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John Wolff

THE ROLE OF INDONESIAN CHINESE IN SHAPING MODERN INDONESIAN LIFE

A Conference in Retrospect

Leonard Blussé

Long before anyone could imagine that the Republic of Indonesia and the People's Republic of China would reestablish diplomatic relations in August 1990, the idea was conceived to convene a conference on the cultural heritage and the social and economic roles of the Indonesian Chinese. This idea was brought to fruition in the symposium on the Role of the Indonesian Chinese in Shaping Modern Indonesian Life, which was held at Cornell University in conjunction with the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute, July 13–15, 1990.

The motivation behind the symposium was to analyze how Chinese culture, as it was introduced by Chinese migrants throughout the centuries, converged with Indonesian culture. Although in Java the Chinese intermarried with the native people, and some even married into the nobility and converted to Islam, and although they were profoundly influenced culturally by the peoples with whom they came in contact (they began to speak Malay or the regional languages as natives within a few generations), nevertheless, they are still looked upon by the natives (*pribumi*) as a nationality apart. Despite the generations of shared history and cultural experiences, the Chinese Indonesians also think of themselves as a separate group. Wondering why this should be so and unable to formulate an adequate answer to this question, the organizers of the symposium committed themselves—a “demonic commitment” as John Wolff put it—to the creation of a platform where Chinese Indonesians from different walks of life—writers, filmmakers, politicians, businessmen, social scientists, and historians—would be given the opportunity to air their views on the issue free from any political connotations.

The cultural identity and the position of the Chinese population group within Indonesian society is a contentious one. The *masalah Cina* (Chinese problem) issue has been hotly discussed within Indonesian society itself and has inevitably resulted in such crucial questions as whether the Indonesian Chinese are entitled to maintain their own cultural identity or should instead seek integration or even assimilation into Indonesian culture.

It was evidently not the organizers' intention to carry on this debate at the symposium. Rather, they wished to find out how Chinese Indonesians evaluate their position and what it feels like to be a Chinese Indonesian or a Chinese in Indonesia. What motivates these people? What cultural heritage has this highly diverse group descended from farmers, traders, and coolies, *peranakan* or *totok*, to offer to Indonesian culture at large? How, where, and when has Chinese cultural influence transposed into Indonesian culture? In other words, it was felt that this meeting should not be devoted merely to cultural affairs but should also deal with existential issues.

It is almost miraculous that during the whole conference, which, after all, was held in the United States, the heartland of political science, almost no political questions were raised or forecasts given about the future of Sino-Indonesian relations. The conference may actually have been the last large academic meeting at which the different aspects of Indonesian Chinese culture will have been discussed in isolation from the so-called "China factor." Yet the selection of conference papers assembled in this special issue of *Indonesia* will certainly contribute to future discussions about the role that should be assigned to the Chinese Indonesians within the renewed political, economic, and cultural relations between China and Indonesia. The public interest displayed in the conference exceeded the wildest expectations of the organizers, even causing some initial worry about how to run a conference with a large audience of several hundred people who clearly also wanted to have their say on the subject.

In consideration of the wide coverage received in the Indonesian press, the organizers decided not to publish the conference proceedings in book form, a long, drawn-out procedure that normally takes three years to accomplish, but to persuade the editors of *Indonesia* to publish a special issue on the theme instead. This decision implied that papers must be selected because of limited space. It also saddled this author with a problem for, although in my concluding remarks to the conference I could philosophize and elaborate at will about some of the main issues that were generated during the debate, it was clear that this approach would not do here. It would not do justice to those contributors who, perhaps, drew most public interest during the conference but whose spontaneous, intimate presentations did not lend themselves easily to publication. As a result, the aim is to incorporate, or at least refer to, all papers in the following observations on the conference without necessarily trying to recapitulate or summarize all that has been said. I hope that in the following retrospect of the conference some of the enthusiasm that characterized the whole operation will be transmitted.

In his inaugural address about the position of Indonesian Chinese in Indonesian life, Prof. Wang Gungwu came straight to the point by posing the questions Have the Indonesian Chinese played an active or passive role in shaping Indonesian life? and Has that role been positive or negative? In this context he rather dramatically paraphrased Hamlet's words "to be or not to be . . . a Chinese (in Indonesia)." Professor Wang, who in the past has coined the term "merchants without empire" to describe the historical Chinese presence in the Nanyang, now elaborated this analysis further by referring to "wealth without power." Discerning four key periods of change, he discussed the Chinese presence abroad from the era of the Malay trading rulers, via the *zaman kompenie* to the colonial state and, finally, contemporary Indonesia. He observed that over these four periods the Chinese have been very adaptable and sensitive to political changes. They adapted themselves well to local conditions and developed a general Sino-Malay culture of their own. In the post-1880 period, other options were made available. The China factor became more important as

a result of better transportation, and in the 1920s, Western education provided “modern alternatives.”

With his remarks on the China factor, Professor Wang briefly touched upon the issue of “Chineseness” among overseas Chinese, an issue that was taken for granted during the conference and not quite conceived as it should have been, that is, as a recent reinvention of tradition and identity for nationalist objectives.

Chinese moving into the Nanyang during the Ming and Qing dynasties often did so to escape the embrace of poverty and the paramount presence of the metropolitan bureaucracy in China’s southeastern coastal provinces. This phenomenon did not elude the imperial authorities, who outlawed these emigrants en masse again and again throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

When by the end of the nineteenth century a tide of nationalistic feeling was mounting everywhere in Asia, the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia could no longer afford to shun their ancestral roots and sought to renew their political ties with the homeland. As a result, the China factor, that is, a distantly looming China as an ever-present factor within the balance of power of local politics, was introduced into the Southeast Asian arena. But there were also moves from the other side. Appeals to the Nanyang Chinese, first by the Manchu government, then by ardent nationalists like Kang Yu-wei or Sun Yat-sen and, later, by the Republican government did not fail to stir a response. Soon these patriotic feelings were consciously played upon by Chinese community leaders to improve the status of the ethnic Chinese within colonial society itself. Schools were established where the national language, *guoyu*, was taught to Hokkien dialect speakers and *baba* who had forgotten their mother tongue and had already been speaking Malay for generations. As a result of the teaching of Chinese culture and values around the turn of the century, Chineseness was “reinvented” by the overseas Chinese, and nowhere were the effects of this reorientation on the homeland more sweeping than among the Chinese living in the Netherlands Indies.

James Rush set the scene by demonstrating how, on the eve of the Dawning of the East, *peranakan* society was embedded in colonial society by its leaders. Surveying the position of Chinese communities within Javanese society, the internal structure of the communities, and the changes that they underwent as a result of externally generated economic, political, and social influences, he focused on the role of the Chinese community leaders and their ties with the colonial elite before these great changes were to happen.

For his analysis of the configuration and the dynamics of the *cabang atas* relationship between the Chinese elite, the Dutch officials, and the *priyayi* elite, Rush has mainly drawn on the archival sources of the Dutch colonial administration. Yet, one could also envisage the position of the Chinese population groups within colonial society by focusing on the social structure of the Chinese community itself and inquire what cultural heritage the Chinese migrants brought along and what cultural ballast they chose to leave behind, as Professor Wang suggested in his introductory speech. Coming from a southeastern Chinese rural setting with severe ecological constraints and fierce competition between the local lineages, they found their way overseas via these same kinship organizations, merchant guilds, or *huiguan*.

When the *orang baru* from Fujian or Guangdong came to Java, all along the *pasisir* he found firmly embedded *peranakan* communities with a sociocultural structure that, apart from various adaptations to local Javanese culture, differed in one important respect from the community in the home province. In China, society was made up of four layers according to the Confucian hierarchy, with the *literati* on top, the merchants at the bottom, and the

farmers and artisans in between—the so-called *shi-nong-gong-shang* relationship. In overseas Chinese society, an upside-down reflection of the situation in the homeland was observed. Contrary to the situation in China, where literati of the local gentry, as agents and guardians, functioned as community leaders and intermediaries between the local community and the agents of the metropolitan government, in Java, in the absence of an educated local gentry, the most successful entrepreneurs assumed the leading position of *kapitein* or *majoor*.

Instead of witnessing a social elite nurtured by Confucian teaching to play its role in the ritual of Confucian bureaucracy, the *peranakan* of Semarang saw their paramount patrons involved in frantic fights for tax farms, such as the opium monopoly, to an extent that would make Clifford Geertz's Balinese cockfighters blush with embarrassment. Claudine Salmon portrayed later during the conference how contemporaries perceived these auctions.

I would suggest that it was this particular state of affairs that engendered a peculiar branch of "little tradition" culture among the "People of Tang," as overseas Chinese society styled itself. Free from the all-pervading metropolitan constraints of Confucianism, it was remarkably open to Javanese culture.

In traditional Southeast Asian colonial society, *peranakan* society thus functioned as a safety valve, a passageway for the newly arrived from China, a function that can scarcely be exaggerated and requires further study. Only in moments of massive immigration, when mounting waves of immigrants could not be absorbed by the traditional social networks, such as the lineage organization or the temple organization, as happened, for instance, in the 1890s, was *peranakan* society no longer equal to its task as a cultural mediator.

What would happen if *totok* Chinese immigrated en masse, without being absorbed by already existing *peranakan* communities embedded in local society, became manifest from the situation in northeastern Sumatra, which had never harbored a sizable Chinese community. When the coolie laborers swarmed out from the labor concentration camps, euphemistically called plantations or tin mines, they established solid *totok* communities in Medan and Bangka. They even almost swamped Java's *pasisir* communities at a moment when, as Rush explains, for a variety of reasons the power structure of *peranakan* society was passing through an identity crisis.

I venture these comments to set out the conditions under which, from the turn of this century onward, Chineseness was reinvented on Java, either through Chinese education from the mainland, which enabled the *peranakan* to bypass and disparage Javanese as well as *peranakan* society, or by the Dutch language educational model of the "Hollands-Chinese scholen," which eased the *peranakan* elite away from the Javanese cultural sphere. The Dutch curriculum even introduced its own brand of Confucianism in austere Calvinist guise into the lessons on Chinese traditional culture. It is telling that from the turn of the century many educated *peranakan* sought to express themselves either in Dutch or in *guoyu*.

The reconfirmation of Chineseness will not be elaborated further here. It will suffice to state that historically *peranakan* society has functioned as a cultural filter to Indonesian society, cushioning the impact from Chinese culture, and, on the other hand, has tended to absorb the cultural shock for the newcomers.

A variety of factors, such as the increased scale of immigration from China, the rise of nationalism in the Chinese community, the influx of Chinese women from the homeland, resulting in a steep increase in *totok* marriages, and finally, the Dutch efforts in the late colonial period to wean *peranakan* society from the cultural and political propaganda of the

homeland, contributed to the alienation of *peranakan* society. The apothegm, “Cina wurung, Londa durung, Jawa tanggung” (no longer a Chinese, not yet a Dutchman, a half-baked Javanese) applied to Kapitein Cina Tan Jin Sing of Yogyakarta in 1813, might just as well have been used to characterize the intellectual upper echelon of the *peranakan* elite on the eve of *kemerdekaan*. Colonial society with its rigid hierarchy was divided into three racial layers: the whites and *gelijkgestelden* (Asians with European legal status) on top, the *Vreemde Oosterlingen* (Foreign Orientals) in the middle, the native peoples below. As soon as the broad basis of this society started to shift, the house of cards fell apart. Especially those Chinese Indonesians who had received higher education saw their career prospects dim when for political reasons they had to make room for *pribumi* Indonesians. Considering the massive emigration of lawyers, economists, and medical practitioners of Chinese ethnicity from Indonesia to Europe and the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, it may be sensible to realize what a tremendous brain drain occurred at a moment when Indonesia needed expertise most. One should like to paraphrase Lenin: one expert is worth twenty nationalists.

The conspicuous presence of the Chinese in Indonesian economic life formed the subject of the contributions by Jamie A. C. Mackie and Yoon Hwan Shin. Whereas Mackie discussed the changing roles of the Chinese in Indonesian economic life by comparing the towkays, merchants, and small-scale businessmen of the 1920s with the large-scale tycoons of the 1970s and 1980s, sketching a development from small family firms to corporatized big conglomerates, Shin focused on the relationship between the rise of big business in Indonesia during the 1980s and the dissemination of new ideologies to support the growth of a new national capitalist class. After the failure of the planned economy (*geleide*) approach and the *pribumi*-oriented economic policies for economic development, the government has now chosen to depend on private investment and initiatives. Why Chinese Indonesians are such successful entrepreneurs remained somewhat obscured. Shin maintained that ethnic Chinese Indonesians, through their ties with international banking interests and influential politicians, have carved a niche for themselves in the new capitalist class. Mackie argued that Chinese businessmen indeed have managed to obtain help and facilities of various kinds from state instrumentalities in the name of promoting national development, but he added that behavioral and cultural factors should not be dismissed either.

“Forces That Have Shaped My Creative Life” was the title of the informal talk that dramatist and critic N. Riantiarno was scheduled to give during the evening session of the first day. Riantiarno said he was happy to have been invited but felt quite puzzled about what he should talk about. He did not feel he was a Chinese, but rather an Indonesian from Cirebon saying “All I know, as founder of Koma theater, about the Chinese in Indonesia is that there are lots of rich Chinese around but few who want to sponsor my productions.” Questions as to whether he felt himself to be *kasno* (a person who hides his Chineseness) or *kirno* (a person who denies his Chineseness) he deemed irrelevant, “What one creates is what counts.”

As it turned out, none of Riantiarno’s plays except one, *Sampek Engtay*, had any Chinese cultural roots. To his surprise, *Sampek Engtay* drew sizeable crowds of Chinese Indonesians wherever it was performed. Occasionally, he even had noticed people among the audience who had dressed for the occasion in traditional Chinese clothes. All this somewhat bewildered the dramatist, who “just wanted to concentrate on making Indonesian theater.”

How do Chinese-Indonesian businessmen experience their own function in Indonesian society? The gallery of eminent entrepreneurs who took the floor in the morning session of the second day of the symposium each presented tales of his own career, which generally

bore out Mackie's observations on the growth of conglomerates and Shin's remarks on the growth of a capitalist elite.

The panel on Chinese in Business and Politics was opened by Christianto Wibisono with a short talk on the profile and anatomy of Indonesian conglomerates. Having categorized the conglomerates into state-owned, bureaucratic (set up by former officials), crony capitalist (formed on the basis of special licensing and favors), and the conglomerates of the genuine private sector, Wibisono felt that the relative weight of Sino-Indonesian business within the Indonesian economy might be the direct result of the government's reliance on the private sector for development. This policy has encouraged Chinese investment from Singapore, Taiwan, and Hongkong by way of the Sino-Indonesian conglomerates.

Mochtar Riady, head of the Lippo Bank and the Bank of Central Asia conveyed his message to the conference through close friend and associate, Mr. Priasmoro Prawiroardjo. The paper began by stating that Confucianism acted as a brake on development but nonetheless went on to emphasize that the sage's tenets might be applied as a "moral code of materialist enjoyment." The late Herman Kahn, the high priest of neo-Confucianism for business purposes, would have heartily concurred with this latter observation. Perhaps the most striking point of the paper was that it was read by a Javanese, who stressed that he had a lot in common with the author: "Riady and I are close in age. I am fifty-eight; he is sixty. He owns the bank; I work there . . . that is the only difference." This multiethnic veneer notwithstanding, the paper itself was a Sino-centric exercise in entrepreneurial philosophy stressing the need for the (Chinese) private sector to take the initiative in solving problems the Indonesian government cannot grapple with.

Edward Soeryadjaya, in his personal, matter-of-fact style, gave the greatest insight into what makes the *peranakan* entrepreneur's heart beat. Explaining that his was not exactly a "from rags to riches" story because his father, William Soeryadjaya, head of the Astra Group, the second largest conglomerate in Indonesia, had enabled him to set up a business of his own with a loan of "only a million dollars," he described how he built his own conglomerate in the seventies and eighties and dwelled at length on the extraordinary contract that his bank, the Summa Bank, has recently signed with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization. When prodded about the rationale underlying this unusual collaboration between a Catholic capitalist and a fundamentalist Islamic organization, Soeryadjaya retorted that he had not sought the relationship himself, but on the contrary, it was he who had been approached by Abdurrahman Wahid, a high-ranked *ulama*. From his own point of view, Soeryadjaya saw the deal as purely commercial. The latest January 1990 requirements of the Deregulation Package stipulate that all private banks should set aside 20 percent of their loan portfolios for small businesses and rural and cooperative loans. Presented with the opportunity for establishing what could possibly amount to some two thousand rural banks in conjunction with the NU, he saw his dilemma of how to reach enough customers to attain the 20 percent minimum level and thus comply with the government regulations now automatically solved.

Regarding questions about his *peranakan* background, Soeryadjaya saw no reason to hide that in making a career in business it might be quite convenient to look Chinese, even though he feels 100 percent Indonesian. He confessed that he would not even be able to tell from which village his Chinese ancestor came five generations ago, and frankly, he could not care less. He also added that he had married outside his own community by wedding a Sundanese woman. Soeryadjaya's contribution was much appreciated because of its frank presentation and utterly commonsense approach.

Harry Tjan Silalahi, former secretary general of the Roman Catholic party and now director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) only marginally touched on the relationship between politics and business, expanding instead on his own political career and the issue of nation building. He maintained that attempts to preserve the (ethnic) Chinese population group as a *suku* might actually endanger the process of Indonesian nation building; "Chineseness" should gradually disappear and merge into the Indonesian national culture. He elaborated on this theme further by explaining what political events in the past had driven him to play a leading role in the *assimilasi* movement. Raised as a devout Catholic *peranakan* in a Javanese environment, recipient of a Dutch language education, and adopted into a Batak family, he feels himself a child of several worlds. He chose a political career because he saw it as his personal responsibility to act as a beacon for those Chinese Indonesians who have felt utterly lost since the political upheavals of the 1960s. Silalahi's plea for assimilation, of course, had a familiar ring to those who have known him as a politician over the past twenty-five years. At this congress it sounded like a declaration of faith mixed with an *oratio pro domo*.

The *assimilasi* versus *integrasi* dispute blazed up that same afternoon when Daniel Lev presented a paper about his friend, the late human rights lawyer Yap Thiam Hien, a presentation so extraordinarily well tuned to the conceptual world of Yap that, at times, it bordered on being a personification of the main character, especially when countered by Harry Tjan's comments. If for the Lev-Silalahi duo, judging from their performance, a bright future in show business is in store, the undertone of their quick-witted exchanges dealt with an extremely serious existentialist issue: For the sake of solving ethnic tension should the Chinese unconditionally give up their own cultural identity to fade away in the pribumi majority culture, as Tjan would suggest, or has the time come for ironing out ethnic differences and reaching a general consensus on cultural matters, rendering it unnecessary for this minority to sacrifice its identity and even religion for the sake of survival? The dilemma is vividly portrayed by the different ways in which Harry Tjan and Yap Thiam Hien each have attempted to serve the needs of their fellow men. In many ways Tjan, the Catholic looking after his flock, represents the traditional community leader, always cognizant of the group's acute needs for protection or assistance, bending like resilient bamboo in times of hardship.

Yap Thiam Hien, on the other hand, did not feel the need to stand up for the Chinese community per se but felt called upon to defend individuals who suffered unfair legal treatment. His unyielding stance, rooted in his Calvinist background and legal training, might be likened to a solitary oak tree anchored by the Bible and the *Burgerlijk Wetboek*. The question of human rights as such was hardly touched upon during the conference—William Skinner went as far as to complain of a "conspiracy of silence." I believe, however, that Lev's approach to the life and times of Yap Thiam Hien actually came to grips with the issue in a much more subtle manner than had otherwise been possible. As Lev pointed out, Yap Thiam Hien's career went through different stages. At the outset fully conscious of his own *peranakan* identity, he became gradually less concerned about ethnicity. He was not against personal assimilation as such but against the forced assimilation of a group. These concerns actually made him transcend the bounds of the Chinese community.

In this respect, it is rather telling that most of the verbal dispute about the assimilation or integration issue is going on within the generation of Dutch language trained Chinese Indonesians who are over fifty years old. By a strange irony of fate, the Dutch, who over the years have obtained a reputation for their overlegalistic behavior in political matters and are rightly criticized on that account, almost see themselves outdone by their own disciples, Yap Thiam Hien not excluded. If this man of principles, who was so vividly and convincingly

portrayed by Dan Lev during the conference, had possessed the freckled face of a Frisian—a particularly headstrong race eclipsing even the Scots—he might have gone unnoticed in this author's home country.

How the discussion occasionally borders on petty bickering about labels became clear on the last day of the conference when a heated argument developed on the term *Cina*, which the government has adopted to address the Chinese minority. Several participants held the opinion that this was a humiliating label and preferred to be designated as *orang Tionghoa*. Quite understandably, one member of the audience, a Batak who briefly fell out of her role as a radio reporter, wondered aloud what all the bickering was about. Raised amidst the Chinese of Medan, she asked whether the latter should not first stop referring to pribumi Indonesians as *hoanna* (barbarians) before starting to complain about discriminatory labeling by the government.

It is time that scholarship came to grips with the artificial garments of Chineseness, rips them off, and observes the educational systems that have shaped and transformed the outlook of the *peranakan* elite. The only way in which the Chinese of the Netherlands Indies could escape from the colonial situation was to walk the highway of higher education, and if Chinese students, upon having Dutch academic education, found most alleys blocked in post-liberation Indonesia, this explains much of the frustration reigning in those circles.

What would seem to be of prime importance in solving ethnic friction is to gain a better understanding of the perception of difference that underlies ethnicity, a difference that is the result of the sociopolitical history of a society. The SEASSI conference, which addressed particular features and contributions of Indonesian Chinese culture, may indeed contribute to such a better understanding. The perception of difference in the cultural sphere should, however, have a meaning other than the one some prominent members of the audience would have liked to apply to it. One of the participants, for the practical purpose of solving the assimilation problem once and for all, proposed dividing the four million or so Indonesians of Chinese descent into brackets varying from those who are so well assimilated that they can no longer be distinguished from pribumi, those who are in the process of being assimilated, and the hard core who still speak Chinese and cling to their own cultural values and await assimilation by "persuasion," to solve the *masalah Cina*.

This approach, however functional it may seem from the point of view of the administrator, who derives pleasure from social engineering and the application of grids on society, would seem in the final analysis to be utterly unrealistic because it conceptualizes the Chinese presence in Indonesia as an internal problem, an issue that can be isolated and dealt with properly.

In the decade after 1965, when relations with the People's Republic of China were interrupted and the PRC itself was in turmoil, the delusion that the Chinese problem could be solved in isolation from the international context took root in Indonesia. This was not only wishful thinking, it also was, historically speaking, a fallacy, for Indonesia was not and never will be a closed society. From time immemorial, Chinese migrants have come to the Nanyang in search of better opportunities. They will always continue to do so, even more as China aims for an export market and Indonesia opens further to the world market.

It should be understood that the perception of how differences come about between ethnic groups calls for a multidisciplinary approach. Resentment between groups may crystallize along lines of religion, language, or differences in physical appearance. These antipathetic feelings can easily develop into deep-rooted passions. From this perspective it is clear that the *assimilasi* policy, with its call to abandon Chinese names and adopt Indonesian

ones instead, really may have been used as a defense mechanism to control and defuse passions. At the root of the confusion of tongues about *assimilasi* and *integrasi* is that some people quite mistakenly see the assimilation policy as an end instead of as a means for solving a dilemma.

The moot question, however, remains how passions within a society can be reduced in the long run within the kind of fluid society that contemporary Indonesia has become. In Indonesian society, with its overlapping and interlocking interests inside and outside the country, it remains for the nation to move to a plural solution and reach consensus on the ethnic issues. A one-way action aimed at the more or less coercive loss of cultural and even religious identity is a terrifying trap, as one of the commentators, Charles Hirschman, pointed out. It was indeed in Germany, where the Jewish middle class was most consciously seeking to assimilate within German nationhood, that *shoah* occurred.

Daniel Dhakidae's observation that Indonesia's newspapers seem to be aimed at exploiting "human interest stories" rather than acting as vehicles of change was interesting in itself, but the focus of his paper remained very much on today's situation, and there was every reason that one would have liked him to discuss the history of the Chinese-Malay language papers, like *Sin Po*, which were withdrawn from circulation. Onghokham addressed the question of what impact ideologies about the Chinese may have on contemporary Indonesia and sought "to bring out the realities of Chineseness within the present day (Javanese) patrimonial state and society." In doing so, he focused on inner- and outer-group concepts so characteristic of traditional societies. As an example, he alluded to stereotypes that are commonly connected to successful Chinese merchants, such as belief in *tuyul* spirits, "children who are not human beings and who steal for the merchant to make him rich." Even more fearsome spirits are the *babi-pepet*. Impishly rubbing his cranium, Ong described *tuyul* as stocky, bald-headed creatures, drawing a murmur of recognition from the audience.

Makers of policy tend to carry out remedial action in ethnic conflicts by drawing on the results of the sociological study of ethnic relations. Even if this knowledge is acquired with the practical aim of influencing policy, it should be remembered that it relies heavily on scholarly research in the cultural and historical fields, which is generally carried out for its own sake. The contributions of Henk Maier on the Malay language policies of the Dutch colonial government, Claudine Salmon on Chinese-Malay *syair*, Myra Sidharta on the perception of the Dutch in Sino-Malay novels and Dédé Oetomo on vernacular spoken in the cities of Java, stigmatized "low Malay," all show how much path-breaking and important work can be done on *peranakan* history and literature.

In Indonesian studies, one of the great developments of the past few years is the (re)discovery of Chinese-Malay literature and the pioneering function it has performed in the development of modern Indonesian literature. The Sino-Malay novel emerged from the 1870s onward, paralleling the establishment of the first Chinese-owned printing presses. When the Dutch colonial administration meant business by establishing a mass-oriented educational system, it introduced its own brand of national "civilized" standard Malay and saw to it that this was used in all textbooks and the Balai Poestaka literature. In his paper, Henk Maier convincingly showed how no efforts were spared to extirpate the "low Malay literature," which was seen as a menace to the illiteracy campaigns. This debate is not without precedent. As early as the seventeenth century, the Dutch gave considerable attention to the translation of biblical texts and whether these should be rendered into "high" or "low" Malay. In that instance, high Malay was also chosen.

What printed Chinese-Malay literature looked like in its early phase was illustrated by Claudine Salmon in her paper on an 1890s poem in which the proceedings of an opium farm auction are ridiculed. As Benedict Anderson commented, the development-oriented policies of the colonial administration went hand-in-hand with "cultural policing" to dampen the scandalizing and alarming aspects of a native gossip-ridden mass press that it found difficult to control. Furthermore, he drew attention to the fact that the mocking tone of Claudine Salmon's *syair* and of the many "fun-poking" novels cited by Myra Sidharta should not be seen exclusively as a Chinese-Malay feature in Indonesian literature. They were actually part of a much broader phenomenon throughout Indonesian literature aimed at making fun of the colonial authorities with their ponderous "white man's burden."

The importance of all these papers, including Dédé Oetomo's, is that they show how *peranakan* Malay, *peranakan* literature, and the *peranakan* frame of mind suffered the merciless onslaught of colonial bureaucracy, which perceived in them a possible menace to the state-building process. Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun!

In the final session of the conference a balance was struck among the cultural, economic, and political policies that have been implemented by the state to solve the *masalah Cina*. Mély Tan and Leo Suryadinata independently produced two papers on basically the same theme: Indonesian policies toward the Chinese and the Chinese response toward these policies. Mély Tan outlined how Chinese language education, the use of Chinese characters, the display of Chinese cultural elements, and the public worship of Chinese religions were banned in 1967. She showed how these draconic measures provoked different responses from the Chinese ethnic groups, varying from integration movements to assimilation movements. But what interested her most was how the post-1967 educated generations of Chinese Indonesians look at intermarriage and how their language patterns and use have altered as a result of the educational policies.

Leo Suryadinata dwelled on some of the paradoxical effects of the 1967 regulations. In the New Order era, the economic strategies aimed at reducing the economic strength of the Chinese actually favored them, whereas the requirement that all Indonesians belong to an organized religion resulted in the establishment of new religions such as the "Confucian religion," *agama Khonghucu*. Chinese who were persuaded to adopt Indonesian names did so but often made sure that their original Chinese surnames could still be recognized.

If the regulations aimed at eliminating Chinese cultural and religious identity have provoked countereffects and bypasses, the language policies seem to have reaped results. The younger Chinese generation speaks and, what is more important, thinks in the Indonesian language. It is within this context that the rediscovery of Malay-language *peranakan* culture should be of current interest.

As the conference neared its end realization dawned that, although the initial questions of the organizers perhaps had not all been satisfactorily answered, participants had at least gained new insight into the complexities of the study of *peranakan* society. This recognition prompted the following observations.

Before the great clearing-up of *peranakan* culture by the Dutch and Indonesian bureaucratic administrations successively reaches the stage of mopping-up the last remaining vestiges, ways and means should be found to study this unique cultural sphere that is equally at the center and the periphery of Indonesian culture. The call is not for an antiquarian quest for an idealized society but for profound research into the dynamics and configurations of Chinese communities embedded in Indonesian cultures.

As a scholar with a cause but without political aspirations one should not only search for and analyze rare manuscripts and books but should also focus on the institutional effects the Chinese educational system, the Dutch colonial school system, and finally, the Indonesian educational system have had on reforming, or drawing a veil over peranakan culture. The study of peranakan culture indeed deserves far more. It asks for dignified treatment by the national and local governments of historical sites, even if only as a reminder of a Chinese presence on Java and other islands. Most monuments of peranakan architecture are destroyed by ignorance rather than by concerted action. This author does not believe in the conspiracy of the state in this respect. Yet it has always seemed rather curious that a monument like the large stone slab of the Chinese hospital of Batavia, which dates back to the eighteenth century and states the names of all the Chinese board members of that institution, should be lying horizontally in the inner court of the National Archives with its text facing the ground so that no visitor can see it. Almost all the photographs in Claudine Salmon's paper by now have historical value, as the sites that she photographed only a few years ago have since been obliterated. Economic progress demands sacrifices, but cultural ignorance eradicates. Many historic buildings in and around the *kraton* of the sultan of Madura at Sumenep, designed and built by the peranakan Lauw Pra Ngo in the 1780s, threaten to collapse. There are many more examples like these. It is to be hoped that the conference organized in the summer of 1990 at Cornell will contribute to the rediscovery of the actual legacy of peranakan culture, a culture of which Indonesia should be proud. Wang Gungwu opened this conference by referring to the issue "to be or not to be." I conclude by quoting once more from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and say with Polonius to Indonesia's Chinese:

This above all—
To thine ownself be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

