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Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians

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Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians

edited by
Leo Suryadinata



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Preface

Since the introduction of an open-door policy, many Chinese entrepreneurs outside China have begun to invest in mainland China. Attention has again turned to the Chinese in other parts of the world, including those in Southeast Asia, and writers, both in the West and Asia, have started to use the term “Overseas Chinese” and “Chinese overseas” to refer to these Chinese outside mainland China. This mainland China-centric view has confused the position and identity of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, with serious political implications as Southeast Asian Chinese are still considered to be “Chinese overseas” or “Overseas Chinese”, not Southeast Asians.

In the light of this new development, a workshop was held on the theme of “Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians” to discuss the perception of the Southeast Asian Chinese in terms of their position in the respective Southeast Asian countries, their relationship with China, their self-identity, as well as the perception of “indigenous” Southeast Asians towards the ethnic Chinese in their countries.

At this workshop, only six ASEAN states and Myanmar were covered. Paperwriters were requested to include the following aspects with regard to their studies on their respective countries:

1. The indigenous and ethnic Chinese notion of a nation (nation-state) and the position of the ethnic Chinese in such a nation. Is the nation racially or culturally defined or both?
2. The relationship between China and the ethnic Chinese overseas — is this a problem for the integration of the ethnic Chinese (or for nation-building)?
3. Is culture and the economic position of the ethnic Chinese a problem for the integration of the ethnic Chinese in their country of domicile? With the rise of ethnic consciousness world-wide, is there national disintegration rather than national integration in Southeast Asia? Does this trend affect the Chinese communities?
4. Prospects of the ethnic Chinese in national integration — are ethnic Chinese “Southeast Asians” or “Overseas Chinese”?

Two groups of scholars from Southeast Asia were invited. One group consisted of ethnic Chinese (or of Chinese descent) and the other group comprised “indigenous” or non-Chinese scholars. The interaction of these two groups of scholars have provided a more comprehensive picture about the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia.

In the past, most of the works (for example, Suryadinata’s work) were based mainly on one country. They were also not done in conjunction with both ethnic Chinese and indigenous scholars. Thus, this volume aims to be a major regional study incorporating a variety of regional perspectives on common themes relating to the question of the Chinese identity.

This volume consists of eight chapters. Each chapter is accompanied by a brief commentary by a discussant. The Appendix is based on the workshop discussion on the role of women in shaping ethnic Chinese identity. It is not a full-length paper but is included here with the hope that others may pursue this understudied topic.

It should be noted here that the title of the workshop was “Ethnic Chinese as Southeast Asians”. Southeast Asians here refer to people in the individual Southeast Asian states, and not a

collective regional identity. The editor is fully aware that a regional identity has not yet emerged, but identification with an individual country has been in existence.

The editor would like to take this opportunity to thank all the workshop participants, especially the paperwriters and discussants, for their contributions and co-operation. Special thanks also go to Professor Chan Heng Chee, then Director of ISEAS, and Professor Wang Gungwu, Chairman of the Institute of East Asian Political Economy (IEAPE), for their kind support. We have all benefited tremendously from their full participation in the two-day workshop.

Leo Suryadinata

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