Studying the Chinese in Indonesia: 
A Long Half-Century

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In the years since Indonesian independence, English-language works have dominated studies of Indonesian Chinese. A brief survey of influential researchers and their topics since Indonesian independence traces changes in scholarly interest from citizenship and assimilation to regional diversity, culture and identity, economic activity, religion and literature. Increasingly, researchers are themselves Indonesians and other Asians, and their home institutions range from Western countries to Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Chinese Indonesians, Indonesia since 1945, citizenship, education, politics, business, culture and identity, Indonesian studies.

This is an exemplary survey, not a comprehensive one or a bibliographic essay. It looks at the changes in studies of Chinese in Indonesia over time, both in English and in some other Western languages. Taking a chronological approach, it chooses especially scholars whose work has influenced others and emphasizes the succession of topics that have preoccupied researchers. English dominates because it has dominated research and publication since Indonesian independence; Indonesian-language studies are, unfortunately, outside the scope of this brief article. But even this brief review shows how scholars have approached Chinese Indonesians, from outside or from within, how they have changed their approaches, how Indonesia has changed, as have Chinese Indonesians, and how research centres and research topics have moved on. It also reveals some possibilities for future research.
Beginnings

Not many know that probably the first work on Chinese in Indonesia submitted to an American university after 1945 was a brief master's thesis undertaken at Stanford University by George McT. Kahin (1946), who later wrote a path-breaking study of the Indonesian Revolution (1952). Kahin relied in preparing that thesis on published Dutch sources, but his interest set the stage for Cornell University's Modern Indonesia Project to look more closely at Chinese Indonesians (G. McT. Kahin 1989; A. Kahin 2007).¹

G. William Skinner

Beginning in the 1950s, the work and the influence of anthropologist G. William Skinner set new standards for a post-colonial approach to Chinese Indonesians, although he never published a monograph drawing on his research in Indonesia. Skinner had learned Mandarin while in the American military during the Second World War, but China, where he began a study of Hakkas in Sichuan, closed its borders to him in 1950. His research on the Chinese in Indonesia in the late 1950s may seem to be a mere interlude between his two monographs on Chinese in Thailand (Skinner 1957 and 1958) and his work on marketing and social structure in China (Skinner 1964, 1965a and 1965b), but it influenced much subsequent writing.

A major project on the Chinese minority in Indonesia, sponsored by the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, took Skinner to Jakarta from 1956 to 1958. Of his resulting publications, in my opinion, the compact survey in the HRAF Press volume on Indonesia edited by Ruth McVey is especially useful (Skinner 1963).² Skinner firmly rejected the term sinkeh for totok. The distinction between totok and peranakan was not, he argued, merely an accident of birth in China or Indonesia, but one related to a complex of cultural factors including language, descent, education, and so on. On Java, this “bifurcation” of Chinese society meant that these two groups spoke different languages, attended different schools, and often socialized separately. Nonetheless, peranakans were not like the assimilated descendants of Chinese immigrants in Thailand. They had acquired
many cultural traits from their Javanese environment without melting into local society.

Skinner’s interest extended to communities outside Java, where different influences were at work. He visited sites from Bagan Siapi-api on Sumatra to Bali and Kalimantan. There, he concluded, Chinese might be less *peranakan* than “locally rooted”, partly because they continued to speak Chinese dialects. Skinner, in an unpublished work (1962), also addressed the different political attitudes among Chinese in Indonesia — pro-China, pro-Indonesia, or adhering to the Kuomintang government on Taiwan — that compounded divisions by language, education and regional origins. These findings underlined the complexity of the minority.

As others have pointed out, Skinner’s differentiation of Chinese Indonesians into *peranakan* and *totok*, and his extension of this paradigm to some communities outside Java, may have been appropriate in the past, but the categories are less useful today. Sai Siew Min (2006, pp. 34–37), for example, urges us to differentiate between language use and acculturation, and even proposes that Chinese languages or dialects are not “foreign” to Indonesia — an idea that researchers might want to investigate further.

Chinese Indonesians themselves now downplay the *peranakan/totok* distinction. Leo Suryadinata (2008, p. 2) has even spoken of “*peranakans*” and “*peranakan-ized totoks*”. Charles Coppel (2012), in a 2010 address, aptly summarized the difficulties of clinging to these categories today. The theme of “identity”, treated below, offers a chance to re-examine the issue, but a critical look at the current situation suggests that *totok* has not quite outlived its usefulness.

In the late 1990s, Skinner (1996) again addressed Southeast Asia, comparing the nineteenth-century Babas in the Straits Settlements, Chinese Mestizos in the Philippines, and *peranakan* Chinese on Java and emphasizing their diverse historical experiences. All three were creolized groups whose culture incorporated elements from two parent cultures — Chinese and local. They maintained contact with both cultures, yet remained separate and stable over time. In the end, the *peranakans* survived the longest.
The State

Many next-generation studies were state-oriented. Although the young Indonesian state seemed weak, its influence on the situation of the minority was strong. Constantly attempting to “solve” its self-defined “Chinese Problem” (*masalah Cina*), an expression that goes back to the Sukarno era, the state challenged the economic role of Chinese and their national status.

From the 1950s to the 1960s: Citizenship and Political Representation

Donald Willmott’s study of the dual nationality question catalogued Indonesia’s discriminatory legislation on the question of Indonesian or Chinese citizenship, pursued because of security concerns and also for reasons of economic nationalism, and its related discriminatory treatment of Chinese Indonesians (Willmott 1956 and 1961). My own dissertation (Somers 1965), after a historical survey of *peranakan* politics, updated the political situation to 1963. It looked particularly at the integrationist group Baperki as a representative of the minority and at the assimilation–integration controversy. In that latter year, Baperki seemed to have a strong political position because of its closeness to Sukarno and political support from the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) and other left-wing parties. The much smaller assimilationist group was flirting with the Indonesian military. Both sides had made, in retrospect, highly problematic political alliances.

Unquestionably, one reason for academic interest in Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia was the Cold War and an American desire to “contain” the People’s Republic of China and limit its influence on neighbouring countries. Many Indonesian political leaders themselves mistrusted a minority with alien roots and uncertain loyalty that was nevertheless essential to the national economy. Was assimilation a possible answer to the dilemma?

Skinner’s work had addressed questions of comparative assimilation and acculturation. Yet he saw assimilation as an outcome to be explained with reference to historical processes and to comparisons between cultures. The assimilationist group in Indonesia
knew of Skinner and hoped for the removal of obstacles to Chinese assimilation. In contrast, Indonesian political discourse, especially after 1965 under Soeharto, regarded assimilation (pembauran) as using the power of the state to reach a projected goal: elimination of the distinctiveness of the minority. As Andreas Susanto (2008, p. 1) saw it, even ten years after the fall of the New Order the "discourse of assimilation" still dominated discussion of Indonesia's Chinese minority. But this was within Indonesia. From the 1970s onward, scholars outside Indonesia were using different paradigms.

The State and Violence

The vantage point for studying Chinese in Indonesia soon shifted from North America to Australia, although it continued to emphasize the state — and violence. As Wang Gungwu wrote in a 1976 collection of articles on Chinese in Indonesia, "nowhere have more Overseas Chinese been killed or wounded, run away or been chased away, and been so insecure during the past twenty years than in Indonesia" (Wang 1976, p. 204). Jamie Mackie (1976) devoted his essay in the same collection to the long-term causes and "precipitating factors" of violent outbreaks. Mackie's background in both politics and economics meant that he was understandably drawn to the study of Chinese Indonesians, and he returned to this subject a number of times.

In that same collection, Charles Coppel (1976) examined patterns of Chinese political activity in Indonesia from colonial times to the New Order, but the theme of violence also attracted his attention. In *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Coppel 1983), he followed the "Chinese Problem" up to 1968. Coppel showed how the engagement of the minority in Indonesian politics, especially through Baperki, had, while presumably underlining its loyalty to Indonesia, in fact left it extremely vulnerable to retaliation for the political positions that it had taken. Aware that the authorities often deliberately organized or incited violence, Coppel chronicled how Soeharto's politics, while paying lip service to both assimilation and economic nationalism, suppressed Chinese culture. His essays also reveal
his deep scholarship and his sympathy for the minority (Coppel 2002). Finally, in a contribution to the volume *Violent Conflicts in Indonesia: Analysis, Representation, Resolution*, Coppel endeavoured to put anti-Chinese violence into context (Coppel 2006, pp. 3–18). In his view, Indonesian history is a history of violence, and violence against Chinese is one example of the ethnic, religious and regional conflicts that have persisted until today.


American anthropologist James Siegel was among the first to analyse the terrible outbreaks of May 1998 in Jakarta (Siegel 1998). Australian researcher Jemma Purdey (2006) addressed the issue in connection with the closing days of the New Order, convincingly arguing that the large-scale anti-Chinese violence of the period, especially the less-known outbreaks in Medan and Solo, were related to state behaviour. She emphasized the persistent contradiction in the New Order’s minority policy: on the one hand, assimilation meant that Chinese Indonesians were to be absorbed into the majority, but at the same time political leaders constantly distinguished the Chinese from that majority by pointing to the “gap” between wealthy businessmen, meaning Chinese, and the poor, meaning indigenous Indonesians. Politicians and members of the security forces repeatedly excused violent outbreaks, blamed them on economic difficulties and bestowed immunity on the perpetrators. Yet, wealthy businessmen, Chinese and *príbumi* alike, benefited from privileges and monopolies that the government itself lavished on them, for a fee of course.
More recent studies of violence remind us that minority victims often remain silent, hoping to return to business as usual when danger has passed. They see their experience only in terms of concrete, episodic acts, not as a recurring and even structural problem (Eifert 2012, pp. 144, 227–28). Or, as Susanto claimed in his study of Yogyakarta, they tend to seize upon short-term solutions and fail to address the issue of long-term policies that might be helpful in preventing future outbreaks of violence (Susanto 2008, pp. 81–82 and 153–67).

Other State-Linked Issues

Although violent outbreaks against Chinese appear to have subsided somewhat, other issues remain. Leo Suryadinata has not been mesmerized by violence. He has instead repeatedly opened discussion on politics, history and culture. For those interested in developments up to 1975, his *Pribumi Indonesians, the Chinese Minority and China* (Suryadinata 2005) is an overview of pre- and post-independence policies towards the Chinese minority and the influence — or lack of it — that China exercised on developments in Indonesia. For example, China reacted vehemently to the mistreatment of its nationals in 1959–61, when the Indonesian government forbade alien trade in small towns and villages and expelled alien Chinese from rural areas in some regions. China’s response, sending ships to evacuate its citizens to China, resulted in disruption there, for China itself could not integrate the returned migrants smoothly. These events led to the realization that Indonesia might now use this kind of Chinese intervention as an excuse to expel many more Chinese Indonesians — from a humanitarian viewpoint, an unacceptable outcome (Suryadinata 2005, p. 125; Mozingo 1976, pp. 173–80).

Chinese Indonesian Organizational Life in Recent Times

In the Soeharto period, 1966–98, Indonesia suppressed most Chinese Indonesian organizations, except religious ones. After the fall of the New Order, Chinese Indonesians were free to form political and social organizations, and a number of recent studies have looked
at the outcomes. Some organizations were revivals of homeland, school, or clan associations — some of which had survived during the New Order under other names. Others were new. Division by language and political attitudes, an old phenomenon, reappeared, as some groups introduced Mandarin in their meetings, while most, more locally oriented, continued to use Indonesian.\(^{13}\)

As to political parties, demography and election laws quickly made it clear that ethnic Chinese political parties were too small to participate meaningfully in electoral politics (Tanasaldy 2015), and, as Suryadinata (2001) showed, minority interests were too diverse. Ethnic Chinese have served as cabinet members and been elected *bupati* (district heads) or members of national and regional parliaments,\(^{14}\) but contests for prominent elected offices have been problematic. Candidates face multiple obstacles: divisions within Chinese communities themselves, manipulation of anti-Chinese prejudices, and, when ethnic Chinese candidates are not Muslims, potential opposition on religious grounds. Chong Wu Ling (2014) described these issues in connection with Sofyan Tan’s failed bid to become mayor of Medan in 2011. The ethnic Chinese mayoral candidate in Jakarta in 2017, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or “Ahok”, faced attacks on his Christianity and his Chineseness; we hope for future, in-depth analyses of his electoral loss and its implications.\(^{15}\)

Relations with China

Four authors — David Mozingo, Rizal Sukma, Liu Hong and Johannes Herlijanto — have looked at China–Indonesia relations since independence and what they have meant for Chinese Indonesians. These four works detail the establishment of relations with China, and then their “freezing” (Mozingo 1976); the lead-up to a cautious restoration after 1990, and especially the personal role of Soeharto (Sukma 1999); and the influence of China as a political and economic model in the early post-independence years (Liu 2011). All of these studies reveal the “paradox”\(^{16}\) that positive attitudes towards China do not necessarily translate into positive attitudes towards Chinese
Indonesians. Unfortunately, however, the negative period of China–Indonesia relations from 1966 to 1990 was also a very negative one for Chinese Indonesians.

A newer topic is the euphoria of “learning from China” (Herlijanto 2013, pp. 136–45). Exposure to a large-scale building project in Surabaya involving workers brought from China aroused admiration for China’s business methods and work ethic (Herlijanto 2013, p. 211ff.). At the same time, the Indonesian press has warned loudly about the importation of even a few workers from China, and even of the arrival of tourists from the country, as if the days of mass coolie immigration were about to return.

Identity

Identity is something that is there but hard to define and difficult to apply. In fact, identity may not be the most useful concept. Ien Ang has reminded us that discussions of identity originated in Western societies like those of the United States or Australia when they discarded the “melting pot” or assimilation model. But she calls “identity”, which tends to be essentializing, a “potential prison-house” for a minority in diaspora (Ang 2001, pp. 11–13).

Identity Studies, 1980s–Present

Skinner’s attention to assimilation reflected in part the “melting pot” image of American society. Later, sociologists criticized this paradigm for the United States. Ironically, “assimilation” was in retreat in Western social sciences by the 1980s or earlier. Americans were learning to be, if imperfectly, a “nation of nations” at the same time that Indonesia’s power holders were promoting “assimilation” of the Chinese minority.

In 1985, Wang Gungwu and Jennifer Cushman invited scholars to a conference at the Australian National University on the “Changing Identities” of Chinese in Southeast Asia (Cushman and Wang 1988).17

Wang later remarked that the idea of identity was unknown to Chinese. They knew only “Chinese-ness”, becoming more Chinese or less Chinese, although Chinese-ness may also be hard to define. In
today’s world, he suggested, multiple identities might prevail (Wang 1991, pp. 198–99). Others agreed. One insight from the discussions in Canberra was that occupation is closely linked to identity; for example, businessmen were “Chinese”, but government employees were not (Mackie 1988). The New Order policy of restricting many non-business occupations to indigenous Indonesians tended to work against the supposed goal of assimilation of the Chinese minority by concentrating Chinese Indonesians in business-related activities.

Leo Suryadinata, also a participant in that conference, had earlier discussed identity in his biography of Liem Koen Hian, “The Search for Identity of a Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia” (Suryadinata 1976), and, indeed, Suryadinata’s *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Java, 1917–1942* (Suryadinata 1981) pointed to the three-way pull during the colonial era among loyalty to China, adherence to the Netherlands, and the desire to become part of a still unrealized Indonesia. This question was also one of political “identity”. Suryadinata’s biographical collections (Suryadinata 2012 and 2015b) offer multiple, divergent examples of the orientations and identities of Chinese Indonesians.

In contrast, wide-ranging discussions at a 1990 conference on Chinese Indonesians at Cornell University largely ignored the question of identity, while at the same time locating Indonesia’s Chinese firmly within Indonesian history and culture (Blusse 1991). Only weeks after this event, the frozen diplomatic relations between Indonesia and the People’s Republic of China finally thawed. Was it a new ballgame?

More recently, Thung Ju-Lan’s dissertation saw “Identities in Flux” (Thung 1998). She classified respondents under four varieties of identity: persistence of Chineseness, a feeling of assimilation to Indonesian-ness, a global identity, or the conviction that work dominated their lives and that identity was irrelevant. C.Y. Hoon (2008) described the responses of Chinese Indonesians during the decade after *Reformasi* to new opportunities for expressing Chinese culture in education, the press, organizations, and politics. Aimee Dawis (2009) focused on young urban Chinese and the role of
the media in (re-)constructing “Chineseness”. Didi Kwartanada’s historical studies include one demonstrating the relationship between identity, identification and control (2016).

Do we need a new approach? That might include situational identity, hybridity, or, as Anthony Reid (2009) has suggested, even “Escaping the Burdens of Chineseness”. Will “multiculturalism” or “pluralism” finally replace assimilation? Or are *peranakans* an Indonesian *suku*, with a right to their own *mestizo* culture?

**Education and Language**

Identity-building has a long history in education. An early study of the changes in Chinese society in the Indies after 1900 by Lea Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism* (1960), drew attention to the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan’s Chinese-language schools and the beginnings in the Netherlands Indies of political and social organizations oriented to China. While Williams said comparatively little about influences from the wider region, Sai Siew Min (2006) has emphasized the importance of trans-border interactions with Singapore and Penang, as opposed to influences from China itself, in the development of a Nanyang-oriented Chinese education among the Chinese in Indonesia.

Sai also chronicles the recent, renewed activity of “We, the generation who have been educated in Chinese schools”, now already an aging group. Soon after *Reformasi*, schools and courses teaching Mandarin blossomed, as did newspapers in Chinese, but observers have expressed scepticism about the long-term prospects for a Chinese-reading and Chinese-speaking public in Indonesia, especially in the absence of a school curriculum that uses Chinese as the language of instruction.

Language is an important identity marker, but how did Mandarin become identified with the genuine “roots” of the Chinese minority, given that the mother tongues of Chinese immigrants were Southern Chinese languages or dialects and that almost no one in the Indies spoke Mandarin? Sai (2006 and 2016) and Setijadi (2016b) point to the transnational and global value of Mandarin both in the past and in the present. Leo Suryadinata’s early survey of the education of
Chinese in the colonial Netherlands Indies identifies three language streams: Chinese, Dutch and Malay (Suryadinata 1972). Ming Govaars-Tjia (1999 and 2005) subsequently showed how Dutch-language education offered the *peranakans* a thoroughly Western curriculum with no provision for Chinese culture.

Even as late as the 1980s, the *peranakan* elite of East Java spoke Dutch, as linguistic studies of identity showed (Oetomo 1987). Dede Oetomo’s grandmother once insisted, “You’re Chinese and you should learn to speak Chinese”. “But”, he noted, “she told me that in Dutch” (Emont 2016, p. 2). More studies of language use, especially in places like Bangka, Medan, Riau, would be welcome. Or, to ask another question, are grandmothers transmitters of identity?

**Religion and Identity**

Between 1966 and 1998, under the repressive policies of the Indonesian state, Chinese religion became an important repository of a Chinese identity. The influence of traditional Chinese religion appears to have expanded and deepened during those years, while other religions also made room for expression of Chinese identity or Chinese-ness.

**Traditional Chinese Religions**

Chinese religion attracted comparatively little attention before the New Order, when Cold War thinking focused attention on politics and economic influence. In addition, by the post–1945 years, most Chinese schools were a-religious and even anti-religious, training a generation indifferent to traditions. Nevertheless, traditional religion persisted, while Confucianism developed in its own way, and many Chinese became Christians or Muslims.

Descriptions of traditional religious practices appeared in regional and community studies such as those of Willmott (1960) for Semarang and Tan (1963) for Sukabumi, and for West Kalimantan, more recently, in Hui (2011). The suppression of Chinese cultural expression after 1966 confined traditional celebrations to temples and private homes, eliminating public processions and festivities. Many
temples renamed themselves to become Buddhist vihara, since the state recognized Buddhism as a religion. In 1977, Denys Lombard and Claudine Salmon realized a breakthrough with *Les Chinois de Jakarta: Temples et vie collective* (1977, with an English summary). They not only catalogued the many houses of worship in the capital, some in disrepair, but also unearthed interactions criss-crossing the Chinese-indigenous and Islamic–non-Islamic divides.

Salmon has also documented Chinese epigraphic materials on Java, contributing to the three-volume collection on Indonesia spearheaded by Wolfgang Franke (Franke et al. 1988, 1997 and 1998). These inscriptions shed light on both family histories and transborder networks. Her recent work on contemporary Chinese burial sites reflects how modernization and globalization are changing Chinese burial practices (2016).

Other post-1998 studies have expanded understanding of Chinese religion, since it is again (relatively) freely expressed. Among the Cap Go Meh processions on the fifteenth day of the Chinese New Year, that in Singkawang (Chan 2013; Hui 2011) is a major tourist attraction, but that in nearby Pontianak was recently prohibited (Hoon 2009; Chan 2009). Lineages and connections among lineage temples may also reach from China to Southeast Asian countries and beyond (Salmon and Calanca 2015), and among Taoist deities the goddess Mazu enjoys transnational links (Sidharta 2015).

Apart from traditional Buddhism, the appearance of Falun Gong (Aizawa 2012) and recent influences from modern Buddhist sects from Japan or Taiwan (Hui 2011) are also likely to awaken interest in contemporary developments in Buddhism in Indonesia.

**Confucianism: A Special Case**

From the turn of the twentieth century, Confucianism developed on Java as a rational, humanistic belief, free of superstitions and nativist accretions. Under Soeharto, however, Confucianism lost its official recognition as one of the five approved religions, and the topic of its status has aroused considerable interest among scholars. In several articles, Charles Coppel (2002, pp. 228–333) followed these
developments from the “qualified recognition” to de-recognition of Confucianism. Lasiyo (1992) produced a comprehensive study; other authors, including Leo Suryadinata, have also taken up the topic.

Christianity
Although Christian missionaries proselytized among the Chinese and established schools in the Netherlands Indies from at least the nineteenth century, conversions really burgeoned after 1965, when people needed to provide a religious identification. Protestant denominations, many of which are explicitly “Chinese”, support the retention of Chinese identity after conversion. They sometimes also allow the retention of Chinese language, although not, for example, “ancestor worship”. Some have links abroad, exchanging pastors and preachers with churches in Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore (Hoon 2013 and 2016). Pentecostal-charismatic sects have enjoyed influence, analysed by Juliette Koning, among mid-level Chinese Indonesian businessmen and managers, linking business and belief (Koning and Dahles 2009a and 2009b).

Catholic churches are less studied. They tend to be multi-ethnic, to use Indonesian in services, and to offer less opportunity to express Chinese identity, but in practice there may be regional differences. Finally, attacks on both churches and temples, apparently religiously motivated, may target Chinese believers, and despite the general decline in violence, they have occurred sporadically since Reformasi.

Islam
In 1985, Lombard and Salmon showed that being Chinese and Muslim was part of Indonesian history in “Islam et sinite” (Islam and Chineseness, 1985, English version 1993). Their work contradicted the prevailing opinion that the two were somehow incompatible.

With scholars increasingly open to the role of China in the early Islamization of Java, the topic derived new relevance from the 2005 commemoration of Zheng He’s voyages to the south. This commemoration shed a positive light on China among pious Muslims (Herlijanto 2013, pp. 136–45). Chinese conversions, Chinese mosques
and Chinese religious teachers have drawn scholarly attention (Chiou 2012, also 2007 and 2015; Hew 2013 and 2014; Zhuang 2011). The Siauw Giap’s question (1993) remains, however: will Chinese Muslims be absorbed into the Indonesian Muslim community at large or will they remain a group apart? Chiou (2012) shows that many converts express their ethnicity in a kind of “Chinese Islam”. The construction of “Chinese” mosques — as in Surabaya — demonstrates creative adaptation in Indonesian Islam rather than a trend towards absorption (Dickson 2008).

Will Chinese Muslims still face anti-Chinese discrimination? In Yogyakarta, Imlek Salat, the plan to hold special Islamic prayers for Chinese New Year, aroused strong opposition (Chiou 2013). In contrast, Chinese Muslims in Surabaya have been able to host gala Imlek or Chinese New Year dinners in an atmosphere of inter-ethnic harmony (Dickson 2008).

Citation of a Hadith of the Prophet about “learning from China” also illustrates the growing place of China in discussions of Islamic piety and modernity in Indonesia (Herlijanto 2013, pp. 160–62, 245–301). Seemingly, the international focus of Indonesian Islam has expanded to China. Questions about how the Islamic revival may affect Chinese Indonesians who are not Muslims or whether Chinese Muslims will play a bigger role in Indonesian politics remain.

Individual Identities: Biography and Autobiography

In the years since 2000, the appearance of biographies and autobiographies — in English, Indonesian, Dutch, Chinese and recently in German — has mushroomed. Fortunately for researchers, Leo Suryadinata has kept his important biographical collections up to date (2015b). Most life stories are naturally in Indonesian, but those in Western languages include businessmen (Borsuk and Chng 2014), politicians (Siauw Giok Tjhan 1982–84; Wanandi 2012), doctors (Oei 2009 and 2010) and other public (Lev 2011; Maxwell 1997) and private (Blussé 2000; Pearson 2008) figures.

Despite their limitations, life stories enrich our understanding of individual identities and their formation, and offer insights into
political and human rights issues, education, politics and the press, social issues, and exile abroad. Above all, they exemplify the diversity of the often transnational trajectories of prominent peranakans — and sometimes totoks.

Literature

Salmon’s important survey of literature in Malay written by Chinese Indonesians (1981) opened an entire field of research into the texts themselves. Above all, they remain valuable sources for the social history of the community. Her work and that of others show the various influences of Chinese, local, and Western texts on Chinese Indonesian writing. It is not possible to list these studies here; nor can I deal with literature by Chinese Indonesians who are now free to publish in Chinese. Both subjects are open for more research.

Regional and Community Studies

The first studies of Chinese communities on Java appeared in the 1960s. Donald Willmott gave us The Chinese of Semarang (1960). Mely Tan Giok-Lan — closely directed by Skinner, whom she served as research assistant — completed a substantial master’s thesis about Sukabumi, West Java (Tan 1963). Both of these early studies showed that — apart from the division between totok and peranakan — Chinese society on Java was divided between Indonesian citizens and citizens of China. Now, almost all Chinese in Indonesia are Indonesian citizens.

Also on Java, Go Gien Tjwan (1966) studied Chinese farmers in a village near Tangerang in the early 1960s, publishing in Dutch. Edward Ryan’s study (1961) of Chinese in Pare, East Java — which Clifford Geertz and others made famous as “Modjokuto” — is limited to a description of their value system. A shorter study of Jakarta’s Chinese appeared in Dutch in 1981 (van Reenen 1981), but it was becoming difficult for Western researchers to undertake community studies by that time. Sometimes, Indonesian researchers filled the gap, as in the case of Gondomono of Universitas Indonesia. He closely
observed family life among Chinese in a Jakarta neighbourhood in his 1990 dissertation (Gondomono 1990). Leonard Blussé’s collection on Batavia under the Dutch East India Company could be considered a community study (1986). Blussé also directed important research on the history of the city’s Kong Koan or Board of Chinese Officers using the archived documents of that institution.

The Outer Islands are represented, too. My own descriptions of Chinese in Bangka-Belitung and in West Kalimantan emphasized history, making use of Dutch sources (Heidhues 1991, 1992 and 2003). Yerry Wirawan’s studies of Chinese in Makassar up to 1965 (Wirawan 2011 and 2014) offer further historical insights from outside Java. As early as 1976, Ng Chin-keong published a brief, informative monograph on the Chinese of Riau and their frontier situation, migration history, and marginal, smuggling-directed economy (Ng 1976). For West Kalimantan, Hui Yew-Foong’s *Strangers at Home* combined fieldwork and oral history to see the links between that province and China from the Japanese Occupation to the present (Hui 2011). He delves deepest into themes of regionalism and transnationalism. In West Kaimantan and in Riau, the transnational involves not only China but also neighbouring Singapore and Malaysia, not least East Malaysia.

Most recently, Chong Wu Ling has investigated the situation of Chinese in Surabaya and Medan since Reformasi. She shows how Chinese businessmen perpetuate a corrupt link between Chinese money and indigenous power by buying security from the government or criminal groups (Chong 2014). Tsai Yen-Ling (2011) has also looked at Medan and Jakarta, with their money-bought security of gated (Chinese) communities and indigenous guards. These authors see Chinese Indonesians as active participants in creating their precarious security situation, not merely as victims of it.

Didi Kwartanada (2002) showed how Chinese businessmen in Yogyakarta survived during the Japanese Occupation. Andreas Susanto recently returned to “assimilation” and New Order policies towards the Chinese of Yogyakarta, finding that the very diverse Chinese there have generally positive relations with indigenous
Indonesians, but that these vary with social position, age and other factors (Susanto 2008).

Business

Over centuries, Indonesia’s economy was oriented to foreign trade and external economic relationships long before the Archipelago became a “nation”. Trade and profits from trade were an essential element of port rulers’ statecraft. Dutch colonialism was trade-oriented. Michael Godley (1981) directed attention to early transnational investors; James Rush (1990) opened discussion of the revenue farmers.

The Japanese period of autarky and the Sukarno era of socialism and indigenism were aberrations from the trade model, and for many of those years (1942–65), smuggling was essential to alleviate economic deprivation. This enriched both Chinese businessmen and their non-Chinese political or military allies. As Twang Peck Yang has shown, during the Indonesian revolution, such trade opened opportunities for new businessmen — often China-born, often Hokchia — who later flourished in the Indonesian economy thanks to political backing from and profitable links with high-ranking military officers (Twang 1998, p. 266ff.). Among these new men were the entrepreneur Liem Sioe Liong and many of his associates (Borsuk and Chng 2014).

Networks, ASEAN, China Connections

The apparent prosperity of these businessmen led to a flood of literature on networks, intra-ASEAN connections and the values behind their “success”. Associating Chinese cultural values with entrepreneurial achievements across East and Southeast Asia, many authors emphasized guanxi (connections), networks and mutual trust, and sometimes Confucianism.35 Others, looking specifically at Indonesia, have emphasized the links joining economic sponsors (cukong) with the political power holders that offer them privilege (Robison 1987) and the networks among Chinese entrepreneurs within and across Indonesia’s borders. A comprehensive overview, focused on the Salim group, is Borsuk and Chng (2016).
From the 1980s China actively courted foreign investment, and Chinese abroad not only contributed to their home regions or *qiaoxiang* but also looked to other, more economically inviting areas in China. The local and international press often listed the wealthiest Indonesians and the largest conglomerates with astonishing, exaggerated estimates of their share of Indonesia’s “national wealth”. Among those who debunked these assertions, Jamie Mackie also confirmed that the “old money” of Chinese revenue farmers and *kapitans* had given way to new entrepreneurs as political power influenced economic success (Mackie 1988).

**Histories of Firms**

More enlightening are histories of individual firms, some of them defunct. Historically dominant, the Oei Tiong Ham enterprise attracted both research and anecdotal accounts, including Yoshihara Kunio’s well-grounded collection (Yoshihara 1989). A brief history of the former Sih Khay Hie textile-trading firm of Semarang and the family that ran it appeared recently (Tjiook-Liem 2015). Many large and mid-level firms succumbed to the political and economic upheavals of the period since 1942, and intra-family disputes could be ruinous. But some were stubborn survivors, as Alexander Claver (2011) showed. More such works would be welcome.

The monetary crisis of 1997, which contributed to the fall of Soeharto, shook both conglomerates and smaller firms. Would the change in political leadership orphan the *cukongs* that Soeharto had favoured? Marleen Dieleman’s history of Liem Sioe Liong’s enterprise and its survival under Anthony Salim shows convincingly how a mix of strategies helped the firm overcome the economic crisis, despite the loss of political favours (Dieleman 2007; also, Borsuk and Chng 2014). Dealing with the period up to 2003, Dieleman concludes that the conglomerate’s activities remained Indonesia-centred, despite some operations in China and abroad. Similarly, Christian Chua described the recovery of several Chinese-Indonesian-owned businesses after the 1997–98 crisis, concluding that they successfully overcame the challenges of democratization and decentralization.
(Chua 2008). Reformasi and the loss of political protection did not seriously damage the prospects for Chinese-Indonesian enterprises. Interestingly, Chua makes little mention of China or China’s role in the survival of such businesses.

Obviously, since the business of many Chinese Indonesians is business, the field is wide open for more studies, especially about local-level activities since political decentralization.

Conclusion

Like music or art, scholarly studies are subject to changes in fashion; those of Chinese minorities are no exception. To recapitulate, the early 1960s looked hard at questions of political and cultural assimilation, integration, and political loyalty as well as sympathy for China. What followed in the 1970s often tried to explain, as well as to document, outbreaks of violence; it also took a more open approach to identity. Religion and culture, broadly conceived, are later themes, while biographies and local community studies have repeatedly reminded us of the diversity of Chinese Indonesians. From the 1980s, the cukongs and conglomerates seemed to dominate studies of Chinese Indonesians. Enterprises reaching out across borders and enthusiasm for China have many ramifications in culture, language and investment. At the same time, regional or local interests and ways of expressing identities are other phenomena to be pursued. The changes in location of interest in Chinese Indonesians also deserve attention. Beginning in North America, the centre of gravity moved to Australia and with a small detour to Europe — where, after all, such studies began in colonial times — on to Asia, to Japan and China and to Southeast Asia including Indonesia. Most contemporary researchers are now Asians, especially Chinese Indonesians themselves, although many have been educated in those same American, Australian and European universities where post-war studies got their start.

Afterword

Shortly after I arrived at Cornell in the fall of 1958, I attended a welcome reception for new graduate students. Rather suddenly,
in my recollection, Herb Feith and Ben Anderson confronted me, asking who I was and what I wanted to study. When I admitted I was interested in Chinese in Indonesia, the rejoinder was “But didn’t Mr. Purcell already cover all of that?” Victor Purcell’s hefty volume *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, published in 1951 and revised in 1965, is the work of a colonial official and a scholar, and, much like an encyclopedia, a very different work from those described above. No, and here you will agree with me, he most certainly did not exhaust the subject. We have come a long way in this long half-century, and I am thankful to have played a small part.

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NOTES

1. Kahin once related that Mohammed Hatta, former vice-president of Indonesia, had strongly advised that the project include the study of the Chinese minority.
2. Charles Coppel further explored regional differences (see Coppel 2002, pp. 106–23).
4. Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia (Baperki), or the Consultative Body on Indonesian Citizenship, was an organization to represent the interests of citizens that in practice acted as a political party for the Chinese minority.
5. In the 1950s–1960s, U.S. embassies in many Southeast Asian countries had diplomats assigned to “Chinese Affairs” who kept informed about Chinese minorities and whether they supported the Kuomintang, the PRC or host countries. Cornell’s Southeast Asia Program was mostly privately supported, but it attempted to enlighten U.S. foreign policy, which was woefully ignorant of most of Southeast Asia. George Kahin (1989) insists that it resisted government interference. Willmott himself was a Canadian.
7. This was before expulsions of Chinese from Vietnam and Cambodia, which may have affected, proportionally, even more ethnic Chinese.
8. Coppel was responding to another state-oriented work that advocated “political assimilation” through political participation (Williams 1966).
9. Coppel initiated the meeting from which this volume resulted, one of several workshops on violence in Indonesia held in 2000 and 2001.
10. She is expanding this theme for her dissertation.
11. This is the topic of Melvin’s dissertation (Melvin 2014), which I have not seen.
12. Siegel asserts that in 1998, “rape” was a new phenomenon. What was new was that it was discussed so openly. Charles Coppel pointed out that rapes occurred in earlier revolutionary incidents (Heidhues 2012).
13. Among others, see Giblin (2003) and Setijadi (2016a). My impression is that these shetuan draw from China-oriented persons (totoks?) who are not typical of Chinese Indonesians.
15. A competent early analysis is Leo Suryadinata (2016). Allen was also sceptical about political participation (2005).
17. The volume by Gosling and Lim (1983) has no contributions dealing specifically with Indonesia.
18. Unfortunately I have not been able to locate a copy.
20. Reid is more concerned with escaping the burden of recurrent violence against Chinese Indonesians.
21. Here I am thinking of the new peranakan museum, Museum Benteng Heritage, some of the exhibits in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, performances of traditional Chinese tales, the revival of Chinese-Malay literature, art objects, food, and textiles, or the recent Indonesian-language publication of Yayasan Nabil (Suryadinata and Kwartanada 2016; see Coppel 2012).
22. Leo Suryadinata (2015a) and private communication, Kwee Hui Kuan.
27. Susanto (2008, p. 141) confirms this.
29. The publication of de Graaf and Pigeaud (1984) was a reaction to Parlindungan (1964) and to Slamet Muljana (1968). Slamet Muljana’s book caused controversy, but the influence of Chinese Muslims in Java is now accepted.
30. Herlijanto suggests that the Hadith is cited out of context.
31. See Werner (2014).
32. Willmott was in Semarang from 1954 to 1955, but he knew Skinner from Skinner’s time in China in 1949–50 (see Hammel 2009).
33. Tan’s was the only published, full-length study to emerge from Skinner’s Indonesia project, although a trove of field reports by his researchers is now available in Cornell library’s inner sanctum, carefully indexed by Hui Yew-Foong; see Heidhues (2017), which utilizes the notes of Tan Fay Tjhion.
34. I have not seen Tsai’s dissertation.
35. For example, see Redding (1990).
36. The Indonesia section of the revised edition adds updated material, mostly from Willmott (1961). For a brief biography of Victor Purcell, who had worked in the British Malayan service, see van der Sprenkel (1970).

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