



## THE DYNAMIC OF MALAY- MUSLIM CHINESE RELATION IN CONTEMPORARY PALEMBANG

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### Abstract

This paper aims to determine the dynamics of Muslim Chinese and Malay relation in Palembang. This qualitative research is conducted with descriptive analytics. Data are obtained by interviews, documentation, and observation. This study engages the socio-historical approach, namely studying the conflict and integration between Malays and Chinese in Palembang by looking at the history and the socio-politics. The research finds that the conflict between the two groups was strongly influenced by the political dynamics at the national level which spreads to Palembang. On the other hand, the process of integration between Chinese and Malays is unique and naturally integrated which is solved pragmatically. The integration potentiality lies on the local narratives of a strong attachment between Malay and Chinese cultures.

**Keywords:** Chinese, Malay, Conflict, Integration, Palembang

### Abstrak

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pasang surut relasi kelompok Muslim Tionghoa dan Melayu di tingkat lokal yaitu Palembang. Penelitian ini termasuk dalam penelitian kualitatif yang disajikan dengan deskriptif analitis. Data diperoleh dengan wawancara, dokumentasi dan observasi. Penelitian ini termasuk penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan sosio historis, yaitu mengkaji konflik dan integrasi antara Melayu dan Tionghoa di Palembang dengan menilik pada sejarah dan kondisi sosial politik yang melatarbelakanginya. Dari penelitian yang dilakukan ditemukan bahwa konflik antara kedua kelompok itu sangat dipengaruhi oleh dinamika politik di tingkat nasional (baca: yang terjadi di Jawa) yang berkembang hingga Palembang. Selanjutnya, integrasi antara Tionghoa dan Melayu memiliki kemandirian tersendiri karena berjalan dengan natural didasarkan pada prinsip pragmatis. Sedangkan potensi integrasi dapat dilihat narasi-narasi keterikatan yang kuat antara Melayu dan Tionghoa yang menambah khazanah multikultural dari budaya Melayu Palembang itu sendiri.

**Kata Kunci:** Tionghoa, Melayu, Konflik, Integrasi, Palembang.

### Background

Despite the fact that the existence of Chinese people who have already lived in Indonesia for centuries and have vast influenced Malay culture, the relationship between the two ethnic groups were not always inharmonious. Various discrimination is still experienced by this community because the process of integration with local residents is

still hampered<sup>1</sup>. The politics of segregation during the Dutch colonial government until the New Order and the spread of negative stigma have made Chinese community is seen

<sup>1</sup> B G Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik* (Jakarta: Trans Media, 2008), <<https://books.google.co.id/books?id=CH0p3zHladEC>>, p. 43. Lihat juga Kodiran, 'Asimilasi Etnis Tionghoa dan Implikasinya terhadap Integrasi Nasional :Studi di Kota Tanjungbalai Provinsi Sumatera Utara' {unpublished doctoral thesis, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, 2012}, p. 231.



as the other or foreigner which led to conflict and discrimination<sup>2</sup>.

This paper aims to determine the dynamic of Chinese and Malay relation in Palembang. The qualitative research is presented with descriptive analytics. Data is obtained by interviews, documentation, and observation. This study engages the socio-historical approach, namely studying conflicts and integrations between Malays and Chinese in Palembang by looking at the history and the socio-political approach. The research finds that the conflict between the two groups was strongly influenced by the political dynamics at the national level which spreads to Palembang. On the other hand, the process of integration between Chinese and Malays is unique and naturally integrated which is based on pragmatic principles<sup>3</sup>. The integration potentiality lies on the local narratives of a strong attachment between Malay and Chinese cultures.

Several studies have investigated that the causes of conflict in Chinese society are mainly on political, economic and cultural factors. From political factors, Takeshi Shiraishi argues that the conflict between Muslims and Chinese is due to the racial segregation policy of the Dutch East Indies Government, which placed the Chinese group in a higher class than the natives that aimed to weaken nationalist sentiment<sup>4</sup>. From an economic point of view, Tan stated that in the Suharto era, Chinese businessman acted as "money machines" both for the interests of the government and

political elites<sup>5</sup>. Many Chinese people were given access to run their businesses but were marginalized in political affairs. In addition, Wertheim assumes that anti-Chinese sentiment is caused by economic competition and the struggle for intermediaries position in the commerce<sup>6</sup>. In Palembang context, Azra sees that the economic position of Chinese people in Palembang was very special, during the Colonial period they replaced the role of Arab and local businessmen as the main trader and broker of plantation products as export commodities from indigenous people<sup>7</sup>.

Furthermore, there was a political separation that placed the Chinese settlement separated from the Arabs and Natives. The colonial government's efforts were intended to weaken Islamic resistance after the collapse of the Palembang Sultanate. In addition, Sommers-Heidhues makes it clear that there was competition between indigenous entrepreneurs and Chinese businessmen, and high social inequality between the Chinese minority and the indigenous majority as the cause of social jealousy and anti-Chinese sentiments in Palembang.

In addition to the structuralist point of view, this research also looks at a cultural standpoint which sees a significant cultural difference between Chinese and Islam as the cause of the difficulty of the integration process among Chinese in Palembang. However, the cultural point of view allows the process of integration among Chinese groups with Islam. For example, some Chinese

<sup>2</sup> Graham K Brown, *The Formation And Management of Political Identities: Indonesia and Malaysia Compared* (New York: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2005), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Muhiddinur Kamal, 'Harmony in Diversity: Study on Potential Harmonious Multicultural Society "Pantara" Regions (Panti-Tapus-Rao) Northern Border of West Sumatra', *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic & Social Studies*, 4.2 (2018), 148 <[https://doi.org/10.30983/islam\\_realitas.v4i1.511](https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v4i1.511)>.

<sup>4</sup> Shiraishi T, *The Rise of China and Its Implications for East Asia.* In *Sinicization and the Rise of China* (UK: Routledge, 2013), p. 136-166.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene K B Tan, 'From Sojourners to Citizens: Managing the Ethnic Chinese Minority in Indonesia and Malaysia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24.6 (2001), 949-78 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870120077922>>.

<sup>6</sup> W. F. Wertheim, 'Changes in Indonesia's Social Stratification', *Pacific Affairs*, 28.1 (1955), 41 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2753710>>.

<sup>7</sup> Azyumardi Azra, 'The Indies Chinese and the Sarekat Islam an Account of the Anti-Chinese Riots in Colonial Indonesia', *Studia Islamika*, 1.1 (1994), 25-53 <<https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v1i1.865>>.

consider there is no problem with religious differences in one family, thus some of them see that the conversion into Islam is not a problem. If previously some studies had discussed the conflict and integration of Chinese and Indigenous people in the Indonesian context, this paper discusses the dynamic relation of both ethnicities in the local context, Palembang.

### **The Origin of Muslim Chinese Community in Palembang**

Palembang is a city which has one of the most strategic port in the archipelago. The city of Palembang has long been known as a commercial centre. Palembang has a big river, Musi River which had been used as routes of international commerce by China, Arab, Persia, India, and Europe traders. Therefore, culturally the city of Palembang has various cultural elements and pluralistic society.

Palembang as an international port city has existed since centuries ago, even in the 13th century, the name Palembang was first mentioned in Chinese chronicles in 1225 which was written in Chinese spelling as Po-lin-fang<sup>8</sup>.

In the past, Palembang became the most important city for commerce and shipping in western Indonesia that connected three important regions of Asian traders, namely China, India, and Arabia. In fact, Palembang was one of the most important ports which formed cosmopolitan city since the period of the Srivijaya maritime empire and the Palembang Sultanate<sup>9</sup>.

Geographically, Palembang has a strategic location as an international commerce and shipping lane since the Srivijaya kingdom (7-13

centuries). Palembang has a big river that connects many canals which all flow to Musi River and continues towards the sea. The estuary of the river was very crowded strait, Bangka Strait which was the main route for Arab, Indian and Chinese traders in the archipelago. Hence, the Srivijaya kingdom became the strongest kingdom in Archipelago at the time because it controlled the trading routes so that foreign traders include Muslim traders will stop at the ports of Srivijaya kingdom<sup>10</sup>.

Based on Chinese writing sources, it can be seen that ethnic Chinese groups have begun to settle in Palembang since the 7th century. When this area was still ruled by Srivijaya, the Chinese came and settled in Palembang to learn Sanskrit language and commerce. The location of their settlements was probably around the Gedingsuro (Tango Buntung) site and the Air Bersih site (Boom Baru). The evidence that shows the existence of these settlements is the remnants of the structure of the Temple, Arca and Chinese ceramic fragments from the Srivijaya kingdom. Chinese ceramic fragments from the Tang dynasty are found in the Air Bersih site<sup>11</sup>.

FJ Mored quoted from Hanafiah claims that Chinese people did not leave much influence in Palembang<sup>12</sup>. The influence was only in terms of trade taken in Chinese as in the Malay-Palembang dialect. It is reasonable because the Chinese term was commonly introduced by traders from Fukien/Canton who settled throughout the archipelago. In our opinion, the claim is not completely true. The influence of Chinese culture is materially found in historic architectures, including the design of the old palace (Keraton Lamo), the Great Mosque, and the newest Palembang Darussalam palace at Benteng Kuto Besak.

<sup>8</sup> D Hanafiah, *Melayu-Jawa: Citra Budaya dan Sejarah Palembang* (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 1995) <<https://books.google.co.id/books?id=YEVxAAAAMAAJ>> p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Jumhari, *Sejarah Sosial Orang Melayu Keturunan Arab dan Cina di Palembang dari Masa Kesultanan Palembang Hingga Reformasi* (Padang: BPNST Padang Press, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Hanafiah.

<sup>11</sup> Purnawati, 'Tugu Prasasti Cina', *Jurnal Tamaddun*, 27. 1 (2004), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Hanafiah.



The most obvious architecture in the form of a pyramid on the roof of these places.

Kukang (Palembang) was the second-largest colony outside Java where Admiral Cheng Ho had already formed colonies in several areas in Java. Cheng Ho and his entourage stopped at Kukang (Palembang) for the first time in 1407 AD. According to Ma Huan, Cheng Ho's translator who accompanied him on an expedition, in Palembang, the admiral was given a special task by Emperor Yong Le to liberate this area from the pirate group Chen Yuze, a non-Muslim from Fujian to secure maritime trading routes in Nanyang or Southeast Asia.<sup>13</sup> After successfully cracking down pirate Chen Yuze, according to Johan Hanafiah, Admiral Cheng Ho settled three times in Palembang, but no record was found that revealed the exact purpose of his arrival.

In addition, the spread of Islam in Palembang cannot be separated from the role of the Chinese community. Arya Damar who was told as the ruler of Palembang, around 1434 AD and also the adoptive father of Raden Fatah according to Parlindungan had Chinese name Swan Liong. He was an envoy from Gan Eng Tju, the leader of the Chinese community in Southeast Asia. Then he led the Kukang (Palembang) region as the successor of Cheng Ho.

Raden Fatah, the founder and the first king of Demak Kingdom was born in Palembang. He has Chinese name Djin Bun (Strong Man). Raden Fatah is the son of Raja Brawijaya V and a princess of Champa, some says that she is Chinese descent who already lived in Palembang. The story indicates that the Chinese Muslim community in Palembang has fused perfectly with the local people, both structurally and culturally through marriage.

The establishment of the Palembang Sultanate began with the events of the seizure of the power of the Demak Kingdom in 1546. It was based on the writings of a Priayi in Palembang written in Jawi letters as quoted in the history book of South Sumatra by Abdullah

"It has been reported that several children of the kings had moved from the land of Java to the land of Palembang to run away from the riots when the Sultan Pajang attacked Demak. The one who became king in Palembang among them was Ki Gede Ing Suro Tuo, Ki Gede Sido Ing Lautan's son, when Kiyai Gede Ing Suro Tuo's death, he was replaced by Ki Gede Ing Suro Mudo, Ki Gede Ing Alir's son and they were all sons of the king who move from the land of Java to the land of Palembang, that all of them were twenty-four numbers of people there".<sup>14</sup>

The founder of the Palembang Sultanate was a descendant of Pangeran Trenggono who moved to Palembang under the leadership of Ki Gede Ing Suro Tuo and settled in Kuto Gawang hamlet, an area around the Palembang Lamo. As is known, Prince Trenggono is the son of Raden Fatah and the grandson Prabu Kertabumi Brawijaya V of Majapahit with his wife a Chinese princess who was born and raised in Palembang. Thus it can be concluded that Chinese people are likely the ancestors of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate. Chinese people have experienced perfect assimilation with local residents. Moreover, the Chinese descendants were able to become local authorities, so that Chinese influence was not only in its culture but also in the power structure.

<sup>13</sup>Tan Ta Sen, *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> M. Abdullah, (ed.al), *Kota Palembang Sebagai Kota Dagang dan Industri* (Jakarta: IDSN Depdikbud, 1984), p. 56.

The book *The History of Sumatra*, containing Government, Laws, Customs and Manners of the Native Inhabitants written by William Marsden in 1784 states that in Bengkulu at that time there were Chinese people settled in that area. Marsden mentioned that there was a Chinese resident named Kee Son who was the smartest among people who worked on the farm. He worked tirelessly and was very diligently. Because the land was not fertile, he almost went bankrupt until he was helped by a British company, the East India Company<sup>15</sup>.

In fact, there were already many Chinese immigrants in the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate. Most of them already converted to Islam. Those who were Muslim can occupy important positions in the government. Some of them even married the family of the sultanate. For example, Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I (1722-1757) wife was descended from Chinese Semarang<sup>16</sup>.

Chinese colonies in Palembang during the Palembang Darussalam sultanate that came in the 18th century were tin miners. Since 1722, the Sultan realised that the tin mining techniques of the Chinese people were far more advanced compared to the primitive technology of the local community. Therefore the Sultan recruited many Chinese from South China. The Sultan appointed a Chinese Peranakan named Cung Huyut (Bong Hu But) to bring in tin porters from South China. This effort actually followed the experience of the Sultan of Perak and the Sultan of Johor who first employed Chinese miners. After the Sultan sold tin minings to the VOC, in order to increase tin production in Bangka, the VOC increased the number of coolies by bringing in many workers from China.

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<sup>15</sup> Setiono.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, 'The Cloth Trade in Jambi and Palembang Society during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Indonesia*, 48.48 (1989), 27 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3351265>>.

## **The Dynamic of Muslim Chinese and Malay Relations in Palembang**

If in Bangka, most of the Chinese people work as tin coolers, whereas Chinese people in Palembang worked as traders. They became the trading partners of the Sultan, and some took the role to be intermediary traders of imported goods. The roles of Chinese traders in the 18th century were more varied, ranging from retailers, groceries, *mindring* (creditors), to brokers of large commodities such as pepper and tin. Most Chinese people traded using "wangkang" traditional Chinese boats. During the Sultanate, those who did not convert to Islam were considered foreigners. That was the reason why they lived in the rivers. That means the Sultanate was still suspicious and cautious about Chinese people. As Sevenhoeven (1971) stated, "if the Chinese were allowed to live in the land, they may be dangerous, whereas if they live in rafts of bamboo they could always be controlled and easily burned their rafts." Usually Chinese lived on the rivers with their rafters, while Arabs had already settled on the land. Both groups worked as intermediaries. There are no exact figures on the number of Chinese and Arabs who settled in Palembang during the sultanate era<sup>17</sup>. During the Palembang sultanate, Chinese people usually traded crockeries, silks, gold, iron pans, medicines, tea, sweets, and other Chinese goods. At the end of the Palembang Sultanate the policy regarding Chinese community began to change, they allowed building houses on the land. This was indicated by the house of Chinese's leader who had a house on the edge of the Musi River on dry land<sup>18</sup>. zamaEven though they obtained permission to live on land, not all Chinese people were able to build houses on land so it is not surprising that there were still Chinese people who live in raft houses. After Dutch took over the power of Palembang Sultanate in 1821, the Dutch began

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<sup>17</sup> Jumhari.

<sup>18</sup> Hanafiah.



to change the regulations regarding Chinese settlements. By the colonial government, they were placed in the area of 7 Ulu and its surroundings. This ethnic Chinese settlement was marked by the presence of the Chinese Kapitan house, temples, and cemeteries. The area is generally known as Chinatown and is still exist nowadays<sup>19</sup>. The problem of Chinese settlement in an exclusive way is a colonial government policy called the Wijkenstelsel policy. Chinese leaders in the region have military ranks such as mayor (major), Kapitan (captain) and lieutenant (linen). Chinese settlements are explicitly separate from indigenous settlements.

Regarding Chinese settlements in Palembang, according to Hanafiah states as follow:

"Liang Taow Ming. Liang was able to bind a strong union between the Chinese people so that they became a strong community and quite respected by the Dutch Colonial Government. When the colonial power became stronger over the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, the Dutch began to point 'Chinese officers' to rule the 7 Ulu region and its surroundings. 'Officers' were initially been tasked with regulating the Chinese community only. However, along with the growing strength of the Dutch, 'officers' of China also began to take control of indigenous communities"<sup>20</sup>.

During the Dutch colonial period, there was a dramatic change, namely the commencement of the implementation of racial segregation policies aimed to perpetuate colonial power. The obvious change is the occurrence of classifications of society based on races, in which Westerners were placed as upper class, Foreign Easterners such as

Chinese and Arabs and other foreign nations, were in the second layer while the majority of native people were in the lowest social strata. (Ari, 2002, p.49) The population of the Chinese community in Palembang increased from time to time. Based on J. L. Van Sevenhoven's record, at the beginning of the Dutch government in Palembang, the Chinese population was around 800 people. Then, at the end of the 19th century, the population increased to 4,726<sup>21</sup>.

The growth of population was also because in the 1920s Palembang began to introduce free trade. In that context, the ethnic Chinese in Palembang was able to dominate the market. Chinese in Palembang was able to become the dominant group since they run their own enterprises or worked in large companies.

In Palembang, they were not rough coolies like those found in East Sumatra, and Bangka Belitung in particular. Most of them are traders who quickly expanded their businesses in many economic sectors which are often referred to as conglomerate<sup>22</sup>.

The development of the ethnic Chinese businesses was supported by their ability to integrate themselves with the local community through trading cooperation. Chinese ethnic traders were able to take advantage of various economic sectors that were not touched by European companies. Western companies that run their businesses in Palembang did have a wide market and even reach Europe. But they did not get into local markets. This situation is occupied by Chinese traders. By cooperating with Pasirah or leader of the local community in the interior of Palembang they were able to master the local market. Trading activities with

<sup>19</sup> Abdul Baqir Zen, *Etnis Cina dalam Potret Pembauran di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2010) p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Hanafiah.

<sup>21</sup> J I van Sevenhoven, *Lukisan Tentang Ibu Kota Palembang*, Seri Terjemahan Karangan-Karangan Belanda (Jakarta: KITLV Press, 2015) <<https://books.google.co.id/books?id=JFkNjwEACA-AJ>>, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Mestika Zed, *Kepialangan, Politik, dan Revolusi: Palembang, 1900-1950* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2003), p.78.



local communities included retailers of daily necessities, small traders, brokers or intermediaries of export commodities such as coffee and rubber<sup>23</sup>. Their adaptation ability to local communities was their strength. It should be remembered that the Chinese community in Palembang was not monolithic, especially regarding its attitude towards the local community. Most of those who settled in Palembang was born and raised in this area and were easily integrated horizontally. They considered or felt closer to other Chinese people who lived in the Dutch East Indies rather than from mainland China. However, some of them did act like foreigners, especially those who were big traders from Singapore, which many of them only related to large European companies.

Their development in the economic sector was also supported by the discrimination policies adopted by the Dutch colonial government. The Chinese businessmen received more privileged than other Asian communities such as Arabia and India. The position of Arab traders in the 20th centuries under Dutch colonialism experienced dramatic changes. During the Palembang Sultanate, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the position of the Arab group was relatively stronger compared to that of the Chinese group. They emerged as strong businessmen in the clothing business and shipping lines, for example, Said Aboe Bakar bin Ahmad, the richest Arab businessman who owned a large Palembang sugar factory in the first half of the 19th century. He was successful in developing and processing sugar cane on the outskirts of Palembang by imitating the sugar industry in Java.<sup>24</sup> However, under Dutch East Indies authority, the condition gradually changed at the end of the 19th century. The colonial government did not allow Arab businessmen to run their business in the interior Palembang.

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<sup>23</sup>Zed.

<sup>24</sup>Zed.

On the other hand, Chinese people took advantage of the policy. They were able to adapt to local people from the interior Palembang. Moreover, under colonial administration, they were appointed as tax collectors, pawnbrokers, salt monopolies, opium traders for the sake of the government, and as brokers (middleman) of the coffee commodity.

The exclusive social class of the Arab group itself has gradually diminished. Since the beginning of the 20th century, none of the companies owned by Arabs has stakes in the transportation industries, a sector that was very important in the economy in Palembang. In the field of agriculture, they had no more control in commodity exports which were actually growing rapidly at the time. The Chinese group has been well integrated with the local community in Palembang since Palembang was the centre of the commerce which grew as a cosmopolitan city so that it was accustomed to plurality.

However, Colonial policies that privileged the Chinese group would gradually prone to conflict at the time of the National Movement until the independence period.

The period of the initial national movement, the period of national awakening was responded uniquely in Palembang and distinguished it because of the emergence of movements in Java. The initiation of the Syarikat Islam movement in Palembang in 1913 launched programs including 1) free of taxes and physical labour 2) providing assistance in social affairs, charity and funeral 3) assisting party members throughout the Dutch East Indies and 4) giving legal information and protecting the people from injustice. These programs are very different from the aim of the previous SI predecessor movement Syarekat Dagang Islam (SDI) which run the night watch program (Rekso Roemekso Association) that focused its



purpose on the boycott of Chinese businesspeople<sup>25</sup>.

Within three years of the establishment of the SI Palembang branch, this organization was able to gain memberships up to 33,400 people. That made SI the strongest branch outside Java, far exceeding its closest competitors in West Sumatra and North Sumatera. Although SI was formed to provide social protection and legal assistance for its followers, the sentiment of religious identity could not be separated, it was effective to bind local people of Palembang since they had a Malay Islamic identity. In 1931, SI had become a political party (Indonesian Islamic Congregation Party: PSII) with one of its leaders Bratananta who organized mass to conduct a massive demonstration against Chinese groups. The origin of the action was in May 1931 that actually did not originate from Palembang.

The rally was the response from the Cirebon based Chinese publisher Hoa Kiao newspaper in early May 1931 that contain writings deemed insulting to the Prophet Muhammad. Reactions did not only appear among local Islamic groups in Java but spread to other areas. In Palembang in particular, leaders of large Islamic movements such as PSII encouraged the masses to rally on the streets. The anti-Chinese action from the Islamic group is said to be very impressive, at least in terms of the number of demonstrators. The action is considered the biggest demonstration that ever happened. Bratananta was able to mobilize 10,000 demonstrators through the Al Islam Committee.

The demonstration which took place in mid-May voiced the defence of Islam from reports that were considered religious blasphemy. Actually, the demonstration was very much influenced by other factors. First, there was an economic depression which

resulted in a decline of the prices of export commodities in the Palembang region which had an impact on decreasing the income of local communities and native entrepreneurs who were members of the PSII. 2) Unequal treatment from the colonial government which privileged Chinese entrepreneurs resulted in jealousy for Arab and Indigenous entrepreneurs. The economic dominance of the Chinese group was regarded as a thorn in the flesh by some businessmen, especially those who were affiliated with Islamic groups.

Interestingly, although the quantity of the mass was very large, it did not cause significant material losses from the Chinese. This was because the atmosphere of the demonstration was still under control due to the attitude of the Chinese entrepreneurs who were able to approach the Islamic elites. To reduce the widespread anti-Chinese sentiment, the unity of the Palembang Chinese community of Tionghwa Tjong Siang and several large Chinese companies such as The Chinese Rubber Association immediately showed financial support and sympathy for the activities of the Al Islam Committee.

In the 1945-1946 Revolution, the beginning of the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, Palembang had a new regional government led by governor AK Gani. The early days of independence were overwhelmed by the spirit of struggle. Chauvinist identity and ethnic differences were obscured in the same identity as the Indonesian nation. Nationalism which became a shared identity was deemed in binary opposition against foreigner and colonialism. Gani himself promised to do everything to liberate the Indonesian people from the dominance of Queen Wilhelmina's country, and every person who did not obey Sukarno and Hatta's government would be labeled as a criminal<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Zed.

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<sup>26</sup> Zed.





The last sentence is a reminder for those who were hesitant and opposed the Republic. At that moment, Chinese elites experienced a dilemma. During the Dutch occupation, they gained a special position and high social class under the Europeans. During the Japanese occupation, they began to be rivalled by the emergence of indigenous entrepreneurs. Unlike the Dutch who relied heavily on ethnic Chinese in supporting economic activities, Japan tended to support Native elites because the Japanese suspected Chinese elites had a close relationship with the anti-Japanese movement in China. (Siauw, 1999) Native business elites who were from Palembang such as Ghani Aziz and Dasaad before the Japanese occupation had gained the trust to take over the textile monopoly from Chinese companies because at the same time the war broke out between Japan and China in 1937. The indigenous elites were incorporated in the business cooperation formed by Hatta, among others, aimed at competing with Chinese entrepreneurs. After Japan occupied Indonesia, several Japanese economic activities relied heavily on Indigenous elites such as Ghani Aziz, H. Shamsedin, and BR Motik<sup>27</sup>.

Some people from the Chinese group in Palembang had an attachment to nationalist movements in China during the Japanese occupation in Indonesia. When the news about the defeat Japanese against the allies and rumour that Chiang Kai Shek's army was going to Indonesia to take over Japanese power was spread, several people from the Palembang Chinese group held a demonstration to celebrate it in the centre of the City. They raised the Chinese flag in the rallies. Similar demonstrations were also held in Prabumulih.

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Post, 'The Formation of the Pribumi Business Elite in Indonesia, 1930s-1940s', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, 152.4 (1996), 609-32 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003956>>.

This caused unrest and gained tension among the local community in the city<sup>28</sup>.

In Palembang, during the occupation of Allies, many vigilante groups had been formed in the early days of the revolution. They made sporadic resistance that even targeted civilians who were considered pro-allies. The most well-known radical group at the time was Boeroeng Hantoe. The lascar (paramilitary group) was originally formed by AK Gani during the Japanese occupation and then was led by Raden Mangoen. Boeroeng Hantoe carried out anarchic actions such as intimidating and plundering the Chinese who were considered as foreigners and pro against the allies.<sup>29</sup> Raden Mangoen's men were not reluctant to kidnap and seized all Chinese property. Some of them were later released, but the victims were almost all killed and their bodies were thrown into the Musi River. In February 1946, there was a report that up to 800 Chinese were abducted by the militia. Protection was given by Allies army but the loss was inevitable, some of the Chinese people were moved to European residents in Talang Semut. The terror did not seem to stop. The group still carried out acts of terror and kidnapping of Chinese people and carried out sabotage to the European residential in Talang Semut.<sup>30</sup>

Again, violence against Chinese groups occurred in 1947. This time it took a lot of casualties and became a dark tragedy for the Chinese group in Palembang. The tragedy was actually an impact of the January 1, 1947 battle which was known as a five-day five-night battle in which militia and the Army of Republic carried out a sporadic attack on the allies and people who were considered pro-allies. The Palembang-Chinese community was the most victims in the incident. Around 2050 Chinese people died, 1000 injured, 600 lost, and 900 residential houses burned down. The incident

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<sup>28</sup> Zed.

<sup>29</sup> Zed.

<sup>30</sup> Zed.



also crushed the Indian people of Palembang. About 50 of their shops were burned<sup>31</sup>.

Functionally, conflicts can produce integration. The Palembang Chinese community had its own initiative to bring about reconciliation with native Malay people. Several Chinese Palembang organizations expressly stated their support for the Republic. Instead of addressed retaliation or sued the republic for their losses, they even blamed the Netherlands for the tragedy, although its nature was to protect its own interests or tended to be political, they showed their support the republic and brought reconciliation between Chinese and Malay people in Palembang.

A group that openly supports the Republic of Indonesia for the incident is the Chinese Labor Union (CLU). Liem Djie Lan, leader of CLU, held a demonstration demanding that the Dutch compensate for losses due to the 1947 New Year event. Liem even demanded the abolition of the Chinese captain. This demonstration was to show the public that the CLU seems to be the most pro-Republican among other Chinese groups. Though the Chinese captain Lie Sio Sing once attended the Heroes' Day commemoration on November 10, 1946<sup>32</sup>. However, these attitudes showed the concrete intention of the Chinese to adapt to social change and to cooperate with the Republic.

In the Sukarno era, sentiment towards the Chinese was still happened mainly due to economic inequality. The government issued Government Regulation No. 10 of 1959 which essentially prohibits Chinese people, especially those who were not Indonesian citizens, from opening their businesses outside the city level. This regulation can also be seen as the Government intention toward nationalism of economic sectors and strengthen the indigenous economic base. However, the

policy was also prone to negative effect which echoed anti-Chinese sentiments. Since the beginning of the Revolution until the 1960s Palembang was known as a paradise for smugglers mainly in the rubber sector directly to Singapore. Actually, not only Chinese elites became smugglers, but the republican, especially local elites, also enjoyed the situation in Palembang both for business purposes and for financing the army in the revolution period. When the American business network imposed the embargo due to the involvement of the People's Republic of China in the 1953 Korean War, Palembang was affected because America saw Indonesia as the axis of Chinese trading network through Singapore. As a result, the rubber business which had become the most lucrative business became collapsed that affected farmers to large exporters. In this situation, it is easiest to blame Chinese businessmen, such the criticism expressed in the *Fikiran Rakyat*, a local newspaper that Chinese entrepreneurs were impatient which resulted in lower rubber prices and was not responsible for the situation<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, Sukarno's government also sought to integrate the Chinese population in Indonesia. This was triggered by their citizenship status. In 1960 the Sukarno Government imposed a dual citizenship status for the Chinese community, especially those who were born in Indonesia. This Dual Citizenship status was the result of a diplomatic agreement between Indonesia and the Chinese government in 1955. As a result of this policy, many residents of the Chinese community were repatriated to the PRC. The regulation even made the PRC government react that demanded the government revoke the Government Regulation. Rules that seemed anti-Chinese in Indonesia had an impact on the Chinese community in Palembang. On August 11, 1960, around 1179

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<sup>31</sup> Zed.

<sup>32</sup> Zed.

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<sup>33</sup> *Fikiran Rakyat*, 25 March 1961.



Chinese left Palembang to China by boarding The Ang Sun ship at the port of Tanjung Api-Api.<sup>34</sup> Besides, in the period 1950-1960, The sentiment of anti-communist was popular mainly in Sumatra where the military was involved, which resulted in intimidation on the Chinese who are pro against the government of the PRC (People's Republic of China).

Furthermore, the Sukarno government attempted to take steps to assimilate the Chinese community, even though they were optional. One of the assimilation processes was to change its Chinese name. Chinese who wanted to change their name obliged to report to the court and then announce it in the State News.

The step of assimilation, the complete amalgamation of the original characteristics of certain cultures with the surrounding culture, is the agenda of the Old Order and New Order governments. However, the assimilation program was a false step, especially during the New Order period. The New Order regime tried to eliminate pluralistic identities to merge into what is called national culture. Unfortunately, the assimilationist policy was not accompanied by the integration process based on democratic principles rather New Order Regime abolished the pillar of Chinese Culture including disbanded Chinese school, Chinese press and Chinese organisation<sup>35</sup>.

After the tragedy of the G.30S PKI, Suharto rose to President of the Republic of Indonesia. With Supersemar's powerful letter, he suppressed all elements of communism. In this policy, the Chinese community was affected, especially some Chinese communities in Indonesia who had a close relationship to the communist government of the PRC and the Old Order government. Inevitably, Suharto

immediately took steps so that the communist ideology did not infiltrate through the Chinese group. Suharto then continued the name change policy for the Chinese community carried out by Sukarno with the Cabinet Presidium Decree No.127/U/ Kep/12/1966. To break the propaganda of communism from China, Suharto also cancelled the Dwi Citizenship status for the Chinese community. They were required to choose to become Indonesian citizens or be returned to the People's Republic of China.

The New Order government then imposed assimilation policy for the Chinese community by issuing Circular issued by the President, in this case, Ampera Cabinet Presidium No.SE.06 / Pres. Kab / 6/1967 dated June 28, 1967. In this instruction, the President banned all matters relating to Chinese. This included the banning of the Confucian religion, Tjap Go Meh celebration, the Chinese-language press, fusing Chinese schools and ethnic organizations. In Palembang, the policy regarding the prohibition of Confucianism, in particular, had a significant impact on this religion. In Palembang until now, most of the Confucian Chinese community merged into Buddha Tridharma.

One of the assimilation instruments was to replace the use of the Tionghoa to Chinese. The government's step was taken under the pretext of accelerating the process of assimilating the Chinese community so the conflict between the Chinese and native community after the G.30 S PKI tragedy was not widespread. Although the objectives were integration, the government, on the other hand, did not recognize the Chinese community as part of Indonesia's diversity. Even from the citizenship status, the Chinese did not get a National Identity Card, they were required to make an SKBRI (Certificate of Citizenship for the Republic of Indonesia).

<sup>34</sup> The Singapore Free Press, 11 August 1960.

<sup>35</sup> Leo Suryadinata, 'Kebijakan Negara Indonesia Terhadap Etnik Tionghoa: dari Asimilasi ke Multikulturalisme?', *Antropologi Indonesia*, 0.71 (2014) <<https://doi.org/10.7454/ai.v0i71.3464>> , p.1-12.



The May 1998 event was the culmination of an anti-Chinese sentiment that seemed to "continued to be maintained" as a result of dysfunctional policies. Palembang is one of the cities that had a dark history of violence against Chinese citizens. Many shops were burned, hundreds to thousands of them were killed, and many women were raped.

In the Reformation era, President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) abolished discriminatory regulations during the New Order against the Chinese community. Since the Reformation era, the three pillars of the Chinese community began to be bold, namely the Chinese-language press, Chinese schools, and Chinese-based organizations. Chinese lion dance began to perform in the general event, Imlek and Cap Go Meh began to celebrate, Chinese-language press was published. Abdurrahman Wahid even acknowledged Confucianism as the 6th official religion recognized in Indonesia. Furthermore, Indonesia's 5th President Megawati made Chinese New Year as a national holiday. From various government decisions, the Palembang Chinese existed to live together with the Palembang community. Gradually, integration between the Chinese and Malays regained strength.

It is undeniable that Palembang Malay culture cannot be separated from Chinese influence. It can be seen from various kinds of material culture, ranging from culinary, traditional clothing, and architectural buildings to festivals such as the Telok Abang festival and Bidar boat festival which are celebrated every August 17th.

On the other hand, there are sacred places in Chinese temples that show the harmonious relation between Chinese and Islam. For example, Hok Tjing Rio Temple, founded in 1962 on Kemaro Island in which there is a tomb (read: vestige) of a Muslim named Fatimah whose fell in love with a Chinese named Tan Bun Ann. The story becomes a

legend of the origin of Kemaro Island. Apart from the accuracy of the legend<sup>36</sup>, at least it is a narrative that illustrates the rich multicultural values of the Palembang people, especially regarding the close relationship between Malay and Chinese. In addition, the narrative also is an alternative to the great narrative so far related to female figures. The narrative that has been developing, in general, tells the story of a Chinese princess who was married by a local ruler and gave birth to a prominent leader, such as a story on Raden Patah mother who was a Chinese princess. It does not only symbolize the values of multiculturalism, but there is also a narrative about equality of the statuses of both communities.

In addition, there is a Candra Nadhi (Soei Goat Kiang) temple located in the 10 Ulu Palembang. Inside the temple, there is a tomb of their ancestor who is a Chinese Muslim. Chinese are not allowed to offer offerings that contain pork. In addition, Kampung 10 Ulu shows a harmonious interaction between Chinese and Muslim communities in the Reformation era. The Chinese community from the Chandra Nadhi Foundation contributed to the construction of the al Ghazali mosque which is right next to the existing Temple. The Foundation's initiative was also driven by the support of the Palembang city government under Mayor Eddy Santana. The Foundation requested permission to assist the construction of the Mayor and local residents, and together the Mayor inaugurated the establishment of the Mosque.

Various activities carried out by the Palembang Chinese community always involve local residents (read: Muslims). The Cap Go Meh celebration that is held in every full moon after Chinese New Year is widely attended by local residents regardless of religion. The Regional Government declared it a regional

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<sup>36</sup> Harun (Local historian), *Interview* {Friday, 23 May 2018}



festival to attract tourists. Many boats are rented by Chinese people for anyone who wanted to go to Pulau Kemaro. During the festival, many local residents get the benefit. Small traders, most of them are a local resident, such as the owners of the boats, and the guards who earn money on the celebration. In addition to the tradition of almsgiving of the Chinese community can be given to everyone. The regional government after the reformation era also encourages integration between the Chinese and Malay communities in Palembang. In 2006, the Palembang city government encouraged Kemaro Island to become a regional tourist attraction, but the management returned to Hok Tjing Rio land and temple owners, namely the Tridharma Hok Cheng Bio Worship Foundation. The City Government also recommended the construction of the Pagoda as an icon of the place of worship. The government proposal was welcomed by the Foundation and immediately built the pagoda as a landmark and added the uniqueness of Kemaro island. The place now becomes the tourist destination which is visited not only by Chinese people who want to worship but also local tourists both from Palembang and from outside Palembang. The regional government is now starting to make the multicultural asset as an attraction for tourist destinations in Palembang.

### Conclusion

The dynamics of Muslim Chinese and Malay relations cannot be separated from the theme of identity. There is actually no sharp disputes between Malays and Chinese identity. Malay identity is an eclectic identity, in which there is a Chinese element in it, however, Islamic identity becomes prominent. Contradictions between the two groups are affected by the emergence of identity politics since racial policies during the Dutch colonial government until the New Order period. In addition, other issues such as economic

competition, inequality, and cultural (religious) differences become sources of conflict. Physical conflicts occur when the national political situation is in a period of crisis such as during the Revolution and Reformation period. The conflicts can be resolved based on the economic and political interest in which Indonesian Chinese need cooperation to run their business. While the potentiality for integration lays on the narratives of a strong attachment between Malays and Chinese which is the nature of the multicultural culture of Malay Palembang.

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