

## THE PROBLEM OF CHINESE ASSIMILATION AND INTEGRATION IN INDONESIA

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The pluralist character of Indonesian society is regarded as a potential source of conflict. The ethnic Chinese are a minority large in number and strong in the economic and trade sectors. Scholars in the various sciences should cooperate to advance their effective integration in the national society. The author offers some definitions and a description of assimilation and integration. In Indonesia, the majority group is not homogeneous, but strongly diversified. Yet the *pribumi*, or sons of the soil, have a sense of unity and insist on local conformity for national harmony. For the Chinese, identification with the ethnic group (Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese) will have to be the first step towards assimilation at the local level. Citizenship imposes on the *Hua-i* the obligation to be receptive to the spirit and attitudes of Indonesians in every aspect of life: social, economic, political, and cultural.

We are often proud of the pluralist feature of Indonesian society. However, we are conscious that such a feature often creates some problems, specially for the decision makers. A traditional pluralist character of Indonesian society is usually a potential source of conflict, either of inter-ethnic-group or of inter-group conflict.

To build up unity in the Indonesian nation so that it may be prosperous (*adil-makmur*), mutual understanding among its ethnic groups is, therefore, important. But national integration is not only the problem of the minorities; neither is it the only problem the minorities have. There are other problems which are more pressing — more important, in fact, since they affect all minority groups. One such problem is the fragmentation of Indonesian societies.

To an anthropologist who hopes to cope with the fragmentation patterns in the Indonesian situation, foremost that would come to his attention would be the overseas Chinese whose numbers are large enough and who control important potential resources in the economic and trade sectors. The problems which concern this group are so complicated that coping with

them requires the cooperation of scholars from various fields of science.

### *The Problems*

There are three problems concerning the overseas Chinese that need to be understood if the still developing assimilation and integration process is to continue building up a harmonious Indonesian nation. They are the following:

1. Although they have been staying in Indonesia for centuries, they have not been assimilated or integrated into Indonesian society.
2. Because they come from various cultural backgrounds, what type of assimilation should be developed for overseas Chinese in Indonesia? (If we consider Indonesia itself, consisting of various ethnic groups, one different from the other culturally, this question gets even more complicated.)
3. How can the assimilation process be established or directed in order to reach national integration, especially for the overseas Chinese?

To cope with these problems we must first categorize the overseas Chinese according to citizenship and sociocultural orientation, and by marriage and birthplace.

*Classification According to Citizenship and Sociocultural Orientation*

1. Overseas Chinese who are citizens of the People's Republic of China. Most of them prefer to live in Indonesia and will not return to the mainland. They number approximately 250,000.

2. Overseas Chinese who are considered stateless. This group includes the Chinese who are citizens of Taiwan.

(The overseas Chinese in this status are considered stateless because the Indonesian government holds a "One China Policy." Indonesia only has diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.) The overseas Chinese who do not choose or do not find a true opportunity to become Indonesian citizens, but politically do not agree with the People's Republic of China are considered stateless, too. They number approximately 1,250,000. Among them we know of four types according to orientation:

- a. Some of them are still oriented to the People's Republic of China.
  - b. Some of them are oriented to Taiwan.
  - c. Some of them do not have any specific orientation; they do not know what to do.
  - d. Some of them are eager to become Indonesian citizens.
3. Overseas Chinese who have already become Indonesian citizens. They number approximately 1,500,000. This group can also be classified into four categories, according to different types of orientation:
- a. Some of them still orientate themselves to the People's Republic of China.
  - b. Some of them still orientate to Taiwan.
  - c. Some of them do not have any specific orientation; either to the People's Republic

of China or to Taiwan; however, they are not yet integrated into Indonesian society.

- d. Some of them have already been integrated into Indonesian society.

The overseas Chinese who are not citizens of Indonesia (either stateless or citizens of the People's Republic of China) are usually called *Hoakiao*; those who have already become Indonesian citizens are called *Hua-i*. Although they are politically divided, the overseas Chinese have a very strong sense of solidarity, especially when they face problems concerning their destiny, interest, and "race."

In certain situations, they can forget Taiwan or the People's Republic of China; they can leave aside their political opinion. This fact makes necessary the drawing of a clear line between the *Hua-i* and the *Hoakiao*. The *Hua-i*, since they have already gained juridical status as Indonesian citizens, should have the same rights and obligations other Indonesian citizens have. This matter should be watched closely in the process of assimilation and national integration.

*Classification According to Marriage and Birthplace*

1. *Peranakan* Chinese. They were born in Indonesia. They are the offspring of intermarriages between Chinese (usually male) and one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia (usually female). A *Peranakan* is also called *Baba(h)*.
2. *Totok* Chinese. They are overseas Chinese whose parents have not intermarried as yet with any ethnic group in Indonesia. They are usually called *sinkhe* (new guests). However, to the Javanese people, this term connotes "impoliteness" (*sinkhe* means an impolite person).

*Historical Roots of the Non-integration of the Chinese into Indonesian Society*

As we have stated before, the overseas Chinese have not been assimilated or integrated

into Indonesian society, even though they have been staying in Indonesia for centuries. We need to know their historical background to understand this fact.

Some centuries ago, Chinese from various regions in the mainland, e.g., Kwantung, Fukien, Kwangsi, and Yunnan provinces, arrived in Indonesia. They migrated because of economic reasons or because of oppression by their government. They stayed in various parts of Indonesia. Some married indigenous women, because women from China did not come with them. As a result of these intermarriages, the *peranakan* generation was born. However, the *peranakan* generation has not been assimilated and integrated into Indonesian society. Reasons for this are the following:

1. Chinese immigrants from the mainland kept coming to Indonesia, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries as well as during the first decade of the 20th century. Thus, the China elements among the settled Chinese were reinforced by the new immigrants.
2. There are some cultural and religious differences:
  - a. Overseas Chinese who come from the Yellow River brought with them their culture. This culture was very different from that of the indigenous people who were strongly influenced by Indian and Islamic culture.
  - b. Most of the overseas Chinese believed in Buddhism, Confucianism or Christianity, while the indigenous people are mostly Moslems.
  - c. The overseas Chinese hardly understood the culture of the indigenous people. There persists an attitude of refusal or at least an unreceptive attitude among the natives toward the Chinese.
3. The result of the social grouping in the Dutch colonial period, whereby society was divided into three groups:
  - a. European: mainly Dutch, and others;
  - b. *Vreemde Oosterlingen* (Foreign-oriental): such as Chinese, Indians, and Arabs; and

- c. Inlanders (indigenous people or *pribumi*): these are the Indonesian ethnic groups: Balinese, Javanese, Sundanese, etc.

During the colonial period, the position of the Chinese, Arabs, and Indians was higher than that of the indigenous people. In civil and commercial law, they were equal with the Europeans, under jurisdiction in such cases of the *Raad Vaan Justitie*; but in criminal cases, they went to the *Landraad* for their trials, just as the indigenous people did. In 1925, overseas Chinese were given an opportunity to make themselves equal with Europeans in all aspects. As a consequence, they considered and felt themselves superior to the indigenous people. Their feeling of superiority was strengthened by physical differences.

Because of the Dutch colonial policy of limiting the activities of the overseas Chinese (they were prohibited from becoming civil servants), the one open field for them to earn a livelihood was in business and trade. It is, therefore, not surprising that today the economic sector in Indonesia is monopolized by the overseas Chinese.

A town-quarter was usually exclusively Chinese (*Pecinan*); this was again due to colonial policy. In the colonial period, these areas were exclusively Chinese and were governed by Chinese: *Luitenant, Kapitein* and *Majoer der Chineezen*. This type of town-quarter can be found in almost every town.

At the same time, we could find educational institutions exclusively for the Chinese; for example, *Tiong Hoa Hwee Kon* (THHK) and *Hollansche Chinese School* (HCS). Some of them were maintained up to the post-independence period. In the post-independence time, *Baperki* (Consultative Body on Indonesian Citizens) sponsored and arranged these institutions. However, the Indonesian government, through a regulation announced by the Minister of Education, Number 16 of 1966 and Number 015 of 1968, finally forbade foreign schools. Their pupils subsequently spread out and entered various public and private schools.

4. The influence of the government of the People's Republic of China tended to impress the overseas Chinese to hold on to their Chinese citizenship for the sake of political and economic advantages.

#### *Assimilation and Integration*

Assimilation is a social process which is characterized by some effort to mix harmoniously the differences among individuals or groups. An individual who wants to assimilate, with, or integrate into, a group or society will not differentiate himself with the goals and interests of the group. In integration, certain similarities in attitude will be growing. In this process, a mutual understanding towards existing social interaction is necessary. It will be smooth and harmonious if there is a high frequency of direct social interaction, balanced in an assimilation pattern, and if there are no political, social, economic or cultural hindrances. In other words, assimilation demands tolerance from individuals and groups involved in this process. It occurs when:

1. Social interaction among individuals and groups is in harmony with the norms of the society as a whole.
2. The individuals or groups involved reduce causes of conflicts as much as possible in order to achieve stability.

To develop mutual understanding and reduce prejudice and stereotypical assumptions, it is necessary that all should have the same opportunity in every aspect of life. This social arrangement ensures that each side will neither feel superior nor inferior toward the other. (Perhaps, one of the most effective means of assimilation is a mixed marriage.)

#### *Indonesian Chinese – What Type of Assimilation?*

To give an answer to this question, let us consider some concepts of assimilation. To Lumley (1944) assimilation is:

The process by which different cultures, or individuals of groups representing the different cultures, are merged into a homogeneous unit.

According to this definition, assimilation is a two-way procedure by which both sides adjust themselves in such a way that the characteristics of each blur into a new culture. This concept, however, cannot be applied to the Chinese minority in Indonesia, because we consider the majority group heterogeneous, consisting of various ethnic groups.

Park (1957) offers another explanation. For him, assimilation is:

The process or processes by which people of diverse racial origins and cultural heritages occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence.

This concept is different from the first. Park still admits the existence of the identity of each group involved in the process of assimilation.

Both Lumley and Park consider assimilation as a process, not as a condition. A process connotes a dynamic situation, a moving situation, a change from an old social structure to a new one. This change is closely related with national integration. In this connection, Watson (1919) viewed integration as:

That social process which tends to harmonize and unite diverging and conflicting units, whether those units be elements of personality, individuals, groups, or larger social aggregations.

Wriggins (1966), on the other hand, explains integration as the

... bringing together of the different parts of a society into a more integrated whole, or the making out of many small societies a closer approximation of the one nation.

The two concepts of assimilation and integration, as can be gleaned from the foregoing definitions, implicitly accept cultural differentiation. Applied in the Indonesian context, this means that the various cultural and ethnic societies which the country has should be integrated ultimately to become one Indonesian culture.

#### *Desiderata*

Since the Chinese in Indonesia cannot be considered united, assimilation at the local level

is considered to be the first step of the process of assimilation to build up one Indonesian nation. Local in the case of the Chinese is identified with the native ethnic groups in each locality. Thus, the Chinese in Java should absorb Javanese culture and should be considered as Javanese. It is very logical that some elements of Chinese culture should penetrate into Javanese.

For the *Hua-i*, assimilation is an inevitable consequence of their will to become Indonesian citizens. The Indonesian government gives them Indonesian citizenship in order to make them assimilate more easily with the Indonesian people. The reason for this is that the loyalty of her citizens is one of the most important sources of building up the Indonesian people as a whole.

However, legal citizenship is not an accurate criterion to measure one's loyalty to one's nation. It is more important to maintain and to grow in one's sense of belonging to his country. Because assimilation is one of the ways to maintain and grow in such spirit, it needs to be enforced on Indonesian citizens, especially for the *Hua-i*, in every aspect of life: social, economic, political, and cultural.

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