Chinese-Indonesians in Local Politics: A Review Essay

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Introduction

Despite various changes that happened after the tragic event of May 1998, including the latest revision of Citizenship Law (issued as No. 12/2006) which have given the Chinese-Indonesians social and political space to express their cultural identity, the situation is still regarded by some Chinese-Indonesians as potentially dangerous as during the New Order period. Anti-Chinese sentiment shown by Malay people of Pontianak at the beginning of 2008, before and after the issuing of the city mayor’s decree no 127 which prohibited the performance of dragon dance in the celebration of Chinese New Year, is seen as an indication of how shaky the position of the Chinese-Indonesians is. Before that, the statement of Jusuf Kalla in Oct 12, 2004 (Sinar Harapan, Oct 12, 2004) as the newly elected Vice President concerning his intention to discriminate Chinese-Indonesian businessmen through different treatments for small-medium enterprise vis-à-vis big enterprise has also shown that the Chinese-Indonesians are not treated as equal citizens yet.

Obviously government politics about abolishing discrimination against the Chinese-Indonesians is mostly rhetoric, even though it was actually entered into law by Habibie (Presidential Instruction No.26/1998), instructing that the terms pri and non-pri should no longer be used in official government policy and business. Likewise, the issuing of Presidential Decree No. 6 of 2000 during Abdurachman Wahid’s presidency, which revokes Presidential Decision No. 14 of 1967 on the restriction of the practices of Chinese customs and traditions into a private domain, was seen by many Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians as the end of discrimination toward the Chinese. However, those political gestures and legal amendments have a very little effect on the long-established hostilities between the Chinese and Indigenous Indonesians. Chinese-Indonesians are still discriminated against and deeply resented, if the Pontianak incident is correctly interpreted. The incident took place right after a Chinese-Indonesian of Pontianak –together with a Dayak- won the competition for the position of Governor and Vice Governor of West Kalimantan. Clearly the Malay of Pontianak could not accept Chinese-Indonesians’ want and need to get involved in local politics.

Jemma Purdey (2005:23) allotted the unchanged reality of the situation of the ethnic Chinese to the doubts remained within Indigenous Indonesians concerning the loyalty of Chinese-Indonesians, and to the myths concerning their economic role and the level of Chinese-Indonesians’ control over national economy that continues to color the perception of many Indigenous Indonesians. She argues that we should “rethink analysis of anti-Chinese violence and much other violence as being simply state-led”, because the incidents post-May 1998 she studied reveal “the extent to which the massa possess a set of memories of violence and also anti-Chinese sentiments and antipathies.” She believes that “the association of Chinese with economic stress, marginalization, and injustice has been deeply entrenched in
Indonesians”, so the position of Chinese-Indonesians, in her opinion, “still warrants their grave and constant wariness.”

Jemma Purdey’s opinion is very much concurrent with other studies on anti-Chinese violence which concludes that, “[i]n the racial violence directed against the Chinese, economic factors are [clearly] at work”. Colombijn and Lindblad, for example, said that, “[s]tarting with the founding of the Sarekat Islam in 1912, Chinese-Indonesians became subject to recurring pogroms when assertive Muslims saw their ascendency in business hindered by the Chinese”. Therefore, for them, “the rioting represented protests against capitalist class, which in Indonesia happens to have a Chinese face”. The perspective was supported by Kees Van Dijk who argued that “Modern means of production expose people to unfair competition or to the fear that they will be unable to compete with other groups on the labour market, Chinese traders and shopkeepers were blamed for a rise in food prices in the early days of the war (WWI)”, even though, as he admitted, the anti-Chinese feelings did not lead to violent outbursts till another couple of years later.

The outbursts that happened in 1946 following the Indonesian revolution were extremely vicious because the Chinese were not only resented as the indigenous people’s economic competitor, but were also being hated as a Dutch collaborator. Perhaps at that time the so-called ‘economic nationalism’ also started to be part of the cause. Therefore, in 1960s, following the presidential regulation No 10/1959 which prohibited alien Chinese to engage in retail trade in the rural areas, and then in mid-1960s, following the ‘communist-related’ abortive coup of 1965 in which Beijing was blamed for its alleged involvement, the attacks on Chinese-Indonesians became exceptionally large scale and nation-wide, indicating more political and ideological variables came into play to bring the violence into its highest degree. So, as we could observe, the anti-Chinese feelings run very deep in the history of Indonesian people, and hence it should not be a surprise if, during the three decades of Soeharto’s authoritarian government, the anti-Chinese riots have been on and off, like ‘unexpected thunders’, until the last and most brutally violent May 1998 riots finally changed the fate of Chinese-Indonesians. Obviously, even though the New Order government was to some extent able to control the degree of violence, but it failed to eliminate it for good. It might be because of lack of want.

Under the circumstances, perhaps the attitude of Chinese-Indonesian organizations found after the May riot of 1998 to avoid politics might have a strong foundation. For example, PSMTI (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia – Indonesian Chinese Social Clan Association) formed in August 28, 1998 under the leadership of an ex-army General Brigjen (Pur) Tedy Yusuf (Xiong Deyi), as the first Chinese-Indonesian non-party organization established after the May riots, tends to position itself as “non-political”:

Even though PSMTI is allowed to conduct activities within the scope of Indonesian legal system, but PMSTI limits itself by not participating in practical politics. Moreover, PSMTI does not affiliate with political parties and social organizations, which have an affiliation with political parties (translated from its original text found in http://www.psmti.net/psmti_, accessed on 1 April 2005).
Similarly, INTI (Perhimpunan Indonesia Keturunan Tionghoa – Association of Indonesians of Chinese descent), which according to Suryadinata was established on April 10, 1999 under the leadership of Eddy Lembong (Wang Youshan) seems to avoid the word ‘political’ in its statement of organizational mission:

Perhimpunan Indonesia Tionghoa, known as Perhimpunan INTI, is a social organization whose characteristics are that of nationality, free, independent, non-profit, and non-partial. The purpose of its establishment is to solve the “Chinese Problem in Indonesia”, the legacy of the past. INTI believes that the involvement of all Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent as a whole in a complete and total way is the absolute requirement for the solution of the “Chinese problem.” Even though the majority of its members are Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent, INTI is not an exclusive organization, but open to all Indonesian citizens that agree with the basic principles and organizational rules, as well as the goal, of INTI.

The reason for INTI to have such a ‘non-political’ or a ‘vague’ political position becomes clear when on 16 May 2007 Eddie Lembong, the previous head of the Chinese-Indonesian Association (INTI), told The Jakarta Post that,

“Chinese-Indonesians need to learn the science of politics, to be a knowledge-based politician in that sense. However, I do not agree with establishing an ethnic-based political party. Most Chinese-Indonesians still regard politics as a taboo matter. They fear talking about politics, let alone being involved in it” (Patung, 2007).

Many Chinese-Indonesians would without doubt relate the fear or the taboo to their traumatic experience of 1965 Incident, which was regarded as negative repercussions for their pre-1965 political choice. But it is not to say that there were no Chinese-Indonesians who liked to organize themselves ‘politically’.

In fact some Chinese-Indonesians – particularly among the younger generation- were eager to form political organizations. One of them is Lieus Sungkarisma or Li Xuexiong, an old Buddhist activist of (at that time) 39 years old – also known as a treasurer of KNPI- National Committee of Indonesian Youth- who together with four other young Chinese-Indonesians (Ponijan Liaw, Cecep Adhisaputra, Alexander Ferry Widjaya, and Julianus Juta) established Parti (Partai Reformasi Tionghoa Indonesia- Indonesian Chinese reform party) in June 5, 1998 in Jakarta (Suryadinata, 2001: 510). The others are: Jusuf Hamka or A Bun, a forestry-licensed businessman and member of Bakom-PKB (Communicative Body for Nation Unity) who established Parpindo (Partai Pembauran Indonesia-Indonesian Assimilation Party), Tan Swie Ling, a Christian writer/journalist who founded Partai Warga Bangsa Indonesia or Indonesian citizen-nation party, and Nurdin Purnomo or Wu Nengbin, owner of a Jakarta travel agency and Head of Hakka Association, who chaired PBI (Partai Bhinneka Tunggal Ika Indonesia – Indonesian unity in diversity party) (Ibid.). But, Parpindo and Partai Warga Bangsa Indonesia did not receive much support, so afterwards nothing much could be said about these two parties. Parti and PBI, on the other hand, continue to exist till the present day, albeit without a strong hold over the majority of Chinese-Indonesian voters. Parti failed the 1999 election’s verification process, while PBI could only win a parliament seat for a Chinese-Indonesian representative from West Kalimantan, L.T. Susanto. However,
later there was an internal split within PBI, which was instigated by the establishment of a ‘new’ PBI by Frans Zhai & LT. Susanto.

Recently there are a growing number of Chinese-Indonesian individuals who become members of DPRD or regional councils for people’s representative, or join *Pilkada* (the election of new regional head) to run for the first position in the government office in several areas of Indonesia. Unfortunately we do not have any statistical figure to report the exact number of Chinese-Indonesians in DPR and DPRD. There are not many stories about those Chinese-Indonesian representatives in DPRD, except perhaps for those who work in the newly established Bangka-Belitung Province known as *Babel*, West Kalimantan and Riau Archipelago – also a new province established in 2002 – known as *Kepri*. This time I will not go to their stories, because I would like to concentrate on those who join *Pilkada* competition. Beside Christiandy Sanjaya who coupled with Cornelis, a Dayak, for West Kalimantan Governor and Vice Governor, there is Goh Tjong Ping in Tuban, East Java who ran for the position of Bupati Tuban (Tuban District Head), even though he failed. Before that, we heard that Bupati Sanggau or the present Head of Sanggau District in West Kalimantan, Yansen Akun Effendy might have a Chinese blood, making him one of the first Chinese-Indonesians into local politics. And then, there is Fifty Lety Indra, a female lawyer of Chinese descent that was supported by *Partai Perhimpunan Indonesia Baru* or PIB party (New Indonesian Association Party), recently changed its name into *Partai Perjuangan Indonesia Baru* (New Indonesian Struggle Party), in coalition with *Partai Amanat Nasional* (National Mandate Party) for the position of Pangkal Pinang Mayor. The appearance of Ahok, Rudianto Tjen, Hidayat Arsani and Ir. Bahar – all are of Chinese origin- as candidates in Bangka-Belitung election for Governor and Vice Governor also shows an interesting development of Chinese-Indonesians’ involvement in local politics.

Others have also expressed interest in local politics. Arwan Tjahjadi, a member of Makassar City’s legislative council of Chinese origin from *Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia* (PKPI – Justice and Indonesian Unity Party), for examples has stated that he is ready to run for the position of Makassar City mayor for the period of 2009-2014 (*Tribun Timur Makassar*, February 21, 2008). Similarly, Eddi Kusuma, a Medan born Chinese-Indonesian businessman who has joined *Lemhannas* (National Defense Institute)’ training workshop on October 29, 2006 in a forum organized by FORDEKA (*Forum Demokrasi Kebangsaan* – National Democracy Forum, one of Chinese-Indonesians associations) has expressed his willingness to become a candidate for Governor or Vice Governor of Jakarta on the 2007 Election, but so far the supports he received from Chinese-Indonesian community were limited to individuals only, and for some unspecified reasons it seems that he failed even to enter the candidacy. Obviously, more Chinese-Indonesians are going to join the competition in the future. The question is how should we interpret this phenomenon?

**Pro and Contra on “Chinese-Indonesian in politics”**

Some people believe that the involvement of Chinese-Indonesian in local politics is long over due, because it is their rights to have a representative in politics. Others even expect that the economic skill and power Chinese-Indonesians possess could help a regional economy, particularly through their international business network and connection. Moreover, there is nothing in regulation on regional government or local election that prohibits Chinese-Indonesians to join the competition.
The fact remains that there is very few support for Chinese-Indonesian candidates from within the Chinese-Indonesian community itself. For example, in Palembang Toni Huang appears and is ready for the candidacy of vice mayor, but since no party wants to support him, he failed even to enter the competition. Considering the number of Chinese-Indonesian people in Palembang—which is amount to about 300,000 people, it should provide a good number of supporters for Chinese-Indonesian candidates (including Toni Huang), but in practice it does not work well (Wijaya, 2008). There are several arguments for not supporting Chinese-Indonesian politics and politicians. One of them is the trauma of political violence Chinese-Indonesians experience at the end of Soekarno period and the beginning of Soeharto’s New Order, how Chinese-Indonesians’ involvement in national politics – thru the Chinese-Indonesians’ biggest and only mass organization at that time, Baperki (Badan Permuyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia – The Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship) has backfired. Chinese-Indonesians were accused of supporting the Indonesian Communist Party’s plan for coup d’état on September 30th, 1965, and because of that for years afterward they were treated –and to some extent were terrorized- as ‘disloyal’ citizens and/or ‘unwanted’ people to be watched over by BAKIN, the national intelligent body (for details, see Coppel, 1983). Today the situation has changed so what Chinese-Indonesians experienced in 1965 might not happen again in the same way it did, but some Chinese-Indonesians –especially the older generation- still feel the trauma to let go the past and move on to a future. Another reason is the memory of May Riot of 1998. Chinese-Indonesians are still afraid that they will become a victim once politics goes wrong. They believe staying in business is the safest way to do, even though it could not guarantee security either, particularly if we count all the anti-Chinese riots that happened during the New Order period when Chinese-Indonesians are non-political, from the 1974 riot, 1980 riot to the peak of them, the 1998 riot. Obviously, not involved in politics is not the answer.

However, being involved in politics also has its risk, as the case of Pontianak revealed. Issue of ethnicity and religion employed in the competition might easily provoke violence against Chinese-Indonesians. It happened particularly when the competition is for a particular position like the position of Governor and Vice Governor, which has a lot of candidates but only one or two winners. Else, a Chinese-Indonesian candidate might be cornered out for his/her own Chinese-ness, like the case of Goh Tjong Ping from Tuban. Goh Tjong Ping failed to become the Head of Tuban District, and strangely, his failure has motivated a mass to explode in violent anger, making it interesting news for mass media. However, in Metro TV’s Today Dialogue, his story was utterly dismissed by Priyo Budi Santoso from Golkar who considered that Goh is ‘not an appropriate name’ for the candidacy of Tuban District Head, indicating what many would call as ‘racist’ attitude on the part of the Golkar representative (Juven, May 11, 2006). Another risk that should be considered by Chinese-Indonesian candidates is, as Nurhayat Arif Permana - a cultural observer from Bangka-Belitung- said, that there is a possibility that if an elected Chinese-Indonesian fails to deliver his or her promise, there might be a repercussion for Chinese-Indonesians as a whole, or for other political candidates of Chinese origin (Tempo Interaktif, Belitung, 19 August 2005).

It would be difficult to contemplate what will happen if the Chinese-Indonesian candidates in actuality fail to deliver their promises, because ethnic factor is not a clear-cut subject matter in the political system we have, not like in Malaysia where racial hierarchy is officially asserted. For one thing, as could be clearly be seen
in the case of Ahok or Basuki Tjahaja Purnama in East Belitung, or that of Christiandy Sanjaya in West Kalimantan, Chinese-Indonesian candidates will always be paired with Indigenous Indonesians. Even though there is no regulation stating that the pair has to be of different ethnic backgrounds, but they all knows that, since most of the provinces or districts consist of multi-ethnic population, their chances to win would be small, if they insist on a pair of a similar ethnic background. Perhaps this is also the reason for Chinese-Indonesian candidates dare to come forward and join the competition, because they would not be alone in that competition. Although the pairing might provide less opportunity to work on their Chinese-ness as fully as they expected, but they might have the advantage of not being seen as “too conspicuously Chinese”, and being held responsible as such.

The Pontianak incident occurred after Christiandy Sanjaya was elected as Vice Governor, I believe, is not caused by a mere rejection of his Chinese background. It is more complicated than that. As some of us might have known, the largest ethnic groups in West Kalimantan are the Dayak, the Malay and the Chinese. Since the bloody conflict between the Dayak and the Madurese at the end 1996, which ended up with the Madurese’s being driven away from the area where the Dayak are majority, the Dayak have been able to re-assert their political rights as one of the ‘native’ owners of the area, together with the Malay who had claimed their rights much earlier through the established history of Malay kingdoms in the area, including the one which was located at the Pontianak city. The Chinese, too, to some extent was able to prove a long history of their settlement in West Kalimantan which could be traced back to the mid of 18th century. With the decentralization process started in 2000, the Dayak have successfully gained control over most of the ‘Dayak’ districts, leaving those considered as ‘Malay’ districts in the hand of the Malay. The issue of power sharing comes up only when the districts could not be easily determined as either ‘Dayak’ or ‘Malay’ districts. In such a case they decided – of course, informally- to have either ‘Dayak as a Head and Malay as a Vice Head’, or ‘Malay as a Head and Dayak as a Vice Head’. Meanwhile the Chinese are mostly considered as ‘a good friend’ to both groups who has no inclination toward politics. Obviously they still believe in the stereotype of Chinese-Indonesian as being ‘a-political’. But, considering the history of Dayak-Chinese relationship, which was very close for most of the time (except for the PGRS-related Incident of 1967 which according to some people was orchestrated by the New Order military in order to turn Dayak sentiment against the Chinese), it is not surprising if the Dayak finally decided to take a Chinese partner rather than a Malay in pursuing their political goals. And this clearly infuriates the Malay, and they choose to blame the Chinese rather than the Dayak for the obvious reason that, as history has shown, Chinese-Indonesians are politically vulnerable.

‘Chinese-Indonesian in Politics’ and Chinese-Indonesian Representativeness

Many Chinese and Indigenous Indonesian observers often talk about the need for Chinese-Indonesian political involvement, or Chinese-Indonesian involvement in politics of Indonesia, because of the absence of such phenomenon during the New Order era. They put emphasis on those Chinese-Indonesians who were appointed into ministry position after the fall of Soeharto’s New Order. Kwik Kian Gie was appointed as Coordinator Ministry for Economics and Finance during Abdurachman Wahid’s and later Megawati’s presidency, while Mari Pangestu is the present Ministry of Industry and Trade, within SBY’s administration. They compare these to the
number of Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesian politics under Soeharto’s regime, which is almost nonexistent except for Bob Hasan (born as The Kian Seng) who was appointed as the minister of industry and trade during the final months of Soeharto government (March 15, 1998). Although their number was not abundant, during the Soekarno era we could list several Chinese names, such as Tan Po Goan (as Ministry for Minority Affairs in Sjahrir’s cabinet, 1946-1947), Siauw Giok Tjhan (as Ministry for Minority Affairs in Amir Sjarifudin’s cabinet, 1947-1948), and later Oei Tjoe Tat and David Cheng was listed among the 100 ministries Soekarno had during the era of his well-known Guided Democracy, 1958-1965 (Siauw, 2005).

The presence of some Chinese-Indonesian in politics becomes a common indicator for a positive change in the political atmosphere as well as on the government policy toward Chinese-Indonesians. Nevertheless, only a few talk about ‘how Chinese-Indonesians as a group should politically position themselves’. Therefore, even though since 2004 Election, more and more Chinese-Indonesian individuals start to venture their way into local politics (into parliaments and local government offices), I think, this has nothing to do with ‘Chinese-Indonesian representativeness’ in national politics, because most of them go into politics for personal interests rather than as a representative of the Chinese-Indonesian community. However, since most of them are dependent upon Chinese-Indonesians’ votes for support, and some of them even deliberately use their Chinese-ness and Chinese-Indonesian networking to gain political supports, albeit they might not be successful in doing so. It becomes very difficult to differentiate this individual effort from a group effort. Moreover, many of these individual are also members of Chinese-Indonesian organizations, and those organizations obviously have no objections or qualms about their members having political positions, even if the organization has publicly stated – like PSMTI did- that they “[do] not affiliate with political parties and social organizations, which have an affiliation with political parties.” They even applaud those people. For example, PSMTI leaders proudly introduced me to their members who become members of local parliaments, when I was invited to one of PSMTI’s internal gatherings in Batam in June 2007.

Even though it is not possible to completely distinguish between Chinese-Indonesian political involvements as an individual and as a group, it would be useful to clarify the issue for our future references. First of all, the idea of having Chinese-Indonesian representations in the national politics was initiated by Chinese-Indonesian political parties that were established not long after Soeharto stepped down from power. The changing political situation, with a strong demand from the people of all walks of life for a political reform, seemed to prompt young Chinese-Indonesians – such as Lieus Sungkharisma - to take the opportunity such a political reform might present. They simultaneously propose for the existence of Chinese-Indonesian representativeness – a representative of Chinese-Indonesians as an ethnic minority group- in the national parliament through establishing Chinese-Indonesian political parties. They calculated the total number of Chinese-Indonesian population for a possible number of seats in the parliament if they could get all the Chinese-Indonesian people to support for the idea. Therefore, placing an emphasis on Chinese identity to have Chinese Indonensian representation in national politics becomes one of the most important goals of the emerging Chinese-Indonesian parties and organizations. However, as mentioned before, the idea has failed to attract the support from Chinese-Indonesian community. Nevertheless, the idea of Chinese-Indonesian representations seems to appeal to some Chinese-Indonesian leaders who later set up Chinese-
Indonesian organizations. I think that is the reason for these Chinese-Indonesian organizations allowing their members to become members of local, regional or national parliaments, or to get involved in local politics. Aiming for Chinese-Indonesian representations in national politics is concurrent with these organizations’ initial claims about Chinese-Indonesians’ being the integral part of Indonesian society, and as such they have to work side by side with Indigenous Indonesians for the betterment of the ‘new Indonesia’, or post-Soeharto’s Indonesia.

However, as explained above, there are pro and contra on the proposal for ‘empowering’ Chinese-Indonesians as an ethnic minority group in politics. Seeing the difficulties of urging Chinese-Indonesians to become a united political community, several Chinese-Indonesians opt for individual actions for expressing their political interests. Still many people doubt the effectiveness of such strategy, and so there is very little support for these self-appointed Chinese-Indonesian politicians. Through the paper presented by INTI’s chief – Eddy Lembong – on INTI organized seminar of February 21, 2004 on “Ethnic Chinese & 2004 Election”, we could implicitly read the ‘political dilemma’ faced by Chinese-Indonesians (in this case INTI members), either those who self-decided to become politicians, or those who were asked to give support to their ‘fellow’ candidates. The dilemma covers several issues, mostly indicating Chinese-Indonesians’ concern about their ‘precarious position’, both as an individual and as a group, within the Indonesian political context. Firstly, those who are interested in joining a political party do not know if they have the right and legitimacy to become the ‘official’ representative of Chinese-Indonesians because Chinese-Indonesians are so diverse in their outlooks; secondly, a Chinese-Indonesian politician could not confidently make a promising projection of whether or not their group’s position as a minority could obtain sufficient power and support to change or improve Chinese-Indonesians’ political status, and so failed to convince other Chinese-Indonesians to support them; and thirdly, those who were asked to support their fellow candidates still have doubts about the advantages of supporting Chinese-Indonesian candidate because Chinese-ness is still an issue within a wider society.

Conclusions

Chinese-Indonesian in politics is not a new phenomenon in the history of Indonesian nation-state, but obviously this phenomenon was highly influenced by the policy of each regime as well as the political situation at the related time. Chinese-Indonesians’ political activities were strongly restricted during Soeharto’s New Order because there was a fervent fear among military officials of communist activities and networking, causing a deep-seated suspicion and prejudice toward Chinese-Indonesians, conveniently labeled as ‘China’s fifth column’ (Coppel, 1983). After the 1998 May Riots, the political situation has changed, and Chinese-Indonesians are allowed to go into politics at the national level, and apparently at the regional and local level as well, indicating the loosening up of government policy toward Chinese-Indonesians. However, from the events that followed Chinese-Indonesian individual movement into politics – such as Pontianak Incident of 2008 – clearly that the general public is not yet willing to accept Chinese-Indonesians’ role in local politics; needless to say the political role of Chinese-Indonesians as a group.

To return to Jemma Purdey’s assertion that “the massa [still] possesses a set of memories of violence and also anti-Chinese sentiments and antipathies”, it is clear that the problem is not only social and political, but also psychological. So, considering
that it was only ten years ago since the indigenous Indonesians started to see Chinese-Indonesians in a different light, I think it would require much more efforts from either Indigenous or Chinese Indonesians to change the long-established hostilities against Chinese-Indonesians. Perhaps we could at least propose that in today’s process of democratization in Indonesia, a transitory period should be introduced to prepare a well-staged adjustment process for all parties concerned. Firstly, because during the three decades of New Order period we have deeply ignored the importance of ethnic and religious factors in Indonesia’s multicultural society, so I think, for the next three to five years we should have a joint-committee of selected intellectual members of various ethnic groups, including Chinese Indonesians, who will work specifically on finding the best way to deal with ethnic and religious issues within our ‘democratic’ political system.

Second, and more importantly, all ethnic and religious community leaders, as well as party leaders, have to reconceptualize, recontextualize and finally reconstruct each of their ethnic and religious identities within the framework of Indonesian nation-state, which they have accepted as their future ‘home’ together. If these two steps could be well implemented, I believe, the political interaction among ethnic groups in Indonesia, including that with Chinese Indonesians, could be more open to negotiations which is necessary for Indonesia’s democratization process.

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