

**ETHNIC RELATIONS
AND NATION-BUILDING
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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ETHNIC RELATIONS AND NATION-BUILDING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Case of the Ethnic Chinese

edited by
Leo Suryadinata

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Preface

Ethnic/racial relations have been a perennial theme in Southeast Asian studies, and current events have highlighted the tensions among ethnic groups and the need to maintain ethnic/racial harmony for nation unity. The Singapore Society of Asian Studies (SSAS) organized an international conference at the end of November 2002 focusing on an analysis of ethnic/race relations in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, with special reference to the roles of ethnic Chinese in nation-building. It brought together a group of established Southeast Asian scholars to critically examine some of the important issues such as ethnic politics, nation-building, state policies, and conflict resolution.

The plan of the SSAS Conference Committee was to have the issues analysed from various perspectives. It therefore invited scholars of different ethnic origins, so that each could present the perspective from his own ethnic background. The arrangement does not imply that scholars cannot offer an accurate analysis of those outside their own ethnic group. Rather, the conference was to provide an opportunity for the scholars to deal with different facets of the issues involved as experienced or witnessed in their lives. Based on this objective, the committee invited nine scholars from three countries.

From Indonesia, the Committee invited Dr Mely Tan, a senior sociologist, to deal with the issue of Chinese ethnicity and nation-building; A. Dahana, an indigenous historian, to see the problem from a *pribumi* perspective; and Frans Winarta, a *peranakan* lawyer and an activist, to look at the legal aspect of the problem.

From Malaysia, the Committee invited Dr Lee Kam Hing, a historian who has done a lot of work on Chinese Malaysians to deal with nation-building from the perspective of a Chinese Malaysian; P. Ramasamy, a political scientist of Indian descent, to deal with Indian Malaysians; and Shamsul A.B., a prolific Malay anthropologist, to give a Malay's perspective of the ethnic Chinese.

From Singapore, three scholars were invited. Eugene Tan, a young scholar trained in both law and political science, recounted the experience of nation-building in the island state; and Tan Ern Ser, a sociologist, presented a paper discussing current ethnic relations in Singapore based on survey data; while Sharon Siddique, also a sociologist, commented on Chinese Singaporeans from an outsider's point of view.

The Committee also invited Professor Wang Gungwu, a leading authority on the history of Chinese overseas and a historian of China and Southeast Asia, to address the general issue on ethnic Chinese and nation-building in Southeast Asia, thus providing a crucial framework for the conference.

These ten interesting and most up-to-date articles were later revised to become this volume. I have not only edited this volume but also provided the concluding remarks to draw the various views together.

Leo Suryadinata
30 May 2003