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Indonesia is a multiethnic and multi-religious society. According to the 2010 Population Census, there are more than 145 ethnic groups in Indonesia, of which the largest is still the Javanese (40.05%), followed by the Sundanese (15.50%), Malay (3.70%), Batak (3.58%), Madurese (3.03%), Betawi (2.87%), Minangkabau (2.73%), Buginese (2.71%), Bantenese (1.96%), Balinese (1.66%), Acehnese (1.44%), Dayak (1.36%), Sasak (1.34%), and Chinese (1.20%) (Ananta et al. 2015: 78). In terms of religion, the population can be divided into Muslims (87.51%), Christians (Catholics/Protestants, 9.90%), Hindus (1.69%), Buddhists (0.72%), and Confucians (0.05%) (Ananta et al. 2015: 257). Why did these multiethnic and multi-religious groups come together to form a country called the Republic of Indonesia?

Dutch colonialism and the birth of modern Indonesia

Indonesian nationalists have argued that Indonesia today is the continuation of the great Buddhist Srivijaya empire (7th to 13th centuries) and the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit empire (13th to 16th centuries). This is misleading. In fact, Indonesia is a modern construct. The emergence of modern Indonesia is closely linked with Dutch colonialism. It was Dutch colonial rule that united various ethnic groups in the Indonesian archipelago under one colonial administration and one economic and legal system. It was also under Dutch rule that the Dutch East Indies underwent major social change, including the emergence of modern Indonesian elite, which produced a nationalist movement. This nationalist movement emerged in the twentieth century and was led by the Western-educated indigenous Indonesian leaders whose aim was to eliminate Dutch rule and establish a modern Indonesian nation-state along the colonial boundaries, not the earlier empire boundaries.1

Indonesian leaders, represented by Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta, declared the country’s independence on August 17, 1945, but the actual transfer of power from the Dutch to the Indonesians took place only in December 1949. The inclusion of West Irian (now Papua) into the Indonesian territory took place only in May 1963. Nevertheless, the nationalist movement, which can be seen as part of the nation-building process, had started prior to World War II.

All the Indonesian nationalist symbols were created during the nationalist movement: national language, national anthem, and national flag. Nevertheless, one needs to note that there were at least two types of nationalist movements: secular and Islamic. In the Indonesian youth movement
before World War II, the Islamic Youth attended the Youth Congress of 1928 but did not endorse the well-known Youth Pledge (Sumpah Pemuda), which advocated Indonesian unity based on a secular nation, unifying language, and unitary state (Suryadinata 1998: 59). During the 1945 Constitution debates, the Islamic groups wanted to insert a clause requiring the Muslims to practice Syariah Law, but it was eventually dropped in order to secure unity (Suryadinata 1990: 26).

The secular nationalist movement appeared to have the upper hand, and therefore, the concept of the Indonesian nation was more secular than Islamic even though Indonesia is approximately 88% Muslim. Nevertheless, the cleavages have never been fully bridged. The issue of “Islamic State” continues to surface off and on after Indonesia attained independence.

The nation-building process in Indonesia has not been smooth. Ethnic and Islamic feelings have been strong, and in the earlier period of the republic, there were a number of rebellions, with some having strong ethnic characters and others not. This chapter attempts to examine the policy regarding Indonesian nation-building over the last sixty-five years or so and the challenges faced by the national government. However, as the ethnic Chinese have been seen as a “foreign minority group” without a homeland within Indonesia, their positions in the Indonesian nation-state and in the nation-building process are different from those of the indigenous Indonesians. This will be examined separately later.

**Early ethnic conflicts: challenge to the Indonesian nation-state**

Indonesian nationalists proclaimed Indonesia’s independence in 1945. The event was followed by the Indonesia-Dutch armed conflict up to 1949 when the Dutch eventually agreed to transfer political power to the Indonesians. The form of the Indonesian state was at first federal, which would cater to different regional and ethnic interests. However, a few ethnic groups rebelled against the central government and sought to establish an independent state. The most serious incident was in South Maluku (the Moluccas), the homeland of the Christian Ambonese (Feith 1962: 55–71). In April 1950, Soumokil, the former justice minister of the Dutch-created “East Indonesia” state, with the support of the regional executive council of the area, proclaimed the Republic of the South Moluccas (Republik Maluku Selatan or RMS).

The rebellion enjoyed a great measure of local support, but it was eventually quelled by the central government under the leadership of Sukarno (an ethnic Javanese) and Mohammad Hatta (Minangkabau). The military solution was definitely instrumental in crushing the rebellion. However, there were other factors that contributed to the failure of the RMS. Many South Moluccans had family members in other parts of Indonesia, and the rebellion was identified with the Dutch. In the eyes of the Indonesian nationalists, this was a Dutch plot rather than the genuine desire of local people. After the rebellion, Indonesia became a unitary state, which gave more power to the central government in Jakarta.

The second rebellion took place in Aceh, a strongly Islamic area (Sjamsuddin 1985). The Acehnese saw the Indonesian republic as a Javanese- and Minangkabau-dominated state. Aceh was not politically integrated into Indonesia. Communications with the nationalists in Java were weak. Aceh in fact had stronger lines of communication with the Middle East. Initially, Aceh was made a province, but in 1951, the provincial status was abolished, accompanied by the downgrading of the Acehnese leaders, disbanding of Military Division X (the predominantly Acehnese unit of the Indonesian army), and suspension of the right of direct trade with Singapore and Penang, which impacted Acehnese revenues.

The local leader, Daud Beureueh, initiated a movement for autonomy, but in 1953, it developed into a separatist movement. He proclaimed Aceh an Islamic state. His troops held many urban centers until 1954. However, the rebellion eventually failed. The government employed
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soft and hard strategies: it restored the provincial status of Aceh and appointed an Acehnese as the governor. Using strong military operations and the divide-and-rule policy among the Acehnese, the rebellion was eventually crushed.

There was another rebellion in West Java launched in August 1949. This rebellion was initiated by Kartosuwirjo, who attempted to establish an Indonesian Islamic State or Daarul Islam Indonesia (DII). The insurgency reached its peak in 1957 but was largely confined to West Java. It was eventually crushed by the central government in 1962. This rebellion was quite similar to the Pemerintah Revolusi Republik Indonesia (PRRI)/Piagam Perjuangan Republik Indonesia (Permesta) rebellion of 1956–1958, which was within the context of Indonesia, not as a separate state based on ethnicity.

The third rebellion involved the Irian Jaya Independence Movement and was known as the Free Papua Movement (Osborne 1985). Unlike the two earlier separatist movements, the Free Papua Movement is recent and smaller in scale. Therefore, it has not yet developed into a major threat. It is clear that the central government did not hesitate to resort to military means to maintain territorial integrity. However, the fact that there were so few separatist movements since the formation of the Republic of Indonesia cannot be solely explained in terms of the government’s control and suppression.

Moderate government policy and a certain degree of national integration are two contributing factors that should not be overlooked. In order to hold various ethnic groups together and integrate them into a new form of political unit called Indonesia, Indonesian nationalists have introduced a broad-based policy of national integration. The motto of “unity in diversity” (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika) allows ethnic minorities to retain a large degree of cultural autonomy. However, there is also an integrating force that compels the minorities to join the major stream through the national schools and national institutions. The popularization of national symbols and the national ideology, Pancasila, is also aimed at integrating the multi-ethnic Indonesian society. At one time, during the Sukarno era, the government had also used the creation of an external konfrontasi threat to unite the people.

National integration and the Pancasila ideology

The measures of national integration adopted by the Indonesian government since independence include the promotion of a national language, national education, national symbols, national institutions, internal transmigration, and the national ideology or Pancasila.

The most obvious measure was the promotion of an Indonesian national language and education, and this was among the most successful. As Indonesian national schools are required to use Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction, Indonesians of different ethnic groups are “nationalized” by learning the Indonesian language. The 2010 population census shows that 92.08% of Indonesians are able to speak Bahasa Indonesia (Ananta et.al. 2015: 276). However, those who use Indonesian as a daily home language only constitute 19.95%. The majority of Indonesians continue to speak their ethnic language at home, with the exception of three ethnic groups: Betawi, Chinese, and Batak (Ananta et al. 2015: 282).

Indonesian national symbols, such as the national flag, national anthem (Indonesia Raya), and national emblem (the Garuda with its motto: Bhinneka Tunggal Ika) are generally accepted by the Indonesian population of various ethnic groups. The presence of national institutions, such as the national armed forces instead of the ethnic armed forces, and national political parties instead of ethnic parties (with the exception of Aceh) indicates the sense of national belonging in the country. Internal transmigration has not been very successful as it often created ethnic enclaves and ethnic conflicts.
Last but not least is the national ideology Pancasila – the “five principles” – which was first formulated by Sukarno during the preparation of Indonesia’s independence in 1945. The first principle, “Belief in One Almighty God,” was aimed at embracing all religious Indonesians. However, it also denies a special position for Islam, reflecting a secular vision of an Indonesian state and culture. The last four principles – Humanism, Indonesian Unity, Democracy, and Social Justice – are ideas that are supposed to be shared by all ethnic groups.

The state ideology was already a required school subject during the Guided Democracy period (1959–65), but during Soeharto’s New Order (1966–1998), the teaching of Pancasila in school was intensified. Between 1978 and 1990, the government established an institute to instill the Pancasila ideology, making it a requirement for all civil servants to take the course and pass the examination. In the view of the Soeharto government, Pancasila meant religious pluralism. Under the umbrella of Pancasila, religious freedom was guaranteed. However, it required Muslim organizations to accept Pancasila as their ideological foundation as well. This was opposed by many Islamists who felt that Pancasila should be subordinate to Islam. The Pancasila ideology attempts to separate Islam as a religion from Islam as a political force. While the government tolerated and even encouraged Islam as a religion (as evidenced in its sponsorship in building mosques and assisting Islamic boarding schools), it suppressed political Islam before 1990.

It is worth noting that Islamists’ disagreement with “religious pluralism” is evidence of their opposition to the proposal of Pancasila as the Indonesian ideology during both the Sukarno and Soeharto eras. When Sukarno was in power, Islamic parties (both Nahdatul Ulama and Masyumi) opposed Pancasila; this resulted in the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in 1959.

During the New Order period, when Pancasila became the sole ideology, there was both peaceful and violent opposition. The Tanjung Priok affair in 1984 and the subsequent bombings were closely related to the Pancasila issue. However, unlike the Sukarno era, Indonesia under Soeharto succeeded in making Pancasila the predominant ideology. Even the official Islamic party, the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), was required to drop Islam as its party ideological foundation and profess Pancasila.

The strong defender of the Pancasila ideology has been the Indonesian military, which is dominated by moderate Muslims and non-Muslims. The military as an institution also serves as a means to integrate Indonesian society.

Soeharto ruled the country for 32 years but was eventually forced to step down in May 1998, following the economic crisis and massive student demonstrations. His vice president B. J. Habibie succeeded him and was forced to introduce reform. The post-Soeharto era is therefore known as the “Reform Era” (Era Reformasi). After the fall of Soeharto, Pancasila no longer had a monopoly of the state ideology. Political parties based on Islam, not Pancasila, emerged. In the 1999 elections, for instance, more than 20 out of 48 parties that participated in the general elections were Islamic Parties; in the 2004 general election, five out of 24 parties were Islamic Parties. In the 2009 general election, five out of 38 parties were Islamic parties, and in 2014, also five out of 12 political parties were Islamic parties (Suryadinata 2014).

Political Islam became respectable and its development is often at the expense of the Pancasila ideology (Suryadinata 1986: 48–9). Nevertheless, Pancasila-based parties are still the largest winners in every general election. Golkar and PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi-Perjuangan) are still based on Pancasila; even some Muslim organization-linked parties have also used Pancasila as the ideology of their parties: the PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, linked to NU) and PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, linked to Muhammadiyah) are two examples. Many have realized that if Pancasila is replaced by Islam, the young Indonesian nation is likely to break up.

If Pancasila was the only ideology used to unite the country in Indonesia before the fall of Soeharto, since his departure, the Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (Supreme Consultative
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Council, MPR) has been eager to promote three other ideological pillars: the UUD 1945 (1945 Constitution), the concept of the Indonesian Unitary State (NKRI or Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia), and the principle Unity in Diversity (Bhineka Tunggal Ika). The PDI-P, the political party led by Sukarno’s daughter Megawati Sukarnoputri, would like to socialize these ideological pillars, but some Islamic parties have disagreed (Sinar Harapan 2013).

Nation-building or nation-destroying?

Indonesian national unity encountered a crisis when East Timor left Indonesia to become an independent country. In 1975, Indonesia invaded East Timor and annexed it the following year. This created a major problem for Indonesia later, as Jakarta was determined to integrate East Timor by force. East Timorese rebels were temporarily defeated but opposition to Indonesia never disappeared. The harsh rule of the Indonesian military eventually gave rise to even more fierce resistance. Demonstrations and riots in 1992 and 1996 received international attention and the Soeharto regime was severely criticized for the human rights violations. In 1996, two East Timorese, Bishop Carlos Filipe Belo and Jose Ramos-Horta, received the Nobel Peace Prize, again highlighting the international importance of the East Timor issue. After the fall of Soeharto, clashes and demonstrations continued and UN peacekeeping forces, led by Australian troops moved in. Habibie finally agreed to have a referendum on the independence of East Timor. The referendum (September 1999) confirmed the desire of the East Timorese to leave the Republic of Indonesia. Many maintained that this marked the beginning of the disintegration of the Republic of Indonesia. But this proved not to be the case.

East Timor was unique. It had been a Portuguese colony and was never part of the territories of the Dutch East Indies; its annexation by Jakarta was never recognized by the UN. Therefore, the situation was different from Irian Jaya (Papua) and Aceh. But with the independence of East Timor, many argued that Papua and Aceh might follow suit.

The problems in Aceh and Irian Jaya are not new, however. At one time, they were under control, but harsh military rule during the New Order era resulted in worsening situations. In 1996, the Free Papua Organization (FPO) kidnapped 26 hostages; many of them were Western tourists. They were later rescued by the Indonesian Special Forces. Ethno-nationalism dies hard; the Papuans made use of the Reform Era and the weakened position of Jakarta to demonstrate their resistance against Indonesian rule. In early July, protesters hoisted the separatist West Papuan flag. One person was killed by the police. In the next few days, more flag-hoisting events took place, resulting in violence between Papuans and the police. Up to seven Papuans were killed. At the moment, the separatist movement is still under control.

Toward the end of his presidency, Habibie initiated a major reform in regional administration as reflected in the two laws that he issued in May 1999 regarding the regulations and laws of regional autonomy (Bell 2001). However, these two laws have many ambiguities that have required further refinement. Some considered that these laws were meant to pacify regional ethnic nationalist sentiment, but others argued that in reality they gave rise to minority ethnic nationalism. Regional ethnic identity became stronger, threatening the national unity of Indonesia.

Some regional ethnic groups demanded the state structure be changed from the unitary system to a federal state system, but the central government refused to budge (Nasution et al. 1999). Developments in Aceh after the fall of Soeharto were more promising (Suryadinata 2012b). The post-Soeharto government was eager to resolve the problem, and peace agreements were signed between the government and the rebel group. On December 9, 2002, the Indonesian government and representatives of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) signed a peace agreement, known as the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, in Geneva.
The situation after the Bali Bombings on October 12, 2002, no longer favored GAM. In fact, since September 11, 2001, GAM has been regularly threatened with being labeled as a terrorist group. In the general atmosphere of anti-terrorism, GAM had no choice but to return to the negotiating table. The international community, especially the United States, was also willing to play a more active role in mediating the conflict in Aceh. The Acehnese in general felt tired of bloody clashes and longed for peace. By 2002, both sides had come to realize that they would not be able to win by using force. But it took three more years for both sides to come together. The peace agreement was signed on August 15, 2005, after Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) became president and Jusuf Kalla vice president (Husain 2007: 3–4; BBC 2005). According to the treaty, Aceh would be given a special broad autonomy. The government troops would be withdrawn in exchange for GAM’s disarmament. Local political parties to represent Acehnese interests were allowed. In December 2006, an election was held and the ex-GAM leader Irwandi Jusuf was elected provincial governor.

It should be mentioned that the Indonesian nation during the Soeharto era was defined in terms of an “indigenous” (pribumi) nation. The ethnic Chinese did not have a place in this nation unless they completely gave up their ethnic Chinese identity. However, the fall of Soeharto has seen a change in the concept of an Indonesian nation. Multiculturalism is accepted, and the ethnic Chinese are recognized as an integral part of the nation, at least in theory. Under these circumstances, some Chinese Indonesians feel that there is a future for their community in this young secular republic. Let us look at the journey of the ethnic Chinese in the making of the Indonesian nation-state.

**Ethnic Chinese and the Indonesian nation**

When Sukarno and Hatta declared Indonesia’s independence in 1945, Sukarno used the definition of Ernst Renan’s concept of nation, which is the politico-cultural definition of nation (Risalah 1992: 62–3). Those who regarded Indonesia as their country and were born and lived in the territories of the Republic of Indonesia were recognized as members of the Indonesian nation.

However, Sukarno did not at first explain the terms of membership in the Indonesian nation in any detail. It was only in 1963, when nation-building became a political movement, that Sukarno presented a rather concrete argument. According to Sukarno, the Indonesian nation (bangsa Indonesia) comprises various suku (ethnic groups).

Suku [also] means leg, Indonesian nation has many legs, just like a centipede, which possesses Javanese leg, Sundanese leg, Sumatran leg, Irian leg, Dayak leg, Bali leg, Sumba leg, Peranakan Chinese leg, Peranakan Chinese leg is one of the Indonesian national legs.

(Siauw 1963: 14)

This was the first time that the president of the Republic of Indonesia clearly stated that the “peranakan Chinese” group is a member (suku) of the Indonesian nation. In other words, peranakan Chinese are already members of the Indonesian nation and therefore do not need to be assimilated into the “indigenous Indonesian nation.” Nevertheless, Sukarno did not clarify who these peranakan Chinese are. Are they Indonesian-born Chinese who use Bahasa Indonesia as their home language or all Indonesian Chinese who have Indonesian citizenship?

**Heterogeneous Chinese Indonesians and the nation**

In reality, Indonesian Chinese do not constitute a group. They are divided by generation, economic status, citizenship, political ideology, religion, and culture. The majority have become Indonesian
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citizens and politically oriented toward Indonesia, especially the younger generation. Economically, a large number are in trade and business. In terms of religion, they are Buddhist (53.82%), Christian (35.09%), Muslim (5.41%), and Hindu (1.77%) (Ananta et al. 2008: 30). Culturally, they are quite plural as well. Prior to the Second World War, Indonesian Chinese were divided into “peranakan Chinese” and “totok Chinese” (or migrant Chinese). The former refers to those Chinese born in Indonesia and influenced by the local (Malay/Indonesian) culture. Peranakan Chinese usually lost their command of the Chinese language and used a local dialect or Malay (Indonesian) as a home language and language of communication. Those Chinese who came to Indonesia during the twentieth century usually still retained the Chinese language and culture. They used a Chinese dialect or Mandarin as their home language and the language of everyday communication. Therefore, they were not classified as “peranakan Chinese.” Their children, who were born in Indonesia before or after the Second World War, are still closer linguistically and culturally to the “totok Chinese,” as they attended Chinese-medium schools and lived in a Chinese community environment.

However, after Soeharto assumed power, he prohibited three cultural pillars of the Chinese overseas (Chinese schools, Chinese organizations, and Chinese mass media), and the descendants of the totok Chinese were transformed into a new type of peranakan Chinese: they used Bahasa Indonesia as the daily language and quickly joined the existing peranakan community. In fact, if the concept of “peranakan Chinese” group as a member of the Indonesian nation had actually been developed, Chinese Indonesian national identity could have been resolved. However, when Soeharto came to power in 1966, he not only refused to acknowledge “peranakan Chinese” as an Indonesian suku (ethnic group), but also advocated their total assimilation. He promulgated a “name changing” regulation, “appealing” to Chinese Indonesians to change their names to “Indonesian names.” He also restricted the development of the Confucian Religion (Agama Khonghucu), by withdrawing state recognition of Confucianism in 1979 and forbidding the Confucian organization from holding national congresses.

Soeharto’s assimilationist policy had a profound impact on the Indonesian Chinese community; Indonesian Chinese in the 32 years of Soeharto rule became “more Indonesianized.” But this does not mean that the Chinese Indonesians have been homogenized. The division between “peranakan” and “totok” remains, but the number of totok Chinese has rapidly declined as new Chinese migration has largely stopped and the three Chinese cultural pillars were abolished. However, the totoks are more dynamic in the economic field, and their presence has been strongly felt. It is also worth noting that during the Soeharto rule, almost all totok Chinese obtained Indonesian citizenship and became the new members of the country.

In the era of globalization and democratization, Soeharto was eventually forced to step down, the military power had been undermined, reform was introduced, and political participation had also increased. During the new Reform Era, the government policy also underwent changes. The three pillars of the Chinese culture have largely been restored. Chinese Indonesians have begun to regard themselves as a suku Tionghoa (“Chinese ethnicity”) within Indonesia. Some Indonesian intellectuals have also begun to accept this concept. During the Reformasi era, the government appears to have accepted multi-culturalism rather than mono-culturalism as the basis of the Indonesian nation. But the 32-year rule of the New Order, during which “indigenism” (pribumi-isme) was the basis of the state policy, remains deeply rooted in many Indonesians’ minds. The social distance between Indonesian ethnic groups remains wide. According to a Tempo survey (Tempo 2001:12–13), 52% of respondents indicated that they did not approve of their relatives marrying ethnic Chinese; 78% did not approve of Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent speaking a Chinese dialect or Mandarin. These and other indicators show that, for many Indonesians, the expectation is that Chinese Indonesians will integrate themselves into the mainstream of Indonesian society.
It should be noted that the 1945 Indonesian Constitution (before its amendment in 2002) divided Indonesian citizens into *Indonesia asli* (indigenous Indonesian) and *bukan asli* (non-indigenous); it also stipulated that the Indonesian president should be *Indonesia asli*. After the fall of Soeharto, B. J. Habibie issued a Presidential Instruction stating that the division between *pribumi* (indigenous Indonesian) and *non-pribumi* (non-indigenous Indonesian) should be abolished. However, in the amended 1945 Indonesian Constitution, the term *Indonesia asli* continues to be used in the citizenship clause, but the requirement for both Indonesian president and vice president candidacy has been changed to “Indonesian citizen who was born in Indonesia” (*Undang-Undang* 2007:5).

In July 2006, a new Indonesian citizenship law was promulgated. This law abandons not only the division between indigenous and non-indigenous Indonesians but also the male-centered principle (*Suryadinata* 2016, Vol. I: lii). It defines *Indonesia asli* as an “Indonesian citizen who was born in Indonesia” (*Sadeli* 2007: 31). Frans H. Winarta, a human rights lawyer, noted that this is “a revolutionary law,” which “eliminate(s) all forms of discrimination against ethnic Chinese” (*Winarta* 2008: 67).

### Ethnic Chinese and political participation

Only Indonesian citizens have the right to participate in Indonesian politics. But Chinese Indonesians were not active during the Soeharto era. As soon as Soeharto stepped down, however, there was a rush to establish new political parties. Chinese Indonesians established three political parties: Partai Reformasi Tionghoa Indonesia (Parti), Partai Pembauran, and Partai Bhinneka Tunggal Ika Indonesia (PBI). The Partai Pembauran was transformed into a social organization soon after its formation; Parti did not develop. Only the PBI contested the 1999 election, but it performed poorly, gaining only one seat in the national parliament (from West Kalimantan). It failed to run in subsequent general elections. Based on this and other indicators, efforts to create Chinese political parties in Indonesia now appear finished.

In the four general elections after the fall of Soeharto (1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014), however, many Chinese Indonesians were elected to national and provincial parliaments as members of mainstream party tickets (*Suryadinata* 2014). In 1999, there were eight Chinese Indonesians in the parliament: five from the PDI-P, one from Golkar, one from PAN, and one from PBI. In 2014, there were 14 Chinese Indonesian MPs: one from PD, one from PKB, one from PAN, and 11 from the PDI-P (*Suryadinata* 2014).

Since the 1999 general elections, Chinese Indonesians have also been elected to the posts of mayor or deputy regent. These include Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Zhong Wăn xué 钟万学, alias Ahok), who was Bupati of East Belitung and later, deputy governor of Jakarta; Hasan Karman (Huang Shàofán 黄少凡), mayor of Singkawang (West Kalimantan); and Tjhai Chui Mei (蔡翠媚), also mayor of Singkawang (*Suryadinata* 2012a:13; *Harian Yin Hua* 2017).

Outside the field of party politics, many Chinese Indonesians since the fall of Soeharto have established socio-cultural organizations. The *Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia* (PSMTI) and *Perhimpunan Indonesia Tionghoa* (INTI) are two prominent ethnic Chinese NGOs. Seen from the mainstream society, the participation in the ethnic Chinese NGOs is less significant compared to that of indigenous Indonesian-dominated NGOs.

While political participation is a way to integrate into Indonesian mainstream society, the process has not always been smooth. Racial and ethnic sentiments have not gone away easily, and racist attacks have been used in order to defeat political opponents. This has happened during many national, provincial, and municipal elections. The most recent examples are the Jakarta gubernatorial elections on July 11, 2012, and February 15, 2017.
Joko (Jokowi) Widodo–Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (alias Ahok) contested the 2012 gubernatorial election as a pair, but Basuki was attacked by their opponents for his ethnic and religious background (Chinese and Christian). Surprisingly, Jakarta voters eventually elected the Jokowi-Basuki pair. Halfway into his gubernatorial term, Jokowi was nominated by the PDI-P to contest the 2014 presidential election; he eventually won. Basuki succeeded him to the governorship. Both Jokowi and Basuki and later, Basuki and Djarot, did a good job in improving the living environment and combating corruption. When Basuki-Djarot announced their intention to run in the 2017 gubernatorial election, their opponents again used ethnic and religious appeals to discredit the pair. Their opponents focused their attacks on Basuki, who was accused of blaspheming Islam, which resulted in two major anti-Basuki demonstrations in Jakarta. In February 2017, Basuki, who had been the most popular candidate before being accused of blasphemy, won less than 50% of the votes and was therefore required to contest a second round. On April 19, 2017, Basuki lost the runoff election to Anies Baswedan. Shortly thereafter he was convicted of blaspheming against Islam and sentenced by a North Jakarta district court to two years imprisonment.

Chinese Indonesian identity and the rise of China

The democratization of Indonesia caused many ethnic minorities, including the Chinese, to be ethnically conscious once again and to aspire to retain their ethnic identity. This is particularly the case with the totok Chinese who have adopted Indonesian citizenship. The rise of China as a major economic, political, and military power is another factor that contributed to the revival of ethnic Chinese identity in Southeast Asia in general and in Indonesia particularly.

Although in law, Beijing today continues to divide Chinese citizens from non-Chinese citizens among the Chinese overseas, in practice, it tends to blur the distinction between Chinese citizens and foreign citizens of Chinese descent; this makes the national status of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia problematic (Yang 2008: 84–5). Policy today tends to regard foreign citizens of Chinese descent as “Chinese citizens”; this makes the national status of the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia problematic (Yang 2008: 84–5). Many peranakan Chinese elites in Indonesia have complained that the Chinese embassy has been too close to the Chinese Indonesian associations. During the celebration of the Indonesian Independence Day, for instance, Chinese Indonesian associations only invited Indonesian embassy officials but not Indonesian officials. This could jeopardize the interests of the Chinese Indonesians in the long run (Setiono 2008: 77). The peranakan Chinese elite appealed to the Chinese embassy to implement the Zhou Enlai “Overseas Chinese Policy”: to educate Chinese Indonesians to be “loyal to their adopted country” (Setiono 2008:77).

Still today, some Chinese Indonesians have a weak sense of themselves as Indonesian. Under this circumstance, those Chinese who have not integrated themselves into Indonesia’s mainstream society will find identifying with Indonesian nation “less attractive,” as they have not been part of the Indonesian culture to begin with. In the long run, the rise of China and its ambiguous citizenship policy may have an impact on Chinese integration into the Indonesian nation.

Conclusion

Modern Indonesia was a product of the Indonesian nationalist movement, which emerged in the twentieth century under Dutch colonial rule. The movement eventually united the country’s diverse ethnic groups and created the Indonesian nation-state. There were a few ethnic separatist movements, which were quelled by the central government with the exception of
that in East Timor, which became an independent state in 2002, but this was a special case. The only remaining ethnic separatist movement of some scale is that in Papua, but it remains weak.

Although the secular ideology as reflected in Pancasila remains dominant, various Islamist ideologies have at times challenged the national ideology. This can be seen in various political events before and after the fall of Soeharto. This may affect the continuing process of nation-building in Indonesia.

The position of ethnic Chinese in the Indonesian nation has greatly improved. Before the fall of Soeharto, they were considered as a non-homeland minority and were expected to assimilate themselves into indigenous society. Since the dawn of Reformasi, however, the government has abandoned the concept of nationhood premised on indigenousness, and ethnic Chinese have been welcome to join the Indonesian nation. However, prejudice against the ethnic Chinese, although diminished, continues.

Notes

1 With regard to the nationalist movement and the emergence of an Indonesian nation, see my discussion in Suryadinata 2015:20–2.
2 Name-changing regulations were promulgated in 1966. It is interesting to note that the so-called Indonesian name is difficult to define; many argued that as long as it is not a “Chinese name,” it can be accepted as an Indonesian name.
3 In the late colonial period, the Chinese constituted about 2.8–3% of the total Indonesian population. This was an estimate based on the 1930 population census, which shows that the Chinese constituted 2.03% (Suryadinata 2004). Since 1930, information on the size of the Chinese community in Indonesia has been unavailable. However, since the 2000 population census, the information on the size of the Chinese population has been included again. The census has been based on self-identification reporting. There were about 0.86% Chinese in 2000 and 1.2% Chinese in 2010. The actual number may be higher but not more than 2%, as population growth among Chinese is low, few new Chinese migrants have arrived, and many Chinese emigrated (Suryadinata 2004).

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