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# CHINESE POLITICS IN POST-SUHARTO'S INDONESIA

## *Beyond the Ethnic Approach?*

————— Leo Suryadinata  
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The long and heavy involvement in trade of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and elsewhere around Southeast Asia has often led to the perception that they constitute members of a trading minority who are not interested in politics. In fact, this is not entirely true. The past 100 years of their history in Indonesia show that ethnic Chinese have participated in local politics. Dependent in part on the various Chinese ethnicities involved and the policies of the state toward ethnic Chinese, the characteristics of that participation and of ethnic Chinese politics in general have differed from period to period.

In 1976, Charles Coppel published a paper discussing various patterns of political participation in the Chinese Indonesian community, especially the *peranakan* (see below for definition) Chinese community.<sup>1</sup> In the present article, however, the discussion will use a more streamlined classification of Chinese politics and be focused on the post-Suharto period. I argue that Chinese politics has been divided between *peranakan* and *totok* politics and that the *peranakan* community itself is further divided between ethnic and non-ethnic approaches. The original meaning of *peranakan* Chinese was a mixed blood Chinese who was born in the Dutch East Indies. It was also used to

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1. Charles Coppel, "Patterns of Chinese Political Activity in Indonesia," in *The Chinese in Indonesia: Five Essays*, ed. J. A. C. Mackie (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, in association with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, 1976), pp. 19–76.

refer to the Chinese who were converted into Islam. *Totok* Chinese, on the other hand, was a term used to refer to a pure blood Chinese who migrated to the colony. However, for the purposes of this article I use *peranakan* to refer to those ethnic Chinese who were born locally and whose first language is Indonesian or Indonesian dialect, while *totok* refers to ethnic Chinese whose first language is one of the Chinese dialects.

Chinese politics in Indonesia has been a reflection of the heterogeneous nature of ethnic Chinese society. Constituting about 3% of the Indonesian population and numbering approximately six million, ethnic Chinese can culturally be divided into the two aforementioned sub-groups, the culturally more-assimilated *peranakans* and the less-assimilated *totoks*. Traditionally, the former were local-born while the latter were foreign-born, but before Suharto came to power, many second-generation Chinese though born in Indonesia were classified as *totoks* if they received Chinese education and had Chinese as their mother tongue. Chinese politics was divided along the lines of these two subgroups. *Totok* politics has rapidly declined since the New Order period (1966–98), when the *totok* Chinese were rapidly “*peranakanized*,” largely as a result of the state assimilation policy. Thus, ethnic Chinese politics in Indonesia has become *peranakan* politics and the current patterns of political participation are considerably different from those of the pre-Suharto era.

### Pre-*Reformasi* Politics: The Origin of Ethnic Approach

Before discussing Chinese politics after the fall of Suharto, a brief review of the pre-*reformasi* (reform) era is in order. Politics during the period of Dutch colonization were ethnic-based. Ethnicity (or race, as it was often called in the past) became an ideology of the state. The Dutch made no attempt to integrate the Chinese into indigenous society; on the contrary, as they had elsewhere the colonizers introduced a divide-and-rule policy toward the population. They perpetuated ethnic consciousness through social stratification and later by encouraging the development of ethnic-based parties. The Chinese were kept apart from the other groups.

Within the Chinese community, the two sub-groups followed different political patterns. While *totok* politics was clearly oriented toward China, *peranakan* politics pointed in three different directions: toward (1) China, as represented by the Sin Po Group; (2) closer affiliation with the Dutch East Indies concept, as represented by the Chung Hwa Hui; and (3) Indonesia, manifested by the Partai Tionghoa Indonesia. Before 1937, both the China- and Dutch East Indies-oriented groups represented two of colonial Indonesia’s major political organizations. During the three-and-a-half years of Japanese occupation (1942–45), all forms of Chinese political organization were

officially banned. However, the China-oriented group gained momentum underground and eventually became the dominant one during this period.

After independence in 1945, the Indonesia-oriented group emerged as the major current. While ethnic-based parties and organizations were either revived or created, some *peranakan* Chinese of this orientation joined ethnic Indonesian-dominated parties. The colonial social stratification was altered under the new republic. The *pribumis* (indigenous Indonesians) now replaced the departed Dutch at the top of the pecking order. However, the ethnic categorization of the Indonesian population otherwise remained intact and ethnic Chinese were still considered to be a non-indigenous group and hence had less rights. During the parliamentary democracy period (1949–58), the Indonesian government started a nation-building project based on a pluralistic model. Ethnic Chinese were relatively free to form their own organizations, both cultural and sociopolitical, and schools where instruction was given in Chinese were also allowed to operate. In 1954, a number of ethnic Chinese organizations came together and formed the Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia (Baperki, Indonesian citizenship consultative body) and it soon became the largest ethnic Chinese sociopolitical organization in the country. This *peranakan*-dominated organization set as its goal equality among all Indonesian citizens regardless of ethnic origin and demanded the cultural rights of the Chinese minority group.

With the Guided Democracy (1958–65) period, President Sukarno abandoned the parliamentary system and introduced authoritarian rule. Supported by both the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian communist party) and the military, Sukarno was able to weaken, if not bury, noncommunist political parties. He advocated the concept of continuing revolution and said socialism was the ideology of the nation. The Baperki, under the leadership of Siauw Giok Tjhan, also developed the idea of socialism, maintaining that only with a socialist society would ethnicity and its attendant problems disappear. While some *totok* Chinese joined Baperki, the majority were still noncitizens and China-oriented. They had their own organizations such as clan, commercial, and overseas Chinese general associations as well as various cultural groups. Influenced by the split in China between the Guomintang (Kuomintang) and the Communist Party, their organizations were also divided along Beijing and Taipei lines. The Baperki gradually but decisively moved to the left and supported President Sukarno and the PKI. However, the Baperki was implicated in and banned as a result of the alleged communist coup of 1965 that led to the downfall of Sukarno, the liquidation of the PKI, and the rise of a right-wing military represented by General Suharto.

Baperki's rival was the Lembaga Pembinaan Kesatuan Bangsa (LPKB, the Institute of cultivating national unity). This was a military-sponsored *pera-*

*nakan* association that was formed in 1961. It advocated complete assimilation of the Chinese into indigenous groups. The organization remained small during Sukarno's Guided Democracy period. With his downfall, it seemed possible that the LPKB would have a chance to grow now that its benefactors in the military had moved to the foreground. However, the military would eventually abandon its support of the organization when the New Order government (1966–98) decided that more direct control of the Chinese was necessary.

Ethnic-based parties and sociopolitical organizations were banned at the time Suharto officially assumed power in 1966. Those individuals who wanted to get involved in politics under his New Order regime had to join one of the three existing indigenous-dominated parties—Golkar (Functional group), the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, Development unity party), and the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI, Indonesian democratic party)—or a government-affiliated organization such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) or the LPKB. In 1977 the LPKB itself was replaced by Badan Komunikasi (Bakom, Communication body), an organization established under the Ministry of Home Affairs. There were no credible Chinese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) during the New Order period, a reflection of Suharto's authoritarian attempt to control all aspects of Indonesian society.

Ethnic Chinese organizations form one of the three pillars of Chinese culture in Indonesia; the other two are schools that offer all instruction in Chinese and the Chinese-language press. During Suharto's rule, not only were the organizations banned, but the schools and the press were also closed down. This had the effect of making the country's Chinese minority all the more *peranakanized*, if not "Indonesianized." Those born and brought up during the New Order period were educated primarily in Indonesian schools and hence lost active command of the Chinese language. They lost their identity as overseas Chinese and became Chinese-Indonesians instead. This shift, too, had a major impact on their political orientation and behavior.

Finally, Suharto also wanted to depoliticize the Chinese community by restricting their activities to the economic field. As a result, there was a Chinese economic elite but no credible sociopolitical leaders to represent Indonesia's Chinese minority. Those ethnic Chinese critics of the Suharto regime who did appear—such as Yap Thiam Hien (human rights lawyer), Arief Budiman (former name Soe Hok Djinn, sociologist and political activist), and later, Kwik Kian Gie (economist and a leader of the PDI)—projected themselves more as Indonesians rather than leaders of the Chinese community. Indeed, most of the issues that they fought for were not directly related to the problems of ethnic Chinese.

Suharto's authoritarian rule ended in 1998 after economic crisis, rampant corruption, rising opposition, and increased military repression had taken their toll on the populace. The country's urban residents, including many university students, rose up against the regime demanding political and economic reform. The anti-Suharto movement intensified, resulting in riots and major social upheavals, before the military finally sided with the reformers and helped to push Suharto out. The remainder of this article discusses ethnic Chinese politics after the fall of Suharto and the problems faced by the Chinese minority.<sup>2</sup> The discussion is not limited to their participation in political organizations such as parties but also in various pressures groups, including NGOs. Thus, the article will address Chinese politics in terms of both formal (electoral) and informal (non-electoral) forms of participation.

### The May 1998 Riots and Their Impact on Ethnic Chinese Politics

As noted above, Chinese politics during the 32-year long Suharto period focused on how to better assimilate ethnic Chinese into Indonesian politics. After his fall, however, an approach more oriented toward asserting ethnicity and ethnic rights reemerged. Some Chinese Indonesians saw Suharto's downfall as an opportunity to set up new ethnically oriented parties and sociocultural organizations, but the main reason behind the heightened political activities was the May 1998 riots that occurred prior to the end of the Suharto regime.

Starting on May 13, Jakarta saw two days of large-scale unrest directed against the city's ethnic Chinese population. Their shops were ransacked, looted, and burned down; many were attacked; and numerous ethnic Chinese women were tortured, raped, and killed. The horror stories spread like wildfire. Initially, there was the general perception that thousands of Chinese girls and women had been raped and tortured, which caused Chinese families to panic. Many of these families, especially those with young women and girls, escaped to what they hoped were safer places, either around Indonesia (such as Bali, Kalimantan, and North Sulawesi) or overseas.

The Indonesian authorities initially tried to deny reports of the attacks and labeled them as fantasies. But stories of the plight of the Chinese appeared early in and were spread through both local and foreign media. Furthermore, human rights groups outside Indonesia joined forces with local groups to pressure the government to address the problem. The occurrence of sexual crimes was confirmed as early as June 7 by Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan (Tim Relawan, Team of volunteers for humanitarian causes), a human

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2. Parts of this paper are derived from the author's earlier essay, "Ethnic Chinese Politics in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian-Pacific Studies*, no. 4 (March 2000), pp. 65-74.

rights group in Indonesia led by Father Sandiyawan Sumardi.<sup>3</sup> The number of victims Tim Relawan reported was smaller than that cited in the earlier estimates that had appeared mainly in the media. However, some Chinese Indonesian retained the earlier perception and there is no doubt that the May trauma has had a significant impact on Chinese politics since then.

The combined international pressure finally led the Habibie administration to reluctantly establish the Joint Fact-Finding Team (TGPF) in August to investigate the matter. Released in October, the team's report concluded that the attacks appear to have been planned and organized.<sup>4</sup> There are many indications that the Indonesian military were involved in this crime, which the report acknowledges in passing. Based on the report and other sources, there are three possible explanations for why the riots took place. One is that they were initiated, to use the report's words, by someone "at the highest decision maker's level," meaning President Suharto, who wanted to create a minor upheaval so that martial law could be declared. In this view, Prabowo Subianto, his son-in-law and then an up-and-coming general, was instructed to do the job to achieve this political goal. The second possible scenario is that the riots occurred as an outgrowth of conflicts within the military. There was a split in the army between Prabowo's backers and the faction of Suharto appointee General Wiranto. In this analysis, Prabowo planned the whole incident and created chaos in Jakarta to discredit Wiranto, who was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, so that he could take over power from the latter.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the third explanation holds that some racialsists as having collaborated with a segment of the army, perhaps Prabowo either directly or through intermediaries, to terrorize the Chinese community into leaving Indonesia forever. This departure would open the way for indigenous elements to then take over the roles played by ethnic Chinese in the economy. It is difficult to prove these allegations voiced by local observers and analysts. The TGPF report does suggest that Prabowo was involved in the riots in some fashion, though his motives remain unclear. In his recently published memoirs, Lee Kuan Yew, senior minister of Singapore, did note that Prabowo had informed both Lee and Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in February that

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3. Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan, *Sujud di Hadapan Korban: Tragedi Jakarta Mei 1998* [To bow in front of the victims: The tragedy of the May riots in Jakarta] (Jakarta: Tim Relawan, June 1998).

4. For a report on the May riot, see "Final Report of the Joint Fact-Finding Team (TGPF) on the May 13-15 1999 Riot: Executive Summary," October 23, 1999, at <[http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Palace/2313/jfft\\_report.html](http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Palace/2313/jfft_report.html)>.

5. For a discussion of the situation leading to the fall of Suharto, see Leo Suryadinata, *Interpreting Indonesian Politics* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998), pp. 221-38.

there might be anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that Prabowo was the mastermind, but it shows that he might have had prior knowledge about the plot against the Chinese minority. It is also possible that he was a party to this plot. However, as there is no hard evidence available at the moment, it is difficult to prove such involvement conclusively.

No matter which explanation is correct, Indonesia's ethnic Chinese population was badly affected and shocked by the May riots. The impact of the riots on the Chinese community was threefold. First, they triggered an exodus of ethnic Chinese. According to a report on immigration, about 152,000 people fled Indonesia through Jakarta, Sumatra, Bali, and Surabaya airports and seaports between May 14–20, 2001.<sup>7</sup> Of these, 70,800 were Indonesian citizens. Although no breakdown of this figure by ethnicity is available, it is quite likely that most were ethnic Chinese. These Chinese appear to have gone mainly to Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China, Australia, and the U.S. However, a report made by Forum Pengusaha Reformasi, an indigenous business organization, claims that 110,000 Chinese families left Jakarta during the upheaval. The report also said that 72.7% of these families expressed their desire to return to Indonesia once the situation returned to normal. Only 18.2% were hesitant about doing so and another 9.1% said they planned not to return.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, if all 70,800 people who left Indonesia were Chinese Indonesian, this would constitute only slightly more than 1% of the country's ethnic Chinese population. If Forum Pengusaha Reformasi's figure was correct, the number of those who left constituted only less than 2% of the ethnic Chinese population. In either case, the majority of the ethnic Chinese stayed in Indonesia. Even those who left Indonesia eventually returned to their birthplace, for many found it difficult to live overseas in a new environment.<sup>9</sup>

Second, the riots generated further capital flight. It is widely known that many Chinese conglomerates do not keep all of their money in Indonesia. Long before the fall of Suharto, quite a few had been active overseas and invested some of their money with foreign financial institutions. One source claimed that 53 Indonesian conglomerates, mainly Chinese, had US\$160 bil-

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6. Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: 1965–2000: The Singapore Story* (Singapore: Times Editions, 2000), pp. 316–17.

7. "Over 150,000 Flee Abroad During Riots: Ministry," *Tempo Interaktif*, June 9, 1998, <<http://www.tempo.co.id/>>.

8. "Diperkirakan mereka bawa uang USD 110 miliar" (They are estimated to take US\$110 billion out of Indonesia), *Pikiran Rakyat*, June 6, 1998; and "Sekitar 110 taipan 'lari' ke LN agar segera pulang" (110,000 tycoons leave the country, urged to return immediately), *Waspada*, June 6, 1998.

9. Observation based on author discussions with Chinese Indonesians in Singapore. Also as early as May 23–26, it was reported that 27,616 of those who fled had already returned. See "Over 150,000 Flee Abroad."

lion in foreign banks,<sup>10</sup> an extremely high amount. During the exodus of 1998, Indonesian newspapers report that departing Chinese took about US\$110 billion with them, a figure that is difficult to substantiate. Other observers gave estimates in the US\$30–60 billion range.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the exact amount, it is generally agreed that a lot of Chinese money was taken out of Indonesia during the turbulent months.

Finally, a third effect of the riots was to produce greater ethnic and political consciousness among Indonesia's ethnic Chinese. It is these organizational responses that will be addressed in the following section.

## The Post-Riot Rise of Ethnic Chinese Organizations

The overwhelming majority of Chinese Indonesians discovered at the time of the May riots that they had to fend for themselves. Chinese Indonesians eventually were successful in gaining the sympathy not only of the international community, as has been shown, but also of their indigenous counterparts—their fellow Indonesians. However, they suddenly realized that, if they wanted to defend themselves, they would have to be involved in the political process. They also felt that they needed to organize themselves to gain the support of *pribumis*.

### *Political Parties*

Given such realizations, it is not difficult to understand why some Chinese Indonesians were eager to form political organizations. On June 5, a group of young Chinese Indonesians led by Lieus Sungkharisma (alias Li Xuexiong) announced the establishment of the Partai Reformasi Tionghoa Indonesia (Parti, Indonesian Chinese reform party) in Jakarta. Lieus, then 39 years of age, and his friends had been involved in the Young Buddhist Association, a Chinese cultural group. He was also a treasurer of the Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia (KNPI, National committee of Indonesian youth), a *pribumi*-dominated organization linked to Golkar.<sup>12</sup>

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10. See “Diperkirakan mereka bawa uang USD 110 miliar” and “Sekitar 110 taipan ‘lari’ ke LN agar segera pulang.”

11. Ibid. See also “Konglomerat yang dirindu dan dicemburu,” (Tycoons who are desired and envied) *Sinergi* (Jakarta) 2:14 (1999), pp. 16–17. The Bank of Indonesia claimed that US\$80 billion in capital fled the country since the onset of the economic crisis.

12. “Rudy Hartono, Susi Susanti dan Kawan-Kawan ke LBH” (Rudy Hartono, Susi Susanti, and friends go to the Legal Aid Institute), *Republika*, June 6, 1998; and “Lima Pemuda Deklarasikan Partai Reformasi Tionghoa Indonesia” (Five youths declare [the establishment] of Chinese Indonesian Reform Party), *Surabaya Post*, June 6, 1998. It is interesting to note that Parti's inception was announced at the KNPI offices.

Parti announced its goals as being to promote racial harmony and protect the interest of Chinese Indonesians. The party's leadership group does not include any well-established or well-known figures from ethnic Chinese politics. The five founders—Lieus, Ponijan Liaw, Cecep Adhisaputra, Alexander Ferry Widjaya, and Julianus Juta—are young and include among them activists, university students, professionals, and entrepreneurs. When asked why well-established Chinese Indonesians were not included, Lieus replied, "We are independent, we have our own way, [and] we need no guidance. We don't need senior Chinese leaders to back us. What for?"<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Parti's leadership wanted to make the party a younger and more dynamic one. It is also possible that established figures might not have accepted Lieus's leadership had they been included. Lieus said that he used the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) as the model for Parti.<sup>14</sup> He also noted that Parti could accept non-Chinese to be party members (which the MCA does not allow). However, it is conceivable that Lieus and his fellows had not thought through every detail—Parti's constitution had not been completed at the time of the party's establishment, indicating that it was formed in a hurry.

Parti was followed by the Partai Pembauran Indonesia (Parpindo, Indonesian assimilation party). This organization was hastily established by Jusuf Hamka (alias A Bun), an ethnic Chinese Muslim convert in his early 40s. He was supported by Junus Jahja (71), an ethnic Chinese Muslim activist who was well known in the LPKB and Bakom. As the party's name makes clear, Parpindo wanted to promote assimilation of the ethnic Chinese into the *pribumi* Indonesian population. This concept has become unpopular among ethnic Chinese after Suharto's fall and many assimilationist leaders during the New Order such as Jusuf Wanandi (Liem Bian Kie) and Harry Tjan Silalahi (Tjan Tjoen Hok) openly abandoned their assimilationist goals after the May 1998 riots. Not surprisingly, Parpindo did not gain much support and was transformed into a social organization soon after its establishment. There was an attempt to establish a third party called Partai Warga Bangsa Indonesia (Indonesian citizen-nation party). It was founded by Tan Swie Ling, a *peranakan* businessman who wanted to revive Sukarno's nation-building concept in Indonesia.<sup>15</sup> However, the party did not take off due to a lack of response.

Finally, a fourth party called the Partai Bhinneka Tunggal Ika Indonesia (PBI, Indonesian unity in diversity party) was also established. The PBI kept a low profile and attracted more press coverage regarding its formation only

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13. See "Lima Pemuda Deklarasikan."

14. "Yinni huaren gaigedang xiangao chengli (Chinese Indonesian Reform Party is formed), *Dipingxian* (Horizon, Hong Kong), no. 7 (July 1998), p. 14.

15. "Partai Warga Bangsa Indonesia—Manifes" (Manifesto of the Indonesian Citizen-Nation Party) (photocopy) (Jakarta, August 1998[?]).

after the fact. The PBI's chairman, a 50-year old Chinese-educated Hakka called Nurdin Purnomo (alias Wu Nengbin), is a businessman who also owns a travel company in Jakarta. According to *Tempo*, he was also an honorary consul of Indonesia to Mauritius during the Suharto period.<sup>16</sup> The party's leadership included an Indonesian of Indian descent and a Dayak, one of the several ethnic groups in Kalimantan.

The above-mentioned ethnic Chinese leaders were mainly self-appointed and either unknown or unrecognized in the Chinese communities at large, possibly because they were unable to emerge during the decades that Suharto's authoritarian rule and assimilation policy were in effect. As the first Chinese Indonesian party to be established after the fall of Suharto, Parti received widespread media coverage at the of its inception; as a result, it was better known than the other groups and became the target of criticism. *Pribumi* opinion leaders, with the prominent exceptions of Professor Lukman Sutrisno of Gadjah Mada University and Amien Rais, chairman of the Muhammadiyah and later the Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN, National mandate party), were generally critical of Parti and the other ethnic-based parties. For example, General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the then-head of the Armed Forces Political Affairs section and currently coordinating minister for defense and security, was reported as saying, "There is no problem with the establishment of new parties. But one has to think very carefully, whether or not it is correct to form parties which are based on most sensitive points: ethnicity, religion, and race." In the same story, Professor Iskandar Alisyahbana, vice-chancellor of the Bandung Institute of Technology, commented that "there is no prohibition against establishing a Chinese party, but in my view, it is not right."<sup>17</sup>

As for how the media responded to the rise of ethnic Chinese political parties, the largest Indonesian newspaper, *Kompas*, founded by a *peranakan* Chinese Catholic but now in the hands of indigenous Indonesians, has offered comments indicative of some discomfort. Addressing the formation of two of the ethnic Chinese-based parties, the paper opined that while it recognized the importance of political participation for ethnic Chinese, it was not sure whether ethnic-based parties were the proper format.<sup>18</sup> More open was the attack by the editor of the magazine *Media Indonesia*, Surya Paloh, who said, "Ethnic Chinese parties are similar to snakes which look for people to hit them." The magazine went on to note that views in the Chinese community were divided into ethnic Chinese and non-ethnic Chinese approaches. The

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16. "Hoakiao Berpolitik: Dari Trauma ke Trauma?" (Overseas Chinese participated in politics: From trauma to trauma), *Tempo*, February 14–22, 1999.

17. "Partai Tionghoa dianggap sebagai langkah mundur" (Ethnic Chinese party is considered to be a step backward), *Media Indonesia*, June 8, 1998.

18. Editorial, *Kompas*, June 10, 1998.

latter approach, it said, was represented by Kwik Kian Gie, who as noted earlier is a well-known economist and persistent Suharto critic who preferred to stay in an indigenous-dominated party, the PDI. Commenting for the *Media Indonesia* article, Kwik said the formation of Parti was a setback for Indonesian nation-building. The majority of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese were already integrated into mainstream society and to revive the idea of an ethnic party would have a negative impact on nation-building. He did not think that such a party would bring benefit to Chinese Indonesians.<sup>19</sup> It is ironic to note that Lieus Sungkharisma, who changed his Chinese name to an Indonesian form, is the person who insisted on establishing an ethnic Chinese party while Kwik Kian Gie, who retains his Chinese name, is in the vanguard of Indonesian nationalism.

Among other prominent ethnic Chinese, two individuals well known for their total assimilation views, K. Sindhunatha and Junus Jahja, later joined PAN. Hendry Kuok joined the Partai Rakyat Demokratik (PRD, Democratic people's party), a minor left-wing party formed in 1996 and banned by the government but allowed to operate again after Suharto's fall. Kuok was among the first to join the party after it was freed from its banning. He has been articulate and active in public comment and he represented the PRD as a member of the 1999 General Election Commission. However, in November 2000 he was reported to have left the PRD and formed the Perhimpunan Demokratik Sosialis (PDS, Democratic Socialist Association) because of a disagreement he had with the PRD's founder, Budiman Sudjatmiko.<sup>20</sup>

### NGOs

Despite such movements into the political arena, many ethnic Chinese still suffered from political phobia. They felt that party politics was dangerous and an ethnic party would not be effective. They preferred to work with associations and pressure groups to fight discrimination. They wanted to establish NGOs that would promote ethnic Chinese interests.

This nonparty, ethnic-Chinese approach was represented by two relatively unknown figures. On August 28, 1998, a group of bilingual (Indonesian and Chinese) ethnic Chinese established an organization called the Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia (PSMTI, literally Indonesian Chinese social clan association). While its Indonesian name is relatively innocuous, its Chinese translation reveals the difficult road that may lie ahead for the organization: Yin Hua Baijiaxing Xiehui (Indonesia's hundred Chinese surnames association). Many *peranakans* have changed their surnames to Indonesian

19. See "Partai Tionghoa dianggap sebagai langkah mundur."

20. "PRD Pecah, Kuok Bentuk PDS" (PRD splits, Kuok forms PDS), *Kompas*, November 16, 2000.

names and lost command of the Chinese language and dialects completely; given these facts, PSMTI is likely to face an uphill battle in any effort to revive Chinese clan spirit. The association's constitution states that its purpose is to promote solidarity between *peranakan* Chinese and other Indonesians, but its members are not allowed to join political parties.<sup>21</sup> PSMTI's president is Tedy Jusuf (alias Him Tek Yi or Xiong Deyi), a retired police brigadier-general who is not known to have been active in the Chinese community. Many Chinese Indonesian did not even know that there was an ethnic Chinese brigadier-general in the Indonesian police force—his Chinese identity was revealed only after the fall of Suharto.<sup>22</sup>

Soon after its founding, PSMTI was in turmoil over internal disagreements. A number of members left the organization and on April 10, 1999, established another ethnic Chinese organization called the Perhimpunan Indonesia Keturunan Tionghoa (INTI; in Chinese, it is called Yinni Huayi Zonghui, Association of Indonesians of Chinese descent).<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to note that the original Indonesian name for INTI was Perhimpunan Indonesia Tionghoa (Indonesian Chinese association), but that was rejected by the authorities. The original Chinese name Huayi Zonghui, or the general organization (*zonghui*) of people of Chinese descent (*huayi*), which specifies something ideologically different than a term such as ethnic Chinese (*huaren* or *huazu*) would. Translated back into Indonesian, the original Chinese name actually meant what is indicated by the organization's current title, not what its original Indonesian name meant. Only after the Indonesian name was changed to this latter one now in use was the organization permitted to be registered. INTI representatives later explained that they chose the original name because "we want to state that we are part of the Indonesian nation (*bangsa Indonesia*) although of ethnic Chinese background but without using the adjective 'descent' (*keturunan*). We are just like ethnic Batak, ethnic Sundanese, and ethnic Javanese."<sup>24</sup> The current official Chinese translation of the organization is Yinni Huazu Zonghui (Ethnic Chinese association in Indonesia).

Like PSMTI, INTI's goal was to promote solidarity between ethnic Chinese and indigenous Indonesians and contribute to the country's develop-

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21. PSMTI, *Anggaran Dasar Rumah Tangga Program Kerja 1998* (Rules of association and the 1998 work program) (Jakarta: PSMTI, 1998) p. 15.

22. Tedy Jusuf, *Sekilas Budaya Tionghoa di Indonesia* (A glimpse of Chinese culture in Indonesia) (Jakarta: Ibid., 2000), back cover. Tedy received some Chinese education in Jakarta up to the middle school level before entering the army's academy.

23. See "Hoakiao Berpolitik."

24. See the editorial in INTI's journal *Suara Baru* (Media INTI) 1:3 (April 2000), p. 3.

ment.<sup>25</sup> Its organizational form is similar to that of *Zhonghua Zonghui* (General association of the Chinese), a well-known organization in Indonesia. INTI's president is Eddie Lembong (alias Wang Youshan), a pharmacist who speaks some Chinese and had led a group of ethnic Chinese on a visit of various Chinese organizations in Malaysia, presumably in an attempt to learn more from the experiences of ethnic Chinese in other countries. The ceremony launching INTI was attended by 3,000 people, including not just ethnic Chinese but also indigenous political leaders.<sup>26</sup> It would appear the leaders of the association had attempted to gain support not only from the Chinese community but also from indigenous leaders.

### *Youth Organizations and Associations*

The fall of Suharto also released social forces that had long been suppressed. For example, there were many ethnic Chinese youths who became exposed to new ideas and were active in the broader student movement. Unlike their parents and elders, these youths felt frustrated with the situation faced by ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and the slow pace with which their problems were being dealt. They wanted rapid changes and an end to racial discrimination once and for all. However, like their elders, the young ethnic Chinese were also divided in their political orientations, especially when it came to questions over what kinds of groups should be formed. Some wanted to work within the Chinese Indonesian community and establish ethnic organizations while others wanted to form non-ethnic ones not necessarily bound by the community. It is worth noting that the May riots triggered the formation of many such organizations, which arose in the violence's immediate aftermath to help its victims, especially the ethnic Chinese ones.

The organizations these young Chinese founded engaged in various activities. For example, *Solidaritas Pemuda Pemudi Tionghoa Untuk Keadilan* (SIMPATIK, Chinese youth solidarity for justice) published its own newsletter. Some SIMPATIK members joined radical parties such as the PRD while others formed their own association. A few wanted to start a "revolution" and become "heroes" (*pahlawan*) in their struggle against racial injustice.<sup>27</sup> Some of the other groups established included *Gerakan Perjuangan Anti Diskriminasi* (GANDI, Anti-discrimination movement) and *Komite Aliansi Kepedulian Masyarakat Surabaya* (Kalimas, Committee of social concern of Surabaya); their goals were to help the victims of the riots.

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25. "Perhimpunan Indonesia Tionghoa Perjuangan Asimilasi Total" (Indonesian Chinese Association strives for total assimilation), *Suara Pembaruan*, April 12, 1999.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Street interviews conducted following a meeting with SIMPATIK members, Jakarta, June 1999.

*Multiethnic Organizations*

While many indigenous Indonesians disagreed with the idea of forming ethnic-based organizations, especially political parties, there have been new developments after the fall of Suharto. Many indigenous Indonesians have condemned racialism and expressed their desire to stop discrimination against ethnic Chinese in the wake of the riots. For example, there is Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa (SNB, National Solidarity), which is led by the husband and wife team of Esther Jusuf (Shen Meiling) and Arnold Purbo, young Chinese and Batak lawyers, respectively, who fought fearlessly for the ending of racial discrimination. A group of mainly indigenous Indonesian women led by a University of Indonesia professor, Saporinah Sadli, launched their own organization called Komisi Nasional Anti-Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (Indonesian commission on violence against women), though more generally referred to as Komnas Perempuan (National commission of women). The group has one ethnic Chinese member, Mely G. Tan, a sociologist who is research director of Jakarta's Atma Jaya University. The commission's objective is to protest abuse and discrimination against women in Indonesia, both indigenous and ethnic Chinese. In the commission's view, the crimes committed against ethnic Chinese women in the riots should be solved in a broader national context, i.e., crime against Indonesian women in general.

### The 1999 Elections: Triumph of the Non-Ethnic Approach

The end of Suharto's New Order saw a renewed emphasis placed on the promotion of basic human rights by pro-reform advocates and Suharto's opponents. Many Chinese Indonesians argued that being able to form an ethnic-based party is part of these basic rights. As touched on earlier, the response of *pribumi* Indonesians has been ambivalent. But what about the ethnic Chinese masses? The section that follows examines what support Chinese voters did or did not give to these ethnic-based parties and why.

*Tempo Survey on Party Preferences*

Indonesia's first democratic election since 1955 was held in June 1999. Prior to the June balloting, *Tempo*, a leading Indonesian weekly in Jakarta, conducted a survey among ethnic Chinese in five cities—Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Pontianak, and Medan—and published the results toward the end of February.<sup>28</sup> The five cities were chosen because they have large ethnic Chinese communities. The 753 people questioned were selected based on their representativeness of the Chinese Indonesian community, coming as they did

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28. "Suara Keturunan Untuk Perjuangan" (Ethnic Chinese voice for the PDI-P), *Tempo*, February 14–22, 1999, pp. 60–63.

from various socioeconomic statuses. Students accounted for 24% of the total. There were about 20% respondents from each city; the majority (75%) were under 40 years of age. Christians were over-represented (57%) while Buddhists and Confucianists (5%) were underrepresented.<sup>29</sup> In addition to being somewhat imbalanced in terms of respondents' backgrounds, the sample is obviously small numerically. *Tempo's* editors were fully aware of this. But they also knew that many Chinese were still afraid to express their political views—the survey had been conducted between December 14, 1998, and February 11, 1999, when the situation was still uncertain for Indonesia's ethnic Chinese population. Therefore only the brave ones were ready to express their political views.

One of the questions these individuals were asked was which parties were they likely to vote for during the June election. Each respondent could vote for more than one party. It should be borne in mind that after the end of the New Order, more than 100 new parties were established. The PDI, which was one of the three parties allowed to be formed during the New Order era, split into two organizations—the original PDI, led by a pro-Suharto individual, and the PDI-Perjuangan (PDI-P, Indonesian democratic party-struggle), led by Megawati Sukarnoputri—to contest the election. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) formed the Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB, National awakening party), a party whose backbone is the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama, while as noted earlier Amien Rais of Muhammadiyah established another party, the PAN. These three, together with Golkar and the PPP, form Indonesia's five main political parties in the post-Suharto period.

The surveys were interesting: 70% of the respondents chose Megawati's PDI-Perjuangan, 36% favored PAN, 24% selected Parti, 15% picked PKB, and 13% chose Golkar. Golkar, once the de facto government party, got the smallest response. This presents an interesting paradox on the face of it: the majority of respondents signaled their backing for non-ethnic Chinese parties, yet Golkar was left behind. Why was this so? It seems likely that PDI-P attracted so much support because of two reasons. First, it had the image of being a nationalist party that nonetheless was friendly to ethnic Chinese. Ethnic Chinese thus entertained hopes that it would come to power because they believed that its policies would benefit, or at least not harm, them. Second, Kwik Kian Gie, who has been mentioned earlier, is a prominent figure within the party and well-respected by both Chinese and non-Chinese. Two other ethnic Indonesian parties—PAN and PKB—also gained Chinese Indonesian support due to the moderate stands of their leaders on ethnic issues. As for Golkar's failure, doubtless the majority of respondents rejected the party be-

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29. According to the author's estimate, Christians constituted about 20% of the ethnic Chinese population and Confucianists, 24%.

cause they felt that they had been betrayed by Suharto, Golkar's longtime leader. Conversely, it is likely that the 13% who did choose the party did so because they had benefited under the New Order regime and hoped the party's victory would pay off for them again.

The question remains as to why the majority did not vote for the ethnic Chinese Parti. The party was singled out by 24% of the respondents, demonstrating that the ethnic Chinese organization had a solid core of support, though relatively low. Perhaps it may be that the ethnic Chinese population has really been integrated politically. Seeing themselves as members of the Indonesian nation, they may have believed that one of the major indigenous-dominated parties would be a more effective channel for achieving their goals than an overtly ethnic Chinese one. It should also be recalled, of course, that because of the restrictions on political activities during the New Order, there were not many Chinese who were ready to emerge as national political leaders following the end of the Suharto regime. Furthermore, except for Kwik Kian Gie, there were very few Chinese political leaders who could be considered independent. As for Parti, its problem was that it was led by a coterie of relatively young men who were little known.

There is no common view among Chinese Indonesians regarding ethnic Chinese political parties. Those who favored their formation felt that their interests could be defended only by political representatives of a similar ethnic background. Thus, ethnic Chinese parties were crucial for achieving this goal. Those groups opposed to forming such parties did so because they felt that getting involved in party politics was dangerous, a lesson they perhaps learned from their experiences under Sukarno's Old Order and Suharto's New Order. Others felt that ethnic parties would not be effective because they would be unable to get the support of the indigenous groups who form the overwhelming majority in Indonesia's diverse population. Finally, it should also be recalled that ethnic Chinese subscribed to a range of different political ideologies that cannot be contained in any one political party.

#### *The June 1999 Election*

The *Tempo* survey of ethnic Chinese attitudes regarding the parties that would be contesting the June 9 election proved correct. It is clear that many Chinese Indonesians, just like many of their *pribumi* counterparts, supported the PDI-Perjuangan. In towns and cities with significant numbers of ethnic Chinese dwellers (with the possible exception of Pontianak, as noted below), red PDI-P banners were an overwhelmingly visible presence. Their support for the PDI-P may not have been the result of a conscious effort by an organized community but rather the outcome of the social changes that occurred during the 32 year-long Suharto regime. Most young, educated, and economically active Chinese-Indonesians are Indonesian-speakers and form part of

the country's non-Muslim middle class. In the new era, they clearly saw that their interests lay with the PDI-P rather than Golkar.

Because Parti did not participate in the election, it is rather difficult to know what level of support Chinese Indonesians may have given to a purely ethnic Chinese party. The PBI has a mixed leadership and membership; however, it is dominated by ethnic Chinese in both areas and so offers a reasonable rule against which potential ethnic Chinese support may be measured. The party appears not to have gained significant support from people of that ethnicity in Java where *peranakan* Chinese form the majority. The votes garnered by the PBI appear to have been from the outer islands where there are still large numbers of *totok* Chinese; according to the official results, it won 121,950 votes in West Kalimantan, where Pontianak is located, and 47,511 votes in Riau, where there still are many *totok* Chinese.<sup>30</sup> In the event, the PBI won only one parliamentary seat although they had expected to win a seat in Riau as well. It is also possible that the PBI votes in West Kalimantan did not come purely from the ethnic Chinese population, as some Dayak might also have voted for the party.

Before the elections, PBI leaders were talking about winning at least 10 seats.<sup>31</sup> However, if they were relying primarily on ethnic Chinese support, the disappointing outcome could have been anticipated due to the heterogeneous nature of that community and the small size of their individual concentrations around the country. To win a parliamentary seat in Java a party needs to gain between 280,000–320,000 votes, while in the outer islands the figure is between 170,000–240,000. The PBI won just enough votes in West Kalimantan to get one of the seats that remained after the first seat distribution. Nationally, the party gained 364,291 votes, about 0.34% of the total cast.<sup>32</sup> Exact figures on the percentage of the ethnic Chinese vote the PBI gained are not available. However, assuming that Chinese Indonesians form only about 3% of the population (about 6 million people) and only half of these were eligible to vote, the PBI gained only 12% of the ethnic Chinese vote in this election. This percentage also assumes that all the PBI votes came from ethnic Chinese, although in reality some might have come from non-Chinese, as was the case in West Kalimantan.

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30. For election results, see "1999 General Election: Provisional Results for DPR by Province," *Jakarta Post*, July 16, 1999. Its tally matches up with the official final results.

31. Purnomo Nurdin mentioned this many times to both local and foreign journalists. See "Huaren lingdao Datongdang jinjun guohui" (Ethnic Chinese-led PBI enters the parliament), *Sin Min Daily (Xin min ribao)*, (Singapore) May 26, 1999. In fact, the article was reproduced from *Zhongguo shibao* (China Times, Taiwan).

32. Zhong Tianxiang, "Shui jiang chengwei Yinni huayi daibiao?" (Who will become the representative of Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent?), *Lianhe zaobao* (Singapore), August 2, 1999.

That the PBI managed to win one seat and for a Chinese member of Parliament (MP) is of some significance. After all, that a party often regarded as being an ethnic Chinese one was able to attract enough support that one of its candidates won a seat is indicative to some degree of a revival of interests among Chinese Indonesians in their country's party politics. That said, it should be recalled that the PBI in reality is a Chinese-led multiethnic party, not an exclusively ethnic Chinese one. Furthermore, the PBI MP is not the country's only ethnic Chinese MP. From PAN there is Alvin Lie Ling Piao (Li Ningbiao) representing Semarang and from the PDI-P there are Kwik Kian Gie and Tjiandra Widjaya.

*The Issue of Ethnic Chinese Representatives  
in the New MPR*

Thirty-eight members of the new People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) are appointed by the military to represent its interests. Initially, General Rudini, chairman of the General Election Commission (KPU), announced that the military intended to appoint one person who would represent the Chinese minority. Rudini maintained that the decision to do so was one of the KPU's notable achievements and came about partly due to the efforts of the government representative on the Election Committee, Afan Gaffar.<sup>33</sup> The accomplishment was not quite as unique as Rudini may have wished to make it seem. During the Suharto period, there were two ethnic Chinese appointed MPR members: Jusuf Wanandi (Liem Bian Kie, Golkar 1972-87), and Anthony Salim (Liem Fung Sen, son of tycoon Liem Sioe Liong, 1988-93). Strictly speaking, they did not really represent the ethnic Chinese population as they were appointed by the Suharto regime without consultations with the community.

However, this time the question of appointing an MPR member to represent Indonesia's ethnic Chinese became controversial. The Chinese community was split as to whether such a person was needed and, if so, who should represent the community. On the one hand was the *peranakan* Muslim group represented by Jusuf Hamka (leader of Parpindo) and Junus Jahja. They disagreed with the idea of guaranteeing such representation because, they claimed, Chinese Indonesians were already integrated into society and should not be considered a separate minority anymore. On the other hand were the non-Muslim Chinese, including such prominent individuals as Christianto Wibisono, an intellectual now in the U.S., and Eddie Lembong of INTI. This camp asserted that the existence of an ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesia was a living reality and hence it was necessary for them to have a representative. The two camps' views were debated on television and else-

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33. *Kompas*, July 19, 1999.

where in the mass media. They did not reach an agreement on the issue, although the majority appeared to be in favor of an ethnic Chinese representative, at least for this term. As for who that representative would be, this, too, was another point of contention and debate as Indonesia's ethnic Chinese population is a heterogeneous group. Some possible candidates for the appointed slot in the MPR included Tedy Jusuf, Eddie Lembong, Ester Jusuf, and Susi Susanti (Wang Lianxiang, a badminton champion), but there was no consensus in the community on who should represent them.

All of this, however, became academic as the KPU later decided that there would be no "foreign" minority group representatives. People of Chinese, Arab, and Indian descent were not defined as such as they were already represented through other organizations. Therefore, the seats were given to indigenous minority groups who lived in remote areas and have not been represented in the political system at all. These were people who belonged to the Kubu, Baduy, Dayak, Sangir, and Irian ethnic groups.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in the end a majority of the KPU's membership disagreed with the conclusions reached by Gaffar and Rudini.

Another blow for ethnic Chinese representation in the MPR came with twin decisions regarding religious representation in the MPR. First, it was decided not to include Confucianism (Agama Khonghucu) among the religious groups that could send representatives to the MPR. Followers demonstrated against the KPU because of this exclusion, which was made despite the Habibie regime having stated that Confucianism was one of Indonesia's six official religions. Second, Buddhism, also a Chinese minority religion, was represented in the MPR, but by Siti Hartati (Fu-Zou Liying), a businesswoman who had been close to the New Order regime.<sup>35</sup> Her appointment prompted about 700 Buddhists to demonstrate against her because of those ties.

After the fall of Suharto, some indigenous Indonesians welcome the ethnic Chinese and consider them as part of the Indonesian nation (*bangsa*). However, it appears that the majority still feels that the Indonesian nation should be defined in the indigenous terms. Even the *peranakan* Chinese are still not yet accepted as "full-fledged members" of the Indonesian nation.

#### *The October 1999 Presidential Election and Aftermath*

October 21 saw the holding of a presidential election in the MPR. One of the contestants, B. J. Habibie, withdrew from the race in the last minute, leaving

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34. *Biodata Anggota DPR-MPR Republik Indonesia Periode 1999–2004* (Biographical data of DPR-MPR members for 1999–2004) (Jakarta: Biro Humas Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 1999), pp. 276–78.

35. Yu Gecang, "Yajjada kongjiao xintu shiwei kangyi shou qishi" (Confucianists in Jakarta demonstrate against discrimination), *Lianhe zaobao*, August 20, 1999.

Megawati Sukarnoputri and Abdurrahman Wahid to compete for the position. Islamic political organizations and Golkar combined forces to elect Wahid president of Indonesia. Once in office, Wahid, who is well known for his sympathy for minority groups and religions, began to respond to ethnic Chinese complaints over racial discrimination. He had certain discriminatory laws and regulations revoked and Confucianism's status as an official minority religion restored, allowing its adherents to register the religion on their national identity cards.

Gus Dur also appointed Kwik Kian Gie as coordinating minister for finance and industry. This is the highest cabinet position that an ethnic Chinese has ever obtained in the history of the republic, though Kwik was representing the PDI-P, not the Chinese community. Another ethnic Chinese, Sofjan Wanandi (Liem Bian Khoon), a former close associate of Suharto who fell out of favor in the waning days of the latter's regime, was appointed as the chairman of the National Economic Committee. Wanandi represents the *cukongs* (Chinese tycoons) while Kwik represents Indonesian nationalists. At the time of their appointments, conflict erupted between the two over these questions of representation. Wanandi claimed that Kwik represented the Chinese and therefore urged the Chinese Indonesian community to support Kwik, arguing that if Kwik were to fail in his quest it would be regarded as a failure of the community as a whole. Kwik countered that he did not represent that community but rather all Indonesians in general, adding a dig that he did not work for the interests of Chinese businesses. Gus Dur retained both while this dispute played itself out, probably because he wanted to balance the PDI-P with the non-PDI-P group in his government. However, his administration was confronted with many difficulties in its first year and 10 months after he had formed his cabinet he was forced to reshuffle it in the face of opposition. Kwik Kian Gie was replaced in the new cabinet by Rizal Ramli, an indigenous Indonesian close to Gus Dur. In fact, the new cabinet was filled with people close to the president personally; there are no more ethnic Chinese ministers.

Concurrent with the crisis in the national government, the PBI itself also saw open conflict within its leadership. The party convened an extraordinary congress in March 2000 that resulted in the ouster of the old leadership led by Nurdin Purnomo (Wu Nengbin). The new leadership is headed by L. Sutanto (Lin Guanyu), the only PBI MP, and includes four deputy chairmen: one is Dayak while the rest are ethnic Chinese.<sup>36</sup> But Nurdin refused to accept defeat. As a result, there are now two PBI central boards.

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36. "Yinni Huaren Datongdang nao fenlie" (Indonesian Chinese PBI party splits), *ibid.*, February 27, 2000.

## Ethnic Chinese Society after the 1999 Elections

The ethnic Chinese community has remained active in Indonesian civil society since the 1999 elections. It has been enjoying its new freedom and the ability to express its ethnic feelings in public. There has been a revival of interest in Chinese ethnicity in general. The *peranakan* group succeeded in restoring recognition of Confucianism, while the *totoks* began to reestablish their clan associations, competing with such *peranakan*-dominated organizations as PSMTI and INTI. Following his ouster from the PBI, Nurdin Purnomo organized an Indonesian Hakka association and put together a world congress of Hakka associations in Jakarta in April 2000. He got Gus Dur to officiate the ceremonies and the president delivered a speech casting the ethnic Chinese in a positive light, expressing his hopes that they would invest more and help Indonesian economic recovery.<sup>37</sup>

Many new publications have emerged since Suharto's fall and the subsequent elections. New Chinese language dailies and magazines sprouted like mushrooms. There are now five Chinese dailies in Jakarta and at least two Chinese language magazines; many of these publications are run by Chinese businessmen and politicians. Whether these newspapers and magazines will be able to survive given their limited readership and limited advertising remains to be seen. Chinese vernacular writers established two associations, 32 years after the last one had been disbanded. As for television and movies, the final years of the Suharto regime saw some loosening up of controls, with the products of studios in Hong Kong and Taiwan being dubbed in Indonesian and shown for the first time. The number of such showings increased under the new cultural freedoms of Gus Dur's administration. In addition, Chinese books, music, and video-CDs have become widely available in the Chinatowns.

All in all, many ethnic Chinese have used the new momentum to alter their sociocultural and political position, with quite visible results. In the words of one individual writing in a journal run by ethnic Chinese, "Anything can be done in the Gus Dur administration."<sup>38</sup> However, this is not strictly the case. The power of the presidency has been reduced and at the time of writing Gus Dur leads a small party that has only 51 of the 495 seats in parliament. He is politically weak and there are many constraints on his room to act. Gus Dur has not been able to put those who were involved in various human rights

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37. Yu Gecang, "Waxide yu kejiaren zhu Yinni zhenxing jingji (Wahid urges the Hakkas to help re-vitalize the Indonesian economy), *ibid.*, April 21, 2000. The article was republished in *Yinni yu Dongxie*, no. 107 (April 2000), p. 22.

38. "Bukti Penghapusan Diskriminasi Agama di Indonesia" (Evidence of abolishment of religious discrimination in Indonesia), *Sinergi* 2:19 (May 2000), p. 31.

abuses that took place as the Suharto regime fell, including during the anti-Chinese riots, on trial. Sporadic disturbances directed against the ethnic Chinese continue to occur. Anti-Chinese forces are not yet absent and the uneven distribution of income, which is perceived along racial and ethnic lines, still remains. The force of Indonesian nationalism—especially of the indigenous sort—is still strong. It is unlikely that schools that can provide their instruction in Chinese will be opened and many discriminatory laws and regulations against the Chinese have not been revoked.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, there have been problems with putting into practice the changes that should have been expected from the revocations of laws and regulations that have occurred. And since the beginning of 2001, Gus Dur has faced more problems and been threatened with impeachment. All told, his position is weak and so he has little room to maneuver at present with respect to issues of concern to Chinese Indonesians.

### Conclusion

Prior to the Suharto period, Chinese Indonesian politics adopted an ethnic approach. The resulting emphasis on Chinese ethnicity led to the flourishing of political and cultural organizations focusing on that background. During Suharto's New Order, however, the ethnic approach was prohibited. Chinese Indonesians were not allowed to organize ethnic sociopolitical organizations. Non-ethnic parties were the only avenue through which they could hope to participate in politics.

This situation changed with the anti-Chinese riots of May 1998. The disturbances resulted in the growth of ethnic consciousness among Chinese Indonesians. The release of democratic forces spurred by the fall of Suharto gave rise to a rebirth of the ethnic approach in Chinese politics; however, the non-ethnic approach remains strong. The present pattern appears similar to that of the pre-Suharto period: Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority is utilizing a combination of the two approaches to promote its sociopolitical interests. That two strategies are being pursued, however, is more a reflection of the divisions in the community rather than the outgrowth of any conscious effort. Many ethnic Chinese have found it expedient to adopt such a dual approach. However, it was quite evident in the 1999 election that the non-ethnic approach was winning out. The explicitly ethnic Chinese political party Parti did not participate while the Chinese-led, multiethnic PBI performed poorly. Massive Chinese support instead went to a *pribumi*-domi-

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39. A prominent *peranakan* lawyer, Frans Winarta, has compiled the list of 58 laws/regulations that contains racial discrimination. See Panitia Kerja Penuntasan Hukum Peristiwa Kerusuhan (Working Committee on the Legal Solution of the Riots), "Tindak lanjut penuntasan hukum peristiwias 13–15 Mei 1998" (Follow-up on the legal solution to the May 13–15 riots) (photocopy) (Jakarta, June 21, 2000).

nated party, the PDI-P. Nevertheless, there are many ethnic Chinese pressure groups such as INTI and PSMTI that are active in promoting ethnic Chinese culture and interests. They lobby the government on the ethnic Chinese community's behalf, as they see it, to get discriminatory laws and practices removed.

Chinese Indonesians have utilized the new political environment to improve their position. They have enjoyed their new political freedoms and much has been achieved in a short period of time. However, few discriminatory laws and regulations have been abolished and the problems the Chinese Indonesian community faces are far from being solved. Although more Indonesians have been able to accept the ethnic Chinese as part of the Indonesian nation, anti-Chinese feelings are still deeply rooted. Thus, in the short-term Indonesia is still likely to see ethnic conflict between its citizens of Chinese and non-Chinese backgrounds.