto's New Order (1965-1998)*", research project presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of International Development, Massey University, New Zealand, 80 pp.

<sup>58</sup> Suryadinata, Leo, 2004, p.8.

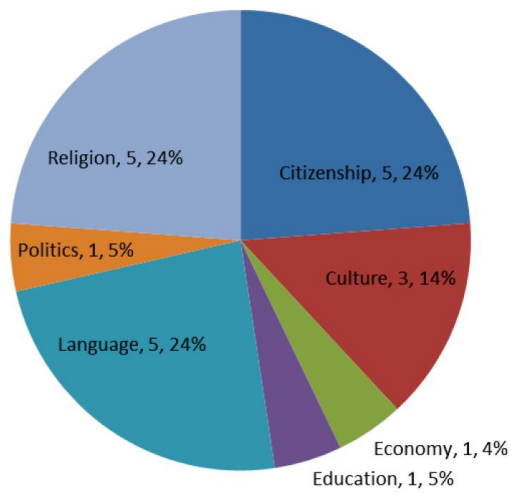


Figure 5: Laws and regulations targeting Chinese Indonesians based on affected areas (adopted from Suhandinata (2009)<sup>59</sup> and Suryadinata (1976)<sup>60</sup> by Sidjaya (2014)).

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<sup>59</sup> Suhandinata, J., 2009, *Indonesian Chinese descent in Indonesia's economy and political stability*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Gramedia Pustaka Utama Publisher.

<sup>60</sup> Suryadinata, Leo (1976). *Indonesian Policies toward the Chinese Minority under the New Order*. *Asian Survey*, 16(8), pp.770-787.



## **5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- 5.1 In the above, we first reviewed the demographic background of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and Thailand and showed that similar immigration policies and measures were adopted by the two countries to curb the substantial increase of Chinese immigrants in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The influxes of Chinese into the two countries effectively stopped in the 1950s, even though the reasons behind were somewhat different.
- 5.2 Based on the influential work of GW Skinner, a comparison of the assimilation policies and measures of the two countries has been carried out in Section 3, discussing the different historical reasons, environments and circumstances behind their success (Thailand) and failure (Indonesia), up to around the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 5.3 Section 4 discussed the policy changes imposed by the two countries since the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, manifesting in anti-Chinese policies and measures, in response to the vast number of Chinese immigrants, arousal of nationalism in these countries as well as in the Chinese communities, and the deteriorating economic and political situations. It could be seen that the magnitude of the anti-Chinese movements in the Suharto regime was much more high-handed and forceful than in Thailand, adopting an “incorporation” rather than “integration” approach, which resulted not in true assimilation of the Chinese into the country, but continual discrimination and prejudices against the Chinese, and even periodic mass violence and humanitarian crises. The bloody May 1998 anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia sorely reminds us that the Chinese assimilation issues are still deep-rooted. It was highly unfortunate for the Indonesian Chinese. In contrast, despite the anti-Chinese movements in Thailand, they were milder in nature and the Chinese assimilation process did not stop.
- 5.4 Time and again, the tide will change. After the fateful May 1998 riots and downfall of the Suharto regime, the reformasi movement has brought healing changes, including revival of Chinese NGOs and clan associations, revival of Chinese newspapers, and emergence of

three-language schools (i.e. teaching Indonesian, English and Chinese) under management by Chinese, abolishing Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 so that even the Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid joined the Chinese New Year celebration in February 2000, etc. Despite all these changes for the better, from the dramatic downfall of former Governor of Jakarta Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (鐘萬學) due to Blasphemy allegations and imprisonment in 2017, which was not without relation to political discrimination due to his Chinese ethnicity,<sup>61</sup> we may only conclude that “the national journey of Chinese Indonesians is far from over”.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/09/jakarta-governor-ahok-found-guilty-of-blasphemy-jailed-for-two-years>

<sup>62</sup> Suryadinata, Leo, 2004, p.14.