

The Indonesian Chinese in the sixties : a study of an thnic minority in a period of turbulent political change

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Abstrak

The Chinese in Indonesia have historically constituted a distinct, if small, ethnic minority amongst the population as a whole. Many of the trading and middleman functions in the Indonesian economy have been performed by members of this minority. This fact has aroused hostility to the Chinese, particularly among their Indonesian business competitors. Although many Chinese have been profoundly influenced by Indonesian culture, they have as a group continued to be sensed by Indonesians as alien even in the case of those who have become Indonesian citizens. Dutch colonial policies had the effect of keeping Chinese and Indonesians as separate groups. The gap between them was widened early in this century by the growth of nationalist sentiment among both Chinese and Indonesians. The achievement of national independence by the Indonesian elite brought about a prolonged crisis of identity for the Indonesian Chinese. Over the course of the next two decades, many issues of basic importance to them came into contention. These included their claims to Indonesian citizenship, the kinds of education to which their children could have access, their retention of a separate social and cultural identity, and the defence of Chinese economic interests. Their situation was complicated by the emergence of China as a major power under a communist government, which made their political loyalties doubly suspect in the eyes of anti-communist Indonesians. As a small but relatively wealthy ethnic minority which has been exposed for a long time to anti-Chinese prejudice on the part of many Indonesians, the Indonesian Chinese have characteristically been compelled (given the powerlessness of China to protect them) to seek an accommodation