

## **From China to Indonesian and to Australia: Two Stories of Struggle for Acceptance**

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### *Abstrak*

Pada kurun waktu beberapa abad, orang China meninggalkan kampung halamannya dalam jumlah besar didorong oleh sebab dan niat yang berbeda-beda. Mereka yang berlayar ke selatan mendarat di kepulauan yang kemudian menjadi bagian dari Republik Indonesia. Ada juga yang tiba di benua selatan yang sekarang dikenal sebagai negara Federasi Australia. Meski beragam, gambaran mental mengenai etnis Cina sangat dibatasi oleh stereotip yang sempit. Di Indonesia, etnis Cina digambarkan sebagai orang-orang yang tanpa ampun mengejar laba, seringkali dengan mengorbankan orang-orang di sekitar mereka, dan enggan membantu kesejahteraan masyarakat tempat tinggal mereka. Di Australia, gambaran etnis Cina yang ada di tengah masyarakat luas berkaitan dengan adaptasi, kebiasaan, dan filsafat kehidupan, yang berbeda dari kebanyakan penduduk yang bertatar belakang etnis dan budaya *Anglo-Celtic* dan Eropa. Tulisan ini berusaha mengangkat ke permukaan dan menganalisis titik-titik gelap dari topik ini, yaitu aspek-aspek tentang diri mereka yang luput dari pandangan-diri etnis Tionghoa, sekaligus aspek-aspek yang lolos dari radar masyarakat luas yang non-Cina.

### **Indonesia: How many Chinese?**

The number of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia has been debated for a long time. Leo Suryadinata, Arifin and Ananta (2003:73) speculate the number to be around 1.45 to 2.04 percent. Suryadinata et al (2003:76) explain the need for inference and speculation in coming to the figures.

It is not easy to estimate the number and percentage of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Discussions on the quantitative aspects of the Chinese relied mostly on information from the 1930 Population Census (Suryadinata, Arifin and Ananta 2003:76).

Suryadinata continue that while the 2000 *Population Census* distinguishes between the ethnic Chinese with Indonesian citizenship and those with foreign citizenship, it still does not provide a full and complete picture in terms of the number of ethnic Chinese (with Indonesian citizenships). Only 11 provinces, covering 68.45 percent of the total Indonesian population, contain the figures. The rest of the ethnic Chinese is not one of the eight largest ethnic groups in those provinces.

In any case, if the figures representing such a small segment of the population seem disproportionate to the definite profile in the country's social and political landscape, a brief investigation into what creates the profile has revealed colourful and complex accounts involving many parties. Interestingly, the profile has been largely created by the popular belief that the ethnic Chinese have dominated Indonesia's economy, complemented by the accompanying stereotype which prevails and persists until today.

They are mostly depicted as business operators, (whatever size business they operate), who are ruthless seekers of financial profit and often with complete disregard for, even at the detriment of, the majority of people around them. On top of that, among the mainstream population they are perceived as 'rootless', hence having no loyalty to the country in which they live, in this case Indonesia. Related to that, it is also widely believed that they are still loyal to their motherland, China. This perceived loyalty is often seen as the reason for their exclusivity and it is reflected in their preponderance to socialize among themselves also their avoidance of interracial marriages

Like most stereotypes, that of ethnic Chinese does contain some truth, *albeit* not the whole truth. Having been reduced into the scale of a caricature, the stereotype does not reveal the complexities of causes and consequences behind it. If we isolate two major elements of the stereotype, and analyse them even briefly, we may find some interesting overlap of myth and fact.

### **They Are All in Business**

During Soeharto's New Order government (1966 - 1998), increasing numbers of ethnic Chinese turned to private enterprise of varying sizes, not only because many indeed fit naturally into this field, but also because they were shut out of most other avenues<sup>1</sup>. If the situation had been allowed to develop naturally, many more ethnic Chinese would most likely have entered other

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1 To deprive ethnic Chinese of their social, cultural and economic space there were laws and regulations as well as widespread practices on the part of the authorities which had no legal base yet accepted as a given. Among the latter was the 'unofficial quota' imposed on ethnic Chinese entering civil service, military service, employment in state-owned enterprise and academia. These restrictions also applied to ethnic Chinese entering state universities, pushing them into a situation where only those who, or whose parents, were able to afford private university fees, were able to continue to tertiary education.

professions such as lecturers, politicians, public services domain, or artists, where a small number have indeed found their vocations.

Ethnic Chinese have not been hard-wired to only operate businesses. This assumption is certainly not historically based. The Chinese who came at different times to what is now Indonesia had widely different vocations. Lynn Pan (1990:6) recounts the circumstances, social and political, which brought private merchants/traders, hunters, artisans and farmers from the southern provinces to flee south. Based on available documentation of the later years on the occupations of the ethnic Chinese, it might be inferred that those who came and settled in the archipelago before then were of the same vocations and occupations. As the varied vocations of the immigrants indicate, they were not all merchants and traders, and naturally they did not all go into business

Chinese, asserts Wang Gung-wu (1994:22), had been sailing to Southeast Asia since the time of Song Dynasty, though written records about Chinese migration would only become available from the beginning of Ming Dynasty. Wang (1994:4-20) sees that the migration follows four patterns: the trader pattern, the coolie pattern, the sojourner pattern, and the descent and re-migrant pattern. The first three being the most relevant to the situation in Indonesia. I will borrow Wang's categorisation in my review and analyses of the occupations of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

The trader pattern, which was the dominant pattern by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, refers to traders, miners and other skilled workers who left China for various reasons. They sailed in different directions; they arrived in various lands, including in Southeast Asia, where some of their numbers then decided to stay. For the purpose of this article, I will focus specifically on the areas of the archipelago in the region which is today's Indonesia.

The coolie pattern refers to mostly men of peasant origins, landless labourers and urban poor who went in large numbers to, among other places, such as North America and Australia. During the gold rushes, they looked for gold as well as work in plantations, railway construction sites, and other openings where manual labour was needed. It occurred in Southeast Asia also, though in a much smaller scale. In terms of the archipelago, the most significant segment of this pattern is the Batavia chapter. Even prior to the existence of Batavia, according to Susan Blackburn, writing then as Susan Abeyasekera (1987:6), Chinese had been living in the place, then known as Jayakarta. Dutch accounts described Jayakarta, as

'...a provisioning port where ships could anchor in an excellent harbour and find good drinking water, local timber for repairs, and arak (rice wine) produced by the Chinese who had settled there. (Abeyasekera 1987:6)

The documents were obviously referring to the time prior to 1619, the year Jayakarta was demolished by the Dutch. The Chinese then, were already set up in small businesses, and were known as eager and serious workers. When Jan Pieterszoon Coen of the Dutch East India Company (known as VOC) eventually began to build Batavia, he saw that to really create a European society in the town he needed more workers, the best and easiest to get, he observed, being the Chinese.

So keen was he to build up their numbers quickly in Batavia that in 1622 he sent ships to China to kidnap people on the coast. Once the port became established... Chinese traders came of their own accord, bringing poor coolies from the south of China. (Abeyasakere 1987:23)

The sojourners pattern is very different from the previously mentioned ones. In the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, this pattern has ideological and political undercurrents. The sojourners were teachers, journalists and other professionals who came to Southeast Asia, including the archipelago a large part of which had then become the Dutch East Indies. Most of the sojourners, according to Wang (1994:6-7) were keen to promote a greater awareness of Chinese culture and the socio-political development in the country. A much smaller number of this class of people were known to have sailed on to Australia and New Zealand.

The peasants, landless labourers and urban poor were driven out of China by immediate forces created by the political situations of that time which generated more widespread poverty among those who were already poor. Wherever they landed their first priority would be to build a better life. In the case of those who settled in the archipelago, many inevitably were unable to find what they were seeking. They remained poor and landless, in the Dutch East Indies in particular. Colonial policies then making it difficult for Chinese to acquire land. The more fortunate however, would have moved on to better positions in life, such as various small businesses. Those who were able to find local indigenous or other Chinese women and build better lives, would encourage their descendants to move further up the social rungs. Nowadays, the only region with a significant ethnic Chinese farmer population was West Kalimantan. Most in the other areas do not live off the land.

### **Rootless: Loyalty to China Rather Than Indonesia**

It is not useful to confuse the meaning of 'rootless' with the notion of 'maintaining links with ancestral land'. Many Indonesians from north Sumatra who now live in Jakarta for instance, feel they have roots where they live. Yet, they still maintain their links with the homes of their ancestors. The desire not to sever the links with China is multi-faceted, however. This sentiment has largely evolved and dove-tailed with the political developments in Indonesia, the Southeast Asian region, and China itself.

### **1. It Is Primordially Driven**

Pan (1990:11) brings to attention a belief more psychological than factual, held by many in the Chinese diaspora that they were the proud descendants of *Huang Di*, the Yellow Emperor, the mythical ancestor of the Han Dynasty. Irrational though it may be, it has been well documented that when a particular people physically leave their land of origins to settle somewhere else, they develop strong needs to feel connected to it, regardless of how deep they have grown roots in the place they live. Those who never leave China may not have the same intense self-identification as the desire to be connected felt by their counterparts who left. In fact, in most cases, the ancestral cultures to which these people believe they have links, often no longer exist, as the original cultures in their natural sites continually evolve.

### **2. It Is Reinforced by Social and Cultural Ambience, Legal and Political Environments, and Politically Induced Insecurity**

The earliest arrivals, assuming those who left especially during the times of Ming Dynasty or maybe earlier, had left their extended families, their comfort zones, behind. Depending on the reception they received in their destinations, they would have physically and mentally settled in the new lands, or moved on in search of new places. Even if they had been well received and able to fit into the local community life with relatively few problems, it would be fair to expect that they would have wanted to maintain links with their loved ones in the homeland. Over decades their descendants, especially those born of indigenous mothers, would have assimilated into the indigenous communities where they lived, naturally and without force on both parts. Though there are certainly ethnic Chinese who stand out in terms of social vernacular such as appearance and body language, despite speaking local languages, many of the descendants of the original emigrants are now almost indistinguishable from their indigenous neighbours. Though in many cases some aspects of Chinese culture have been incorporated into their lives. In Jakarta area, for instance, they live in Kemayoran, Tanjung Priok, Palmerah, and on the outskirts such as Tangerang, Serang and Muara Karang, as well as other more central, suburbs. They are spread across the socio-economic continuum from very poor to reasonably comfortable. Only a very small number became outstandingly rich.

### **Ethnic Chinese During The Dutch Occupation**

During three and a half centuries of Dutch occupation ending officially on 17 August 1945, the Chinese were continuously used by the colonial administration as middlemen, given licenses to be tax-collectors and harbour masters, for example. They were thus made distinguishable from the indigenous population as well as other non-indigenous non-European races.

This arrangement may well have served both the Dutch and the Chinese as well. The Dutch were not having to dirty their hands while still collecting the dues and the Chinese, who were known to very rarely recoil from hard work, benefitting financially while enjoying the power lent to them by the Dutch. The Chinese, especially those who enjoyed significant economic success, thus perceived themselves as closer to the power elite, in this case the Dutch, than other ethnic groups or the indigenous majority. Many of the wealthy would have behaved in a superior manner *vis-à-vis* the indigenous majority. If the indigenous population, especially those in the lower end of the social rungs, harboured any resentment toward their Dutch masters. It was necessarily tinged with awe, due to the power the Dutch never hesitated to exercise.

In the meantime, the resentment the populus felt toward the Chinese, while clouded with fear for their apparent closeness to power, was largely laced with contempt. While the wealthy Chinese were able to afford guards for their safety, it was the poorer ones among them who became vulnerable to attacks or robberies by some indigenous people who regarded themselves as being the oppressed in an unfair social arrangement. While the wealthy felt bolstered by a sense of proximity to power (most likely false, nonetheless), the poorer Chinese resorted to the 'links' with China, their ancestral land, which in reality did not do them much good, either.

Legally, the Dutch did not make it easier for the Chinese to find their spot *vis-à-vis* the rest of the population. The Constitutional Regulation of 1854 placed the Chinese under the same legal footing as the natives. The Regulation separated the population into two legal classes: Europeans and those equated with Europeans, and the natives and those equated with them. Equated with Europeans were the indigenous Christians, and equated with the natives were Chinese, along with Arab, Japanese and other non-European races – these would later be called 'foreign orientals' -

As Charles Coppel (2002:158-159) asserts, the concept of 'equating' is very complicated. The Regulation conferred power to the Government to make exceptions to the classification referred above. While equated with the natives, various pieces of legislation blurred the issue. Coppel names as an example the 'Agrarian Law of 1870 which prohibited the sale or permanent transfer of land from 'natives' to Europeans or other 'foreigners' like the Chinese' (Coppel 2002:59). Moreover, Coppel points out,

The Chinese were also required to reside in designated districts (*wijken*) and were not permitted to travel from one part of the colony to another unless they obtained a government pass (Coppel 2002:59)

This certainly did not make natural social mixing with the rest of the population any easier for the Chinese. Mixing however did occur, but limited, mainly to the marketplace.

Another issue which may have been seen as Chinese stand-offishness is the lobbying by a number of Chinese during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which continued throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The colonial government 'equate' all Chinese in the Indies with Europeans. This followed a significant move in 1890 to 'equate' with Europeans, all Japanese nationals and ethnic Chinese whose land of origins was Formosa (as Taiwan was known then). This move was a result of the Netherlands government's treaty with Japan. Given a choice, the Chinese would have preferred being included in the group 'equated' with Europeans, not only because that would redress the anomaly in relation to the Japanese and Taiwanese, but also being 'equated' with Europeans would mean being able to enjoy the protection of the European criminal code with respect to arbitrary arrest, jail condition, and legally qualified tribunal. In the native court only the presiding chairman was legally qualified. It was a hopeless situation for the Chinese, but as it had happened and would happen again, most just accepted the situation, but the politically aware among them began to look toward China where nationalist fervour was swelling, in the hope that a stronger China would be able to sway the Netherlands government.

The majority of Chinese who had enjoyed Dutch education and those who were politically realistic took the option of going with the flow, because they knew that for China to come to their aid was not a reasonable likelihood. However it does not mean they liked the situation. Spread in the middle of the continuum were a fair number who were in different professions such as writers, lawyers, teachers and various artists, who had accepted the Indies as their spiritual as well as actual home, and had been imbued with similar feeling of nationalism as their indigenous counterparts.

The early 1940s was a significant turn of attitudes among the Chinese. The Japanese landed in 1942 and occupied the Indies for three years. In line with its campaign of Asia for Asians, the Japanese forced the ethnic Chinese to send their children to Chinese schools. Parents duly withdrew their children from Dutch schools and enrolled them in Chinese schools. Among the teachers here were children and friends of the teachers and other intellectuals who had left China during the latter half of the previous century. After the departure of the Japanese, followed by the declaration of Indonesia's independence on 17 August 1945, the arrangement continued. By that time, at school the children had been taught of their Chinese cultural heritage, where they were also largely buoyed by the fervour of the nationalism in China which saw the birth of People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. The pride of being Chinese infected many of the young minds then. A number of Chinese social organisations were founded.

After the Dutch finally ceded power in 1949, the issue of loyalty became increasingly merged with that of identity. It was during this time also that a bigger picture appeared. Firstly, not all ethnic Chinese in Indonesia were in

favour of the new communist China. Many were Kuomintang sympathisers. Secondly, a fair number of ethnic Chinese were largely unaffected by the Communist and Kuomintang conflict, preferring to focus on life in the new republic. Lastly, of those groups mentioned above, many sympathised with the nascent Indonesian nationalism.

In the new republic however, the insecurity of the ethnic Chinese was revived as regulation after regulation was enacted to suggest that they were less than welcome. Among them were the 1954 regulations barring them from purchasing rural property and owning rice-mills, and the 1955 regulation barring them from studying at university. Stuart Pearson, writing the memoirs of his ethnic Chinese Indonesian mother-in-law, An Sudiby, quotes and describes her feelings about the situation then,

I believe the Indonesian Government wanted to rid itself completely of Chinese, so they structured the arrangement in such a way that everyone who had not accepted Indonesian citizenship by December 1951 was automatically regarded as an 'alien' and therefore liable for expulsion..  
(Pearson 2008:125)

The ethnic Chinese were practically required to decide overnight, whether to accept Chinese citizenship or refuse it and officially become Indonesian citizens. Even those who took Indonesian citizenship were not spared discrimination problems. They were still treated as foreigners, a legacy of the Dutch colonial administration policy. One prominent example was businesses operated by citizens of ethnic Chinese were categorised as foreign companies and subjected to discriminatory legislation.

### **Ethnic Chinese During The New Order's Government**

Under the New Order government (1967 - 1998), ethnic Chinese continued to be disadvantaged. They were not only politically disempowered, but also presented in the worst possible light. Even a basic right like citizenship, was made problematic for them. Having officially taken up the citizenship, they still had to have a specific document, a certificate proving Indonesian citizenship, known as *Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia* or *SBKRI*, which invariably cost them a lot of money, the amount of which depending on the demand of each official who had to sign the application. On top of that, since their identity cards were specifically coded, each time an ethnic Chinese had to apply for any licence or document, he/she had to pay a higher fee than their indigenous counterparts. At the same time, few individuals who were publicly known as 'close' to the power elite, hence able to obtain preferential treatment in say, tendering for major projects, were given such high profiles that it was etched into public consciousness that the ethnic Chinese were inherently corrupt, so they became fair game for extortion. Unfortunately,



this practice became so ingrained and widespread that even the poorest of the ethnic Chinese expected to be subjected to various forms of extortion. As a result, many had no option but not to obtain the various documents, even the ones required by the government.

Throughout decades of being part of Indonesian nation, the ethnic Chinese have had to live with the awareness that violence, mostly to their property, occasionally to their person and it can descend upon them anytime. They have had to depend on the power elite, or in the very least, those in charge of national security, for protection. This unsurprisingly has placed them in very awkward and unbalanced alliances, of which they have had no choice. Since the end of New Order's rule, the situation is slowly improving for the ethnic Chinese. They are since allowed cultural expression, such as publicly celebrating Chinese New Year and using Chinese characters in public space without fear of prosecution or persecution.

### 1. Self-perceptions

As for self-perceptions of ethnic Chinese in terms of their Indonesian identity, there does not appear to be a collective one<sup>2</sup>. There is instead, a wide continuum where on one hand, those who believe a separate race, must retain their Chinese cultural heritage. Because the indigenous population do not want them in their community anyway. A large number of this category of ethnic Chinese live in West Kalimantan cities, notably Pontianak and Singkawang, and in Sumatra, especially Medan and Palembang. These are mainly places where ethnic Chinese communities appear to fully function with a minimum of interaction with the ethnic Malay majority and other minority ethnic groups, such as ethnic Arab and ethnic Indian.

On the other hand, those who have abandoned their Chinese attributes, belong to the land in which they live, especially if their families have interracial marriage with nonchinese. They even have adopted the local language as their own regional language along with Indonesian as their national language. A large number of this category live in Java, especially metropolitan Jakarta including its outskirts, central and East Java, in northeast Sulawesi notably in Manado. Scattered in between, they feel with differing degrees of ethnic Chinese sense of identity while they feel grounded in Indonesia and being Indonesian. They have assimilated the political uncertainties and insecurities into their day-to-day lives, as an inherent part of life itself. They can be found throughout Indonesia, even among those in West Kalimantan, north and south Sumatra.

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2 This information was collated during the author's three-year research in preparation of *Breaking The Stereotype: Chinese Indonesian Women Tell Their Stories (2010)*, during which time she travelled to different regions of Indonesia and spoke with many people, of Chinese and other ethnicity.

Dewi Anggraeni (2010) in her book presents a sample of eight ethnic Chinese women who do not in anyway fit into the stereotypical images, generally attributed to them. One of them, Ester Indahyani Jusuf (2010:3-32), for example, could wipe the stereotype off the canvas with one brush stroke. She is a human rights activist, fighting not only for ethnic Chinese, but anyone of any ethnicity. She is married to an ethnic Javanese (her late first husband, Arnold (Ucok) Purba, was of Batak ethnicity). Having founded Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa, a non-profit nongovernmental organisation, with her then husband Arnold Purba and a number of friends, she now still regularly donates part of her income as a lawyer to the organisation. She does not show any inclination or desire to operate any business. Modifying the popular profile however, will be a massive and slow process, because what has been embedded in the collective psyche of the population will take a concerted effort on everybody's part over a long time, to dislodge.

### **Australia: How many Chinese?**

In the 2006 Australian Census, 669.890 Australian residents identified themselves as having Chinese ancestry, either alone or with another ancestry. Thus they made up just over 3 percent of the whole population of 21 million at the time. The first documented arrivals, originating in the southern provinces of China, took place in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were among the human cargoes, as indentured labourers, destined for Cuba, Peru and the Caribbean sugar colonies as well as Australia. Thus they fit into Wang's *coolie* pattern. Those who arrived in Sydney, as described by Pan (1990:11) in her book,

'In October 1848, the Nimrod, a 234-ton barque, brought 120 Chinese labourers from Amoy to Sydney through the agency of James Tait. The odd Chinese carpenter and houseboy had preceded them many years before, but the arrivals on Nimrod were probably the first Chinese to come to New South Wales as a group. They were followed by many others, for Australian squatters badly needed pastoral labour in appreciable quantities (Pan 1990:11)

Some of these people may have been skilled workers and artisans, but they were never perceived as anything but manual labourers, comparing to those who were shipped to Jayakarta to help build Coen's Batavia. They were brought in as indentured labourers to work on farms belonging to private landowners, to look after cattle and sheep, and build, then work, the irrigation system.

Then in 1851, gold was discovered in Australia. This brought streams of immigrants from all around the world, the Chinese among them. Again most of them came from the southern region, especially the province of Quandong (then known as Canton). More than 40.000 men and over 9.000 women were

documented to have migrated to the goldfields in 20 years. Incidents of violent conflict among different nationality groups seeking gold, frequently occurred. These led to Sir Charles Hotham, then Governor of Victoria, to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate Victorian goldfields problems and grievances. The Commission's findings resulted in restrictions being placed on Chinese immigration and residency taxes levied from Chinese residents in Victoria from 1855. Six years later, in 1861, New South Wales imposed the same restrictions. The restrictions were in force until the early 1870s.

### **Coming to a Land with Harsh Political and Social Landscape: the Forming of a Stereotype**

When the Chinese really began to come, Australia was a convict colony of Britain. On the whole, it was a very sparsely populated continent. Apart from the relatively small numbers of Aborigines, by 1800 there were fewer than 6000 white people, and only one-tenth of these were free settlers. The arrivals in large numbers of an alien race would have been unsettling to their fragile sense of cohesiveness in the best of times.

Even after federation in 1901, Australian attitudes toward the Chinese were hostile at worst and extremely suspicious at best. Alison Broinowski (1992:6) describes the sentiments toward nonwhite in Australia at the time:

For more than a century most settler Australians defined Asia not as many diverse countries but as one and as a generalised source of threat. While they had inherited other enemies – Russians, Germans, French, even Americans – from their British identity, Asia seemed peculiarly their own (Broinowski 1992:6)

The first Bill introduced at Federal Parliament in 1901, was indeed the Immigration Restriction Act, a precursor of the White Australia Policy. This Act continued to be strengthened with subsequent Acts, making entry into Australia by Chinese extremely difficult. Alfred Deakin, Australia's second prime minister, the chief architect of the the White Australia Policy, deemed the Policy necessary as he perceived the Chinese and Japanese to be a threat to the newly formed federation. As far as white Australians were concerned, the Chinese were only good as labourers who worked for them. They were not, however, to live among them, let alone as equals. White Australians found the Chinese unacceptable in all respects, whether these touched the unemotive or emotive sides of the white population.

### **Unemotive Side: Perceived Undesirable Qualities**

Even in a relatively unemotive language, the Chinese were clearly perceived as possessing of undesirable qualities in terms of living among white Australians, qualities which in other circumstances would have been actively

sought. The suggestion was that with the Chinese around, white Australians would have very little chance of maintaining their high standard of living and having decent jobs at the same time.

The sense of threat felt by the Anglo-Australians at the time was more real than a mere excuse. Though strongly identifying British, the newly formed federation was very much driven by the idealism of an egalitarian and classless society. Emancipists and free settlers alike, were reluctant to accept any foreign groups which would disturb that ambition even in the remotest possibility. In fact, they did not even like the free settlers who gave the impression of wanting to reintroduce the classed society they had left behind in Britain. The Chinese, in this case, were believed to have come from an inherently hierarchical society and as such, were incompatible with the ideals of the newly formed federation.

### **Emotive Side: Compounded Fear of the Threat of the ‘Unknown’ Leading to Confusion and Misconception**

The general population’s inability to differentiate between Chinese and Japanese plays the emotive side of the need for excluding the Chinese from Australian soil. The fear of the Japanese during the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century was thus consolidated with the ‘alien’ attributes and qualities of the Chinese. Films showing images of the Asian (Japanese and Chinese) threat, helped the population absorb the message subliminally. Raymond Longford’s film (1913) *Australia Calls* suggested Asian invaders were Japanese, which they named Mongolians. It also showed attacks on local Chinese by settler and Aboriginal Australians. A film of the American fleet’s visit included the footage to simulate a Japanese invasion. Phil Walsh’s film (1928), *The Birth of White Australia*, showed the massacre of Chinese at Lambing Flat, New South Wales, in 1860-61. In fact, the Lambing Flat violence was just one example of how the qualities that would later be referred to by Deakin as ‘good qualities’, worked against the Chinese themselves in the context of the gold rush society of that time. The white gold diggers – British and continental Europeans, tended to work alone or in small groups, and in random fashion, concentrating on rich patches of grounds then abandoning them to move on to other spots. Not many were able to earn a decent living that way, let alone striking rich. The Chinese on the other hand, tended to work in large organised groups. They took over a large surface at a time, thus sooner or later they would find gold. They worked long hours, slept in simple quarters and ate basic food, hence even with a smaller return of gold they had a lot more to show for their efforts than the other nationality groups.

### **More Subtle Campaign Reaching to Both Levels:**

#### **Cerebral and Emotional**

A similarly relentless campaign was maintained on a more subtle and seemingly cerebral level. For example, in 1865, in an edition of the *Melbourne Punch*, an Australian literary magazine, Chevalier, a cartoonist, sketched newly-rich Chinese acting as though they owned the place. Broinowski (1992:9) writes,

A cartoon image of a Chinese posing as A.B. Paterson's comic bushman, Mulga Bill, reflected the perennial fear that lazy Australians would have the tables turned on them, and that they would become the 'poor white trash of Asia (Broinowski 1992:9)

Just as undesirable if not more, it appeared, was fraternising and worse, intermarrying, with the Chinese. Here 'others' means 'nonwhites'.

'In 1902 Hop managed in black and white to suggest the awful polychrome possibilities of intermarriage with Asian and others (Broinowski 1992:9)

Another argument circulating then which on the face of it sounded rational, was that the Chinese came from a very different culture from that of egalitarian Australians. They were imbued, the argument said, with a hierarchical and authoritarian concept of humanity, completely incompatible with universally held in Australia.

There was a kind of counterbalance to the above negative images lodged in public consciousness, generated by the proponents of orientalism. While the concepts held by most adherents of the White Australia Policy were generally dark and sinister, the orientalist's take was mostly beautiful and idealistic, even of dreamlike quality. The orientalist concepts and their array of manifestations are still available today in the realm of the arts, such as paintings, sculptures, literature and drama.

#### **Stereotype vis-à-vis Reality**

Stereotypical concept and images of the Chinese have been largely based on four premises<sup>3</sup>:

1. They were a threat to the Australian way of life where egalitarianism and mateship were the mainstay, not hierarchy and authority
2. They were a threat to workers in Australia because Australian workers would not be able to compete with them

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<sup>3</sup> This list was collated based on documented data as well as the author's personal communication with Australians throughout four decades of living and working in Australia

3. Their main ambition was accumulating wealth, hence they would not hesitate to take over the country and its resources
4. Their culture was too different from that of white Australians, so the distance was too vast for the two sides to converge

When the above four elements were fleshed out, they could reach into spots and corners of the collective consciousness of Australians, manifested in numerous shapes and forms which kept adding to the popular profile of the ethnic Chinese in Australia. During the latter half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fear and suspicions generated by the stereotype hindered a great deal of natural social intercourse between the ethnic Chinese and the rest of the population. Even those who subscribed to the orientalist concepts were happier if Chinese culture were more of an idea than a reality that might confront them as they stepped out of the confines of their own homes.

White Australia Policy, as well as the taxes and levies imposed specifically upon the Chinese, may have stopped further large numbers coming to Australia, however those who were already in the country managed to find their own spots in society, with varying degrees of success.

### **Becoming Indispensable Part of Australian Society**

In everyday life, the Chinese found vocations which were indispensable to all Australians, such as market-gardening, cabinet-making, printing, and fine arts as well as general cuisine. And those who eventually enjoyed financial success sent their children to a good school and universities, thus producing a new generation of ethnic Chinese with a more acceptable to the generally white population. With subsequent intermarriages with members of other ethnic groups in Australia, including Australian Aborigines, at least two generations of Chinese Australians, especially the mixed-race among them, have entered Australian society with relative ease. They are actively participating in various professions and vocations: in different levels of government, in the legal and medical professions, in commerce, in education, in the arts and in the trades. One of Australia's current senior ministers is Penny Wong, a Chinese Australian born of a white mother.

John Fitzgerald (2007) confronts the stereotype about this group and finds that the Chinese themselves have gone a long way in breaking it down with their own lives and contributions to the nation. Among the list of achievements Fitzgerald names clubs and businesses, founded by Chinese Australians,

'Chinese Australian merchants were among the earliest in the diaspora to recognise the value of inclusive clubs and societies for community management and business networking. The NSW Chinese Chamber of Commerce (1903) was founded some years after the Hong Kong

Chamber (1896) but ahead of comparable chambers in Singapore and Straits settlements, the Dutch East Indies, North America and even China itself...(Fitzgerald 2007:181)

With White Australia Policy officially dismantled in 1973, new streams of Chinese immigrants, many come from countries other than China (e.g. Malaysia and Hong Kong prior to 1997 handover), fitting Wang (1994)'s descent and remigrant pattern, began to be admitted into the country. In 1990s, after Tiananmen Square, many young individuals, students and intellectuals, were further accepted. They were seen as victims of an authoritarian regime, whose lives would be in serious threat if they did not leave China. More importantly, the Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, took exceptional interest in them and promised them refuge in Australia.

By now, Australia has been exposed to different outlooks on life, differing lifestyles, various types of mannerism and body language from the ethnic Chinese. Some of course still recognisably foreign to most of the population, especially in the cases of those who had been in the country for a short time, and still tend to move within their own circles, their comfort zones.

### **Self-Perceptions**

While the mainstream society in Australia still have problems telling the differences between Asian ethnicities, such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Malay and Indonesian, let alone differentiating different subethnics of China. They can tell the class differences among the ethnic Chinese and they think they are ethnic Chinese. Class differences are indeed a prominent aspect of Chinese Australians' self-perceptions.<sup>4</sup> A second, third or fourth generation Chinese Australian doctor or dentist, for instance, would regard himself/herself as an Australian doctor or dentist rather than Chinese doctor or dentist. It is also generally the case with Chinese Australian teachers, writers, artists and drycleaners. At a more subliminal level however, most Chinese Australians have never severed their emotional ties with their homeland in China. When they are asked by his/her family dialect for instance, an ethnic Chinese Australian would more likely to say 'Hakka', 'Hokkien' or Teochew' than 'Victorian' or 'South Australian'. This is also mostly the case with those who migrated to Australia from Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore.

There are two main elements which can explain this social phenomenon. First, Australia is being an immigrant receiving country, barring its various aboriginal tribes. All the rest of the population come from other places and coming from another country is a given, not an indication of being foreign or disloyal. Second, apart from the dominant British culture, which varies in

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<sup>4</sup> Information gathered by the author during four decades of living in Australia

strength from state to state, there are not any particular local 'home cultures' into which the ethnic Chinese feel comfortable to blend, their physical features alone setting them apart. Thus, their subconscious longing for belonging can only be fulfilled by staying with the original ancestral culture, however distant in time it may be. Residuals of the stereotype remain, though they no longer form a strong barrier, though a more subtle barrier still exists, between the ethnic Chinese and the rest of the population.

### **Different Situations: Indonesia and Australia**

The Chinese who arrived in Indonesia and Australia, both have had to struggle to be accepted, when they have wanted to live and settle in the respective countries. For that reason, they have had to break the mould of the widespread stereotype. The Chinese who left China in 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards or in earlier times, were necessarily of the adventurous and outward-looking type, who did not recoil from the idea of serious risk-taking. Depending on the local cultures at the places of their destination, they were either accepted, even welcomed as proponents of progress, or shunned as *agents provocateurs* who tended to upset the established set-ups which the majority of locals perceived as ideal. They were also suspected of ambitions to rob the locals of their natural resources and other riches. Those who left China during the rule of Ming Dynasty, sailed out with a desire to visit China's tributary regions in the southern seas. Most of them came to what is now known as Southeast Asia.

In various parts of the Southeast Asian archipelago, those early small entrepreneurs and artisans were able to fit in slots which they created themselves but worked well with the general communities. They may have had problems adjusting to the local mores, but their industriousness, specific skills and expertise may have put them in fairly good steads.

Serious problems arose during the times of Dutch occupation. The Dutch recognised the entrepreneurial skills of the Chinese and used them to their own advantage. By placing the Chinese between themselves and the natives, the Chinese became a kind of bumper which took the hard knocks coming from both sides. It also created a social cleavage between the Chinese and the natives, generating a great deal of resentment on the part of the natives, and an illusion of power on the part of the Chinese, which made them even less liked. Nonetheless they were predisposed to taking the side of independence fighters against Dutch colonialism. This placed them on the wrong side of the Dutch rulers.

Those who came in 18<sup>th</sup> century were driven by poverty, which would have rendered them more easily accepted by the natives if not for the fact that the Dutch separated them from the rest of the population. This added impetus to negative stereotyping. History and political events have not been



very kind to the Chinese who have wanted to live in the Indies and later on, in the nation of Indonesia. Not having a natural, geographical area of their own, the Chinese have always been disadvantaged politically. Hence, they needed the acceptance of those who had political power.

One of the huge differences between the situations in Indonesia and in Australia lies in the fact that in Indonesia the locals had contact with Chinese people other than those brought by the Dutch colonial administration as manual labourers. There had been trading activities between the locals and Chinese seafarers, especially from the Ming dynasty era. Some of whom, from time to time, decided to stay and settle in various areas of what is now Indonesia.

On the other hand Australia, when the Chinese began arriving in earnest in 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a convict colony of Britain. On the whole it was very sparsely populated. Apart from the relatively small numbers of Aborigines, by 1800 there were fewer than 6000 white people, and only one-tenth of those were free settlers. The colonial authorities only took in the Chinese under duress, for want of other options. Neither the white settlers nor the emancipists, had any interaction with the Chinese except as master and labourer.

Despite the rough beginnings, in Australia, the journey of the ethnic Chinese toward social integration has been a lot more linear than it has been in Indonesia. Their struggle of acceptance has progressed ahead with very few setbacks. They have always had freedom of cultural expression even under White Australia Policy, and the mainstream society have always expected them to maintain links with their cultural homeland. At the same time, they have equal legal standing as the rest of the population, as their citizenship is as good and as solid as anyone else.

In Indonesia, people have been conditioned to expect their ethnic Chinese citizens, at 3 percent of 240 million, over 7 million, to show loyalty by severing cultural links with China, though this is gradually changing. They are still regarded with a degree of suspicion and as ready targets for resentment. The legal framework meant to protect their rights. It is not always enforced or enforceable. The struggle to be accepted in Indonesia, therefore, has been more arduous and fraught with continuing insecurity, for the ethnic Chinese. ●

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