

## Chinese Community under the Soekarno Era in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the life of Chinese people in Indonesia during the Soekarno government and analyze the government's treatment of Chinese people in the Soekarno era. This study used a historical method approach with a limited history across the 1930s period, from 1941 to 1958, from 1959 to 1966. The method used is as follows: data collection in the form of literature studies relevant to the subject matter discussed, source criticism to find out the relevant elements through the incorporation of information obtained through the source, and compilation i.e., writing historical facts. Political and economic perceptions influenced Chinese ethnic communities in Indonesia during colonial, the old order, and the new times. Chinese society received many sanctions from the Soekarno government because of communist ideology, which was a threat to the government. The existence of ethnocentric during the old order so that Chinese people cannot be received well.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kehidupan masyarakat Tionghoa di Indonesia pada masa pemerintahan Soekarno dan menganalisis perlakuan pemerintah terhadap orang Tionghoa pada masa pemerintahan Soekarno. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan metode sejarah dengan sejarah terbatas pada periode tahun 1930-an, dari tahun 1941 hingga 1958, dari tahun 1959 hingga tahun 1966. Metode yang digunakan adalah sebagai berikut: pengumpulan data berupa studi pustaka yang relevan dengan materi pelajaran yang dibahas, kritik sumber untuk mengetahui unsur-unsur yang relevan melalui penggabungan informasi yang diperoleh melalui sumber, dan kompilasi yaitu, menulis fakta sejarah. Persepsi politik dan ekonomi mempengaruhi komunitas etnis Tionghoa di Indonesia pada masa penjajahan, Soekarno, dan Orde Baru. Masyarakat Tionghoa banyak mendapat sanksi dari pemerintah Soekarno karena ideologi komunis yang menjadi ancaman bagi pemerintah. Adanya etnosentris pada masa Soekarno sehingga masyarakat Tionghoa tidak bisa diterima dengan baik.

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### INTRODUCTION

Since centuries ago, ethnic Chinese have been in Indonesia with quite large numbers. The calculation of the number of ethnic Chinese was estimated based on the 1930 census. At that time, the number of ethnic Chinese was only 1.2 million, approximately 2.03% of Indonesia's population. In another opinion, the number of ethnic Chinese is between 2.5% and 3% or even greater, which is around 4-5% (Hidayat, 2012).

Ethnic Chinese behavior in Indonesia is influenced by their perceptions of society's political, security, and social conditions. The perception of individuals or groups of people is a process in which individuals or groups organize and translate their sensory impressions to give a sign to their environment. Regardless of whether someone is nationalist or not, this is related to one of the basic needs of human life,



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which concerns the safety and security of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Besides, perceptions about ethnic Chinese in Indonesia also depend on the stereotypes circulating among indigenous people about ethnic Chinese in Indonesia (Sunuantari et al., 2019)

The formation of perceptions about ethnic Chinese in Indonesia is related to their characteristics, especially in responding to the environmental situation they face, with certain motivation, especially to obtain security and welfare of life, even stability (Brady, 2012). This is certainly influenced by the background of experience, which is the basis for moving forward to achieve their hopes of life in the present and the future. Therefore, it is necessary to know the historical background of Chinese ethnicity as knowledge to understand the economic and cultural behavior of ethnic Chinese. The historical trajectory, in this paper, will be limited in several parts, namely the period 1930s, the period 1941 to 1958, the period 1959 to 1966 (Lan, 2018)

Indonesian state policy towards the ethnic Chinese minority. Concerning the issue of ethnic Chinese from time to time, especially the Soekarno era with assimilationist policy projects and the post-Soekarno regime. This policy was marked by the abolition of Chinese cultural pillars (including the closure of Chinese schools, the dissolution of Chinese ethnic organizations and the suppression of Chinese mass media), and symbols and customs of Chinese ethnicity. In such circumstances, several Chinese people have been mixed and do not feel as Chinese anymore. Leo emphasized that the ethnic Chinese group did not disappear and the numbers are still huge in Indonesia. With the change in government policy to be more accommodating, the revival of ethnic Chinese identity is not impossible (Hapsari, 2016).

In 1948 during the reign of President Sukarno after independence, Indonesia experienced a precarious situation regarding the existence and naming of "China" and "Chinese". The outbreak of the Indonesian Communist Party (ICP) rebellion in Madiun was allegedly supported by the Chinese Communist Party. Some Chinese-Indonesians supported it, albeit in small numbers. Because of the political clash between nationalists and communists, the result was that in general, the Chinese-Indonesians were made scapegoats and were associated with communist activities. All of that continued until the fall of President Sukarno's government, replaced by the New Order regime. The ban on the name of China as a country in 1948 given the increasingly complex political developments,

came the unofficial ban on the use of the Chinese term because this term was used by the Indonesian Communist Party (Dian Afrinda & Rahmat, 2019)

In 1959 Government Regulation No. 10 of 1959 issued a trade ban for all foreigners, including people with Chinese citizenship (or Chinese as it was then). In 1959 Chinese Indonesians were faced with a choice between being a Chinese citizen or an Indonesian citizen because Indonesia was not familiar with a dual citizenship system. This conflict then spread with the culmination of racialism on May 10, 1963, in Bandung and spread to several other cities. In 1965 there was an ICP rebellion (G30S / ICP) and suspicion of the support of the PRC (then known as the People's Republic of China (RRT) which eventually overthrew President Soekarno.

In 1967 the New Order government under President Soeharto issued Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 which prohibited all religious activities, beliefs, and customs of China from being carried out in Indonesia. That year also issued the Ampera Cabinet Presidium Circular Letter Number 06 of 1967, which was loaded with political content to justify changing the Chinese / Chinese term to "China."

The Government of the People's Republic of China is one of the parties who expressed their objection to using the term Chinese in Indonesian to refer to that country. They objected to the Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 issued by the Suharto government, which was considered to restore terms that contained negative connotations, and not vice versa as used as an excuse in Circular Letter Number 06 of 1967 (Suryadinata, 2014)

In 1978 the Minister of Trade and Cooperatives Decree No. 286 of 1978 was issued. The Indonesian government, through Bakin oversaw Chinese-Indonesian movements through a body called the China Problem Coordination Agency (COCA) with the reason to supervise the problem of communism.

Reinstatement of terms and objections to the use of the Chinese term During the administration of President Abdurrahman Wahid Presidential Instruction Number 14 of 1967 was revoked by Presidential Decree Number 6 of 2000 (*Kompas*, February 27, 2000, President revoked the term "China"). However, the Cabinet Presidium Decree Number 127 of 1966 and the Ampera Cabinet Presidium Circular Letter Number 06 of 1967 were not revoked, until 2004 some ethnic Chinese parties assumed that the Chinese / Chinese term that should have been used still fights for the revocation of this

circular letter.

Chinese nationalism, including crossbreed, grew apart from and desired the Indonesian government' with its assimilation policy. On the one hand, the tendency to maintain its ethnic identity is found in some ethnic Chinese; while on the other hand, they have felt to be part of Indonesian society (Rohmah et al., 2017)

The Chinese are categorized as foreigners or *Vreemde Oosterlingen* (Foreign Oriental) who is considered not a part of the Indonesian nation. Indonesian nationalities are defined as 'belonging' to the indigenous people, groups having their territory. The position of the Chinese as 'foreigners' emphasizes the importance of applying the concept of ethnicity (or ethnic) in Indonesian society (Sutandio, 2019). Furthermore, the concept of native as a host has taken root in Indonesian earth. The Chinese are considered non-indigenous and newcomers who cannot be accepted as Indonesian ethnicity before they assimilate themselves. According to Suparlan, natives also have stereotypes about ethnic Chinese. They have a perception that the ethnic Chinese are an ethnic group that occupies the economic ladder higher and separate from the natives. The implication, the concept of a plural society that emphasizes the importance of ethnicity, will always position the Chinese as foreigners, even though the Chinese are Indonesian citizens. Indirectly, he said that ethnic Chinese who were non-priests had to blend into natives if they wanted to be accepted as Indonesian.

Another factor linking Chinese descent with political problems in Indonesia is that laws created by the Indonesian government to regulate the identity and culture of Chinese descent always relate to government politics. One example is the decision to ban the holding of Chinese customs in Indonesia. Although the attitude of the government has changed little by little in the application of this law, over the long period the law was used to eliminate the cultural differences between the natives and the Chinese. And this has led to the loss of the original Chinese identity in Indonesia without the discussion of the laws mentioned above (Wasino et al., 2019)

Wasino's research results (2019) that Chinese terms come from words from Cantonese, which is one of the Chinese languages, and the meaning is Chinese (Tan, 1987). The Chinese community always used this term before 1965, so this statement received special attention. After the war for independence, the Chinese also did not want to participate in the war against the invaders. In his research,

Eid (Suryadinata, 1976) emphasizes whether most Chinese people already feel like a nation with indigenous people, whether they still have a strong relationship with Chinese culture, and finally whether there is a result of the above policy and law-making.

According to the results of Achmad's research (Yeung, 1999), Chinese descendants throughout Indonesia are generally not included in the same group. They have different habits and lives. However, it is obvious that most of them agree that there must be assimilation between the Chinese community and indigenous peoples. However, the meaning of 'associating' or 'assimilation' is very different from what was used by the government in the past.

## METHOD

The research used a historical approach, the historical method, namely the facts into a harmonious and interesting story that is described either directly or indirectly from authentic historical sources according to a careful examiner with the law of historical methods. The historical trajectory in this history will build several parts in the period of the 1930s, the period 1941 to 1958, the period 1959 to 1966. The method used is as follows: data in the form of literature studies relevant to the material discussed, criticizing the source for seeing no some are relevant through combining information obtained through primary sources (UGM historian Prof. Djoko Suryo), and secondary sources (journal articles, government documents, newspaper articles), and compilation, namely writing historical facts.

## CHINESE COMMUNITIES IN COLONIAL PERIOD

Based on Volkstelling (census) in the Dutch East Indies period, the Chinese-Indonesian population reached 1,233,000 (2.03%) of the Indonesian population in 1930 (Koentjaraningrat, 2004). There are no official data on the number of Chinese populations in Indonesia issued by the government since Indonesia's independence. However, American anthropologist GW Skinner, in his research has estimated that the population of Chinese people in Indonesia reached 2,505,000 (2.5%) in 1961 (Hapsari, 2016)

Hectic interaction of trade in the area of southeast coastal Chinese led to many people who also feel the need to go out cruising for trade. Interest primary when it was Southeast Asia. Because shipping is very dependent on the wind season, so every year, the merchants will settle in regions of



Figure 1. Map of the distribution of the area of origin ancestral ethnic Chinese-Indonesian, (Purbasari & Suharno, 2019)

Southeast Asia who visited them. And so on, there were traders who decided to settle down and marry local women. Some traders returned to China to continue trading (Lan, 2018).

Chinese people in Indonesia generally come from southeast China. They include tribes: Hakka, Hainan, Hokkien, Cantonese, Hokchia, and Tiochiu. The area of origin concentrated on the southeast coast is understandable because from the Tang Dynasty era, port cities on the southeast coast of China had indeed become a bustling trading port. Quanzhou was once recorded as the largest and busiest port city in the world at that time (Hapsari, 2016).

Most major of the Chinese in Indonesia settled on the island of Java. Area- the other areas where they also settled in the number of large apart in the area of urban are North Sumatra, Bangka-Belitung, South Sumatra, Lampung, Lombok, West Kalimantan, Banjarmasin and some places in South Sulawesi and North Sulawesi.

Hakka - Aceh, North Sumatra, Batam, South Sumatra, Bangka-Belitung, Lampung, Java, West Kalimantan, Banjarmasin, South Sulawesi, Manado, Ambon and Jayapura. Hainan - Riau (Pekanbaru and Batam), and Manado. Hokkien - North Sumatra, Pekanbaru, Padang, Jambi, South Sumatra, Bengkulu, Java, Bali (especially in Denpasar and Singaraja), Banjarmasin, Kutai, Sumbawa, Manggarai, Kupang, Makassar, Kendari, Central Sulawesi, Manado and Ambon. Kantonis - Jakarta, Makassar and Manado. Hokchia - Java (especially in Bandung, Cirebon, Banjarmasin and Surabaya). Tiochiu - North Sumatra, Riau, Riau Islands, South Sumatra and West Kalimantan (especially in Pontianak and Ketapang) (Hapsari, 2016).

During the colonial period, the Dutch had appointed several community leaders with the title Kapitan China, who were obliged to be loyal and become a liaison between the government and the

Chinese community. Some of them have also contributed to the general public, for example, So Beng Kong and Phoa Beng Gan who built a canal in Batavia. In Yogyakarta, Kapiten Tan Djin Sing was the Regent of Yogyakarta.

In fact, there were also Chinese groups who had fought against the Dutch, either alone or with other ethnic groups. Together with Javanese ethnicity, the Chinese group fought against the VOC in 1740-1743. In West Kalimantan, the Chinese community who were members of the Lanfong "Republic" fought with Dutch troops in the XIX century.

In pre-independence history, the ethnic Chinese were several times subjected to mass murder or looting, such as the massacre in Batavia 1740 and the Javanese wartime massacre of 1825-1830. The massacre in Batavia gave birth to an ethnic Chinese resistance movement that moved in several cities in Central Java which was also assisted by Javanese ethnicity. Which in turn resulted in the breakup of the Mataram kingdom. Chinese people are no longer allowed to live anywhere. This Wijkenstelsel rule created ethnic Chinese settlements or Chinatowns in a number of major cities in the Dutch East Indies (Tan, 1987).

The rise of nationalism in the Dutch East Indies was inseparable from the developments that occurred in the Chinese community. March 17, 1900, was formed in Batavia Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK), which founded schools (54 in 1908 and 450 schools in 1934). Other ethnicities, such as Arab descent, followed this initiative, who founded the Djamiat-ul Chair to imitate the THHK model. In turn, this made Javanese priyayi aware of the importance of education for the younger generation so that Budi Utomo was formed.

The colonial government's target to prevent native interactions with ethnic Chinese through the *passenstelsel* and *Wijkenstelsel* regulations turned out to be to create a concentration of Chinese economic activities in urban areas. When the world economy shifted to the industrial sector, Chinese people were best prepared to do business with specialties in the business of food and beverage, herbal medicine, household appliances, building materials, spinning, batik, kretek, and transportation. In 1909 in Buitenzorg (Bogor), Sarekat Dagang Islamiyah was founded by RA Tirtoadisuryo following the Siang Hwee (Chinese chamber of commerce) model which was formed in 1906 in Batavia. Even the formation of the Sarekat Islam (SI) in Surakarta is inseparable from the influence of the association that Chinese citizens

previously made. The founder of SI, Haji Samanhudi, was originally a member of Kong Sing, the organization of the Chinese community helping the Chinese in Surakarta. Samanhudi also later formed Rekso Rumecko, namely Kong Sing of the Javanese (Purbasari & Suharno, 2019)

The Dutch colonial government was increasingly worried because Sun Yat Sen proclaimed the Republic of China, January 1912. Chinese organizations that were initially involved in the socio-cultural field began to turn to politics. The aim was to eliminate discriminatory treatment against Chinese people in the Dutch East Indies in the fields of education, law/justice, civil status, tax burdens, barriers to movement and residence. In the framework of implementing the Ethical Policy, the colonial government tried to promote education, but Chinese citizens were not included in the program. Even though the Chinese pay double taxes (income tax and wealth tax). Income tax is compulsory on indigenous people who are not farmers. The wealth tax (house, horse, carriage, motorized vehicles and household appliances) is imposed only on Europeans and Eastern Foreigners (including ethnic Chinese). Barriers to the movement were imposed on Chinese citizens with the existence of *passenstelsel*.

## CHINESE COMMUNITIES UNDER SUKARNO PERIOD

### Socio-Economic System

In the early era of independence in the agrarian sector, ethnic Chinese were still limited in ownership, except on Bangka Island, West Kalimantan, and several locations on the islands of Sumatra and Java. As a result of the conditions during the Malaise era, there was a shift in the role of certain economies, especially from plantation coolies in East Sumatra to middlemen, fish traders, or rice mill owners. Likewise, the ethnic Chinese dominated retail trade to a lesser extent than the Dutch. This profession is also followed by the role of middlemen and small traveling peddlers. Business in the financial sector is only a low-level pawnshop broker and does not take the form of banking. The Chinese ethnic also owned kretek, batik and small textile factories, while the natives were still largely engaged in agrarian affairs and government services for the Dutch East Indies (Jomo & Folk, 2013).

Educated ethnic Chinese have begun to pursue specialized fields, such as doctors, accountants and teachers. Those who work as coolies, or manual laborers, whether skilled or not,

are starting to shrink in number. In addition, many work for Chinese companies (Leibold, 2013). Hence, in the period of the 1930s, most of the ethnic Chinese who were former coolies changed their roles to become traders and entrepreneurs in petty trade or small-scale industry which excluded the indigenous small traders and entrepreneurs, but not Dutch entrepreneurs.

From 1941 to 1958, In general, Dutch companies and foreign private companies dominate major economic sectors, such as manufacturing, plantation, textile industry, and others. There was a change in the economic role of the ethnic Chinese, who gradually entered the wholesale and export-import business, which the Dutch still dominated. This was followed by the growth of small private banks owned by ethnic Chinese and also emerged in the textile industry (Hidayat, 2012).

The shipping sector became the main sector widely held by ethnic Chinese at that time, but in the end it met with competition from indigenous state and private companies. The service sector and profession are increasing quantitatively, but for government services and the armed forces, in quantity, it is almost non-existent.

The economic behavior of the ethnic Chinese became increasingly prominent in this period, especially from 1957 to 1958. The success of their efforts to take over the large nationalized Dutch companies, although the political and economic conditions of Indonesia were not in their favor, especially after the G 30- event. S / PKI in 1965. At that time, the middle class ethnic Chinese made large-scale human capital in the field of education, especially those of a technical and managerial nature, so that during high inflation and feelings of anti-ethnic Chinese were widespread until 1966 (Wasino et al., 2019).

### Socio-Cultural Life

Research on Chinese cultural identity in Indonesia will always be related to the laws mentioned above because for the past 30 years, these laws have regulated the existence of Chinese community identity by regulating the implementation of the most important aspects for Chinese culture. Research must include an interpretation of the social and historical conditions that prevailed in the pre-New Order era and period, along with the blending of these laws so that an understanding of the unofficial grounds for these kinds of laws emerged (Dian Afrinda & Rahmat, 2019).

Consequently, this information will help the researcher understand the ideas on which the

official grounds are based, which explains the creation of these laws, namely to promote complete integration of the Chinese community in the rest of Indonesian society. The meaning is that all relations, including cultural, social and political links should be eliminated.

These laws include the prohibition of the use of any Chinese language, both written and spoken and its use as the language of instruction in schools in Indonesia. Some laws prohibit and reject religions that most of the adherents of which are Chinese, namely Kong Hu Chu, and prohibit any places for them to worship (Suryadinata, 1976)

### **Political Life**

In 1946 PM Sjahrir's government appointed a minister from ethnic Chinese-Chinese, Tan Po Goan. During the time of PM Amir Sjarifudin, Siauw Giok Tjhan became minister of minority affairs. The two ministers had difficulty convincing the majority of the Chinese-Chinese group to continue to support Indonesia. In general, due to the racist explosion that claimed lives, this group tended to support China or the Netherlands. It was only in 1949-1950 that concerns about safety began to decrease and many Chinese-Tionghoa figures were involved in politics (Brady, 2012).

The high frequency of cabinet changes during the 1950-1959 period gave rise to a class of political elites who tried to raise funds for party survival. Some of them also enriched themselves so that there was a desire to take over the strength of the domestic economy from the hands of the Chinese-Chinese. Political priorities were not based on the need to liquidate the colonial economy but also took over decades of Chinese businesses (Leibold, 2013).

Then came out discriminatory regulations such as PP-10 of 1959 which prohibited Chinese-Chinese from trading and living in rural areas. During that period there was an exodus of more than 200,000 people from Indonesia to China in the 1960s.

During the guided democracy 1959-1965, many racist regulations were abolished. The position of the Cina-Tionghoa group was politically better because of Soekarno's close relationship with the PRC Government. But the "honeymoon" period ended with the G30-S / PKI. Then Suharto compared the Chinese-Chinese to the Chinese people. The Chinese terminology which contains contempt was formalized in 1966 to create an inferiority complex for the Chinese-Chinese group.

The relationship between Indonesian Chinese

citizens and other Indonesian citizens (or those called 'pribumi') since Indonesian independence has always been controversial. On the one hand, they can live side by side peacefully (even until marriage), work together, and become one unit. Communities support each other, but on the other hand, also they dislike each other (as seen from the stereotypes of each other). Conflict with each other (both latent conflicts in economic competition and social jealousy, open conflicts which are always preceded by incidents) small), and often split into two dichotomous communities with the terms 'indigenous' and 'non-native'. There is a relationship of love and hate here, which is expressed alternately from time to time (Jomo & Folk, 2013).

### **CONCLUSION**

As a result of the above discussion, several reasons explain the acceptance of Chinese culture in Indonesia as one of Indonesia's cultures. Furthermore, this action could help non-Chinese communities accept this society as a part of the Indonesian nation, which was hoped to improve bad relations between Chinese and non-Chinese and overcome the 'Chinese problem'. The Indonesian nation 'is always based on the concept of race, namely the Indigenous people. In this reality, it negates the ability of people of Chinese descent to be included as an "Indonesian nation" and to be accepted as this nation by the Indigenous people. Pak Suryadinata believes that the concept of 'nation' is based on political and cultural concepts, it is very visible, from the explanation above, that people of Chinese descent should be accepted as a part of the Indonesian people who have always existed since the birth of Indonesia as an independent country.

The principles of Chinese economic behavior in Indonesia have indeed changed from time to time, but in general, the principles of Chinese economic behavior depend on their understanding of the policies and the national political conditions regarding the existence of ethnic Chinese nationally.

This economic behavior ultimately leads to safe and neutral businesses in the sense that they do not pose a lot of risk to personal safety and well-being. The concrete form of the Chinese ethnic economy tends to be engaged in trade (retail) and finance, businesses that are not big businesses (because the state controls the vital efforts to manage them).

Economic behavior that tends to be proactive, in the form of a family business or company, has become a characteristic of Chinese ethnicity in

the Asian region, including Indonesia. It is also supported by the perceptions of ethnic Chinese towards Chinese ethnic self-identification of the country they inhabit. Particularly in Indonesia, the economic perception of the Chinese ethnic group is divided between the economic and political perceptions of the “*totok*” and *Peranakan* Chinese, both of whom initially came as overseas Chinese.

The “*totok*” ethnic Chinese, especially those with lower economic status, tend to have dynamic economic behavior and are trade-oriented. This behavior is motivated by the hope of living a safe, prosperous, and loyal life to customs and obedience to the family, including the cooperation between ethnic Chinese ethnic groups. Meanwhile, *Peranakan* Chinese tend to be more conservative in doing business. Ethnic Chinese rely on the integrity of a relationship between ethnic Chinese in the economic and family fields. The form of collaboration of Chinese ethnic behavior in Indonesia, especially the middle and upper classes (who are professionally independent).

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