Introduction

‘Cina lole, abang abang buntute!’ (Chinese! Your tail is red!)

I often heard this saying when I was growing up. Then, as a child, I lived in Tegal, a small city in Central Java Province. Other children in my neighbourhood mocked me by chanting this saying. They regarded me as Chinese because I was born to a Chinese Indonesian mother, even though according to the regulations concerning civil registration inherited by Indonesia from the colonial era, I was ‘Pribumi’ (Indigenous) Indonesian, as was my father.\(^1\) As a child I did not understand the meaning of

\(^1\) Since the early twentieth century, civil registration in the Netherland East Indies (NEI) had been based on ethno-religious category. Contemporary Chinese Indonesian civil registration is based on what is popularly known as *staatsblad* (statute book) 1917-130, while Christian ‘Indigenous’ Indonesians are based on the *staatsblad* 1933-75 and the Muslim ‘Indigenous’ Indonesians are based on the *staatsblads* 1917-751. While some of the regulations bequeathed by the Dutch colonial government have been revoked in the law of citizenship enacted since 2006 onwards, regulations
the words. I did know however that the word ‘Cina’ meant ‘China’ or ‘Chinese’, while the phrase ‘abang abang buntute’, claimed the subject accused possessed a red tail. Despite its unclear meaning and the fact that another version of it (that is, loleng) is used in Central Java to denigrate the Chinese (see for example Sarwono 1999:27) I knew too that I was being belittled.

The sentence gives us a clue of how widespread the negative perception of China and of the Chinese was in ‘New Order Indonesia.’ While the phrase ‘Cina Lole’ or ‘Cina Loleng’ appeared to have emerged before President Suharto came to power, it apparently was not followed by the words ‘abang abang buntute.’² The additional words emphasizing the redness of the Chinese only came in the New Order period. As the colour red is often seen as a symbol of danger and guiltiness, and during the cold war era was associated concerning civil registration mentioned above are still in effect, despite the protests of the Chinese (See e.g. Wibowo 2007). However, interviews with parents of newly-born Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesian babies revealed that the categorization based on the above staatsblad does not appear in these babies’ birth certificates.

² For example, in a footnote to one of his articles, Arief Budiman told us how when he was a kid he was often mocked by his ‘pribumi’ friends with the words “Cina loleng makan tahi sekaleng” (Loleng Chinese, [you] eat a can of faeces) (Budiman 2006:339 n. 2).
with communism (Kim 1996:49), the inclusion of the words ‘your tail is red’ is meant to convey the relationship between the Chinese and communism. Thus more than just denigrating Chinese Indonesians, the ‘red tail’ in the New Order era was a continuous reminder to whomever uttered or heard it of the imminent danger of communism that came from China with the assistance of Chinese Indonesians. It was also a reminder of a terrible action allegedly sponsored and carried out by China. The ideology of the New Order authoritarian regime was reflected even in children’s perceptions.

The origin of the story about China’s guilt and dangerous status might be traced back to the year 1965, when a coup attempt known in Indonesian historical text books as the ‘September 30th Movement’ (Gerakan September 30, Gestapu) took place. Suharto and his allies, who came to power and established the New Order regime in the direct aftermath of the coup, claimed that the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) orchestrated the event in an attempt to change the basis of Indonesian state policy from Pancasila (the Five Principle) to communism. The New Order regime also alleged that China was involved in the coup by providing assistance to the PKI (Sukma 1999:44-45). Thus in the view of the New Order elites, “China had committed the serious sin of intervening in the domestic affairs of a friendly nation” (Elson 2008:271). Following the charge, the New Order froze its diplomatic tie with China (Sukma 1999:32-34). Subsequently, it developed what became
known as the ‘China threat perception’ policy that prevailed for almost three decades (Sukma 1999:46-56). The perception was not based on the story of China’s 1965’s intervention alone. The regime also reproduced a negative perception of China, including of pre-Republic China, that had been circulating as early as the end of the 1950s (see Taylor 1963 for the dominant perception of China). This ideology of ‘historical China’ as an aggressive, imperialist, and expansionist power was taught at schools and reiterated in historical writings (Sukma 1999: 52).

The regime also developed a suspicious attitude toward anything that might be related to China, including towards Chinese Indonesians. Chinese schools and newspapers were shut down. Expressions of Chinese cultural identity among Chinese Indonesians were restricted. Opportunity to learn Chinese language (Mandarin) was banned unless it was conducted in the University of Indonesia and Dharma Persada University (both are in Jakarta) as a part of the Chinese study program organized by those two universities (see Sutami 2007: 227). In short, China and Chineseness had become dirty words, issues that raised the political hackles of the regime.

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3 The Chinese study program of Dharma Persada University was only opened in 1986.
And yet the 1990s saw the emergence of a significant change of perception about Chinese language and culture in Indonesian society. Middle class Indonesians began to be optimistic about China’s economic development. They began to think that growing business cooperation with Chinese companies (and businessmen) was inevitable. In anticipation of this, some even began to learn the Chinese language (Mandarin). Since the formal learning activity of this language was still banned, many professional Indonesians invited Mandarin teachers to their offices or homes to give them ‘private Mandarin courses.’ This growing enthusiasm for learning Mandarin ran parallel with increasing appreciation of aspects of Chinese culture (see Heryanto 1998). Chinese movies - mostly in the form of soap operas - were welcomed by Indonesian viewers. For example, the screening of the prominent Chinese movie series entitled ‘the Return of Condor Hero’ by Indosiar, the then newly established broadcasting company, attracted a lot of viewers. Alongside a number of other Chinese martial arts series, it “succeeded in winning top ratings nationwide for Indosiar” (Thomas 2005: 141). A similar response was evoked by the ‘White Snake Legend’ series, which was aired by SCTV (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia) in 1994 and was popular with the public (Heryanto 1999: 173). Although most of these series were produced by the Hong Kong or Taiwan television industries the average watchers loved them as Chinese movies.
The growing appreciation of Chinese culture in the mid 1990s was also apparent in the way themes related to ‘China’ or ‘the Chinese’ became widespread in Indonesian theatre. Most prominent was the 1994 performance by Koma, a prominent Indonesian theatre group led by a Chinese Indonesian drama director, Riantiarno. One of their most famous performances was the ‘Opera Ular Putih’ (The White Snake Opera), which adopted the theme of a traditional Chinese legend. The performance was held in the Taman Ismail Marzuki (Ismail Marzuki Park, usually abbreviated as TIM), and attracted a massive audience. I recall how difficult it was for my friends and I to get tickets for the performance, despite the fact that they were not cheap. Some three years after this performance, Theatre Koma appeared on stage again, this time with ‘Sampek Engtay’ (‘Legend of Butterfly Lovers ’), also based on a Chinese traditional story.

Clearly, the emergence of the above phenomenon is at fundamental odds with previous ways of portraying China and the ethnic Chinese (in Indonesia), as well as with the basic tenets of Indonesian nationalism and nation-building (see Chapters One and Two). This dramatic difference between previous policies toward China and the Indonesian Chinese on the one hand and the current enthusiasm for them on the other hand has made the contemporary love of all things Chinese worth investigating. It is to conduct such an investigation that the present study is carried out. In the
endeavour to understand this phenomenon, I will use the following questions to guide us: in which way has this enthusiasm for China and the Chinese taken place? With which aspects of China and the Chinese have the middle class Indonesians become enamoured? How has this enthusiasm been understood and taken advantage of by Chinese Indonesians? And finally, how can an observation of this phenomenon help us better understand the nature of present day Indonesian society?

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Let me trace more broadly the shift in practice and attitude (towards the Chinese) in Indonesia over the last decade or so. The change of course did not happen overnight – a more positive attitude toward China as a country among the State elite was slow to emerge. Diplomatic ties between the two countries eventually resumed in 1990. But suspicious attitudes toward China among government officials were still common. For example, when the Chinese government showed its concern with riots that targeted Chinese business owners or managers in North Sumatra in 1994, it was met with a strong rebuke from Indonesian elites (Sukma 2009:142-143).

Nevertheless a more profound change of attitude toward China began with the demise of the New Order regime. During my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009 carried
out a decade after Indonesia entered the Post-Suharto era, I often encountered phenomenon illustrating that change of attitude. For example, in January 2009 I attended a lunch organized by a Chinese Indonesian Muslim entrepreneur attended by various groups, including Chinese guests – consisting of university professors and retired diplomats who were assigned to the Chinese embassy to Indonesia – and Indonesian guests, among whom were former ministers and ambassadors, members of the Indonesian parliament, academics and researchers. As the lunch was served, Yudi Latif, a young Indonesian researcher who holds a PhD from the Australian National University, delivered a brief speech (in Indonesian: *Sepatah Kata*). In his speech, he called the gathering a very important event because in his view it might (re)develop the ‘Silk Road’ between the Indonesia and China:

In the past, China was one of the greatest civilizations in the world. Meanwhile the Nusantara civilization [...] was the second biggest one. So now, as China is once again becoming the greatest centre of world civilization, Indonesia should again be the second biggest one. [...] Therefore, it is important to re-knit this Silk Road network.

A year earlier, in 2008, a book authored by Dahlan Iskan, the CEO of the Jawa Pos Media group who recently was
appointed as minister of state-owned enterprises, was published in Surabaya. It was titled *Pelajaran Dari Tiongkok* (Lessons from China). In the preface of the book, the author explained to the readers that he visited China frequently and that the main purpose of those visits was more than just to learn Mandarin or to do business:

> But despite the frequency of my visits to China, and of learning Mandarin, the most important thing is actually this: I want to ‘learn the spirit’ of China. I view that no one has the spirit of progress and development compared to what is happening in China. Spirit! Spirit! Spirit! I want to progress together with my colleagues in the Jawa Post Group. (Iskan 2008: ix)

_Pak_ Dahlan also mentioned that while previously he frequently went to the United States, today he never goes there anymore.

> In the past, I also often went to America. The purpose was also similar, although not exactly the same, that is, to shop too. But in America, I shopped for the Idea. In those days, America gave me a lot of ideas to begin developing this Jawa Pos group. Now, I never go to America. There
is ‘a closer and cheaper America’: China!
It is also more suitable for Indonesian conditions and situation. (Iskan 2008.ix)

Such ideas are surprisingly widespread. Coincidentally, on my way to attend a public lecture given by a Surabaya-born Chinese Indonesian who had become a nationally well-known trainer and public speaker on business and management, I talked with the driver of the minibus that brought me to the lecture’s location. The public transportation driver was a young Madurese man who had grown up in Surabaya. As we chatted about the Surabaya-Madura (Suramadu) Bridge construction project (a bridge that connects Java and Madura Island), in whose construction China has provided much financial and technological assistance, he commented on China’s involvement positively.

Despite his tendency to equate the Mainland Chinese with the Chinese Indonesians, he considered the involvement of China in the development project significant in fostering a closer relationship between Chinese and Indonesians. “It can develop a good friendship (persahabatan) between the Chinese and the Indonesians. The Chinese are everywhere in this country”, he asserted. In addition, he also hoped that the construction of the bridge would benefit Madura by boosting investments there. And finally, he regarded the fact that Indonesia sought technological assistance from China while constructing the bridge as acceptable
because “as Moslems, we are taught by our Prophet to seek knowledge as far as China.”

Within hours of this conversation, the Prophet Mohammad’s words - that originally read “seek knowledge even if you have to go to China” (in Arabic: *Utlub il ‘ilmā wa law fis-Sin*) - were mentioned again. But this time, it was said by a Chinese Indonesian business and management trainer as he delivered the public lecture. The audience laughed when this trainer maintained further that, “if (you) have not had any chance to go to China yet, then (you’d better) learn it from the Indonesian Chinese.”

A different attitude toward China might be observed in the statements and actions of the Post Suharto Indonesia’s ruling elite as well. In 1999, newly elected President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) made China the destination of his first overseas visit. He was supported by the speaker of the Indonesian People Consultative Body (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*, MPR), Amin Rais, who claimed that because “political hegemony has been used [against Indonesia] by superpower countries in the international community, we need Asian strength from countries like China.” (Novotny 2010:176). The current Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, also reiterates a positive attitude toward China. In a visit to China in 2005, President Yudhoyono began his speech with the following statement: “there is a proverb that says, ‘seek
knowledge as far as China!’. I visit this place, amongst others, to accomplish this advice, (to) learn from as far as China…”

Some years later, while making an argument that the key to a successful nation lies in the quality of its human capital, Yudhoyono pointed to China, although he also mentioned other East Asian countries (Republika 17 November 2010). Speaking in front of the cadres of the political party that he leads (Partai Demokrat), Yudhoyono reportedly told the story of how China was rapidly changing from just another Asian country 50 years ago to becoming a country whose economy is expected to be as powerful as the US (Waspada Online 28 November 2010).

The cases above are just a few examples of how positive sentiments and images of China and the Chinese are circulating in Indonesia today. Such sentiments and images have been popular amongst sections of the Indonesian public for roughly a decade. As revealed by a 2008 BBC Poll, 58 per cent of Indonesian respondents held a positive view of China’s influence, while 25 per cent of them considered it negative (BBC 2008:14). A similar survey conducted by the Pew Research Center also shows that between 2005 and 2011, over 58 per cent of Indonesian respondents have a favourable view of China (Pew Research Center 2011). In the 2009 BBC Poll, which was based on a survey conducted in the aftermath of the 2008 ‘Tibetan Unrest’, Indonesian
respondents that viewed China positively had dropped to 43 per cent (BBC 2009:7). Nevertheless, this number is still significant if compared to the previous era, when a negative perception of China was extremely dominant.

The positive sentiments and images of China are not just observable in the form of rather shallow opinion polls. The number of books published on China has exploded, discussing economic development taking place in China and the potentiality of this country to become a world superpower (for example Brahm 2002, Wibowo 2004, Shenkar 2005, Dharmawan 2006), the working and business culture of the Chinese (e.g. Tjoe 2007, Sugiarto 2009), and even the Chinese historical role in the spread of Islam to Indonesia (for example Qurtuby 2003, Muljana 2005, Tan 2010). While some of these are Indonesian translations of books written by foreign authors, others are the work of Indonesian scholars. Today these books are found in all major book stores in Indonesia, sometimes prominently displayed in a special shelf or corner. Chinese cultural performances such as lion and dragon dances have attracted an increasing numbers of people, many of non-Chinese ethnic backgrounds. Some of these have not only become spectators of the arts and cultural performances, but also participants in them. Equally interesting, certain themes associated with Chinese people and their culture have entered Indonesian art and cultural worlds. They have begun to appear in Indonesian novels and films as well as in the more
traditional *kethoprak* and *wayang* performances (Heryanto 2008 for their appearance in films and novels). Meanwhile an enthusiasm for the learning of Mandarin, the official language of China, has also increased (see Lee 2011, Kaboel and Sulanti 2010). This language is not only being learned, but is also increasingly heard in public. The recitation of a section of the Chinese version of the Koran by a young Muslim Javanese in the Cheng Ho Mosque in Surabaya during the celebration of 6\(^{th}\) anniversary of the mosque on October 25\(^{th}\) 2008 is an example of this. Similarly, Chinese characters are now more observable in public space. Just a decade ago, one would hardly see a Chinese character in Glodok, a district known as the Chinatown of Jakarta. But today, Chinese characters may be seen even at a shopping centre located in the centre of the city, which is outside the ‘Chinatown’ area. In addition, China has now become a destination country, not only for Indonesian tourists, but also for Indonesian students who study abroad (see *Kompas* 10 May 2011; *Waraskita.net*, 11 June 2011). One may confirm this trend by observing the scattered billboards advertising ‘study in China’ to be seen in many shopping centres in Indonesian cities today.

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\(^4\) For example, the expedition launched by the Muslim eunuch Zheng He of the Ming Dynasty has become a theme that appears in many performances by various groups of popular arts.
However, equally significant as the events described above is the apparent willingness to learn from China that many Indonesians, particularly of a middle class background, show when they talk about that country. Along with their appreciation of China’s transformation into what in many Indonesians’ view is a modern, powerful, and economically developed country, many Indonesians today are enthusiastic to learn from China and the Chinese. Such enthusiasm manifests in the way in which the economic and political model adopted by the Chinese state has been regarded as worthy of emulation or in the way that Chinese leaders are seen as good examples to copy. It also appears in the conviction that Indonesians should be inspired by the spirit of progress demonstrated by the Chinese, developing a working and business culture currently possessed by them.

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Indonesian enthusiasm for China has arisen concomitantly with the emergence of a global discourse on the rise of China and on the soft power that this country is increasingly wielding. The discourse has become apparent in the international media since the early years of this new century. Many mainstream Western scholars and opinion leaders now talk and write about China’s rapid economic development in the last two decades. Yongjing Zhang illustrated this tendency by
making a light-hearted adaptation of the opening paragraph of the *Communist Manifesto*

A spectre is haunting the world—the spectre of the rise of (Communist) China. All the discourses about China around the world have entered into one spiral hype about this spectre: in print and other media, in academic discussions and policy briefings, in published books and articles, and all over the virtual space of Internet. (Zhang 2009:45)

And as he further explains, “If the rise of China is the topic of the political moment, the latest hype about the rise of China is about China’s soft power” (Zhang 2009:45).

Soft power is a concept introduced by International Relations theorist Joseph Nye in 1990. Unlike hard power that according to him “can rest on inducements (‘carrots’) and threats (‘sticks’),” soft power “rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye 2004:5). Hence, it “uses a different type of currency (not force, not money) to engender cooperation - an attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values” (Nye 2004:7). Aestheticized culture is also considered an important source of soft power.
The concept of soft power has been applied to analyse China’s relation with other developing countries, especially with its neighbours. Such discussion often points to the emergence of a more positive image of China in a certain country or region, regarded as a result of the exertion of China’s soft power. One example of this is Joshua Kurlantzick’s book, *Charm Offensive: How China’s Soft Power Is Transforming the World*, in which he writes about an improved reception of China not only in other developing countries, but also in a developed country like Australia (Kurlantzick 2007:3-4). For Kurlantzick, the transformation of China’s image, especially in developing countries, “is due largely to China’s growing soft power, which has emerged as the most potent weapon in Beijing’s foreign policy arsenal” (Kurlantzick 2007:5). However, his concept of China’s soft power is significantly differed from the one espoused by Joseph Nye, as seen in his explanation below:

In the context of China, both the Chinese government and many nations influenced by China enunciate a broader idea of soft power than did Nye. For the Chinese, soft power means anything outside of the military and security realm, including not only popular culture and public diplomacy but also more coercive economic and diplomatic levers like aid and investment and participation in multilateral
organizations—Nye’s carrots and sticks. Indeed, Beijing offers the charm of a lion, not of a mouse: it can threaten other nations with these sticks if they do not help China achieve its goals, but it can offer sizable carrots if they do. (Kurlantzick 2007:6)

A study conducted by Bronson Percival, a former American diplomat, also argued for the significance of China’s soft power. Based on several polls, Percival showed how in some Southeast Asian countries “not only leaders but also ordinary people increasingly see China as a benign, positive force, a reputation that once belonged to the United States and, to a lesser extent, Japan” (Percival 2007:125). Indonesia is among those countries. As Percival pointed out, one of the above polls revealed that 68 per cent of Indonesian respondents not only had positive views of China but also regarded China as a remote, benign presence (Percival 2007:126). However, Percival warned us that even though the above data might indicate the presence of China’s soft power in Southeast Asia, this is not the soft power espoused by Joseph Nye. He explained,

Claims about China’s soft power in Southeast Asia should be treated with caution. In the days before the term soft power became prominent, the terms cultural and diplomatic influence would
have been employed to describe the same phenomena. China has successfully conducted a sophisticated, reassuring diplomatic campaign and projected a benign image. This campaign, combines with growing economic ties, has provided Beijing with greater influence.

China’s soft power has increased not because Southeast Asians are attracted to Chinese values. Rather, China’s attraction has grown primarily because ties with China benefit, and thus appeal, to national elites and the small but often influential ethnic Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia. This ‘power’ is enhanced by anticipation of further benefits for Southeast Asians as ties with China deepen. (Percival 2007: 126-127)

Thus for both Kurlantzick and Percival, the growing enthusiasm for China in developing countries was the result of China’s cultural diplomacy and economic attraction. Indeed, China’s recent behaviour seems to support this view. On the one hand, Chinese leaders have tirelessly disseminated the idea that developments currently taking place in China are peaceful and beneficial for the region, if not for the world. Such an idea, popularly known as ‘China’s peaceful rise’ (heping jueqi) was introduced by Zheng Bijian, a close associate
and advisor to President Hu Jintao. For instance, in a speech delivered in September 2004, Zheng maintained that

We term this path toward modernization ‘a development path to a peaceful rise’ because in contrast to some other emerging powers in modern history, who plundered other countries of their resources through invasion, expansion, or even large-scale wars of aggression, China will acquire the capital, technology, and resources needed for its modernization by peaceful means. The continuous rapid development that China has witnessed in the past twenty-five years proves that we have been quite successful in pursuing this path. This undoubtedly deserves attention. (Zheng 2005:39)

Yet even the phrase ‘peaceful rise’ has not pleased all Chinese leaders and intellectuals. Some of them worry that the term ‘rise’ might remind the international world of the ‘China threat’ (Guo 2006:2). As a result, “President Hu Jintao, in his April 24, 2004 remarks to the Boao Forum on Asia, dropped the term peaceful rise, and used peaceful development [heping fazhan] path instead” (Lampton 2008:33). For David Lampton, this indicates that “Beijing remained dedicated to the task of reassuring the outside world about its intentions, even if
it could not reach internal unanimity about the vocabulary for doing so” (Lampton 2008:33).

On the other hand, China has done more than just promote the idea that its development is peaceful and beneficial. As Michael A Glosny puts it,

Chinese statements expressing trust and friendship toward its neighbors are not new. [...] What is new, however, is that since the mid- to late 1990s, China has consistently taken action to back up these words of friendship and goodwill in its relations with ASEAN countries. (Glosny 2007:150)

These actions might be observed in the way in which China has made a number of efforts to win Indonesian hearts. Among them are establishing Confucius Institute, providing scholarships forIndonesians to study in China, sending teachers to teach Mandarin in Indonesian public schools and government institutions, and establishing relations with political parties and mass organizations, especially Muslim organizations. When all of these are combined with aid and investment, it is not too difficult to imagine the impact that these have on Indonesian people.

Furthermore, the financial aid that China has given to Indonesia has been used for projects that have
significant meanings for local Indonesians. An important example of this is the construction of the Suramadu Bridge. The bridge is not only important for the inhabitants of Madura Island, who now can travel to Surabaya by land vehicles to work or do business, but also for East Java in general. “It might become an icon for East Java people, as the Krakatau Steel is for the people in Cilegon (in Banten Province),” commented Dayat, a worker who participated in the project. Similarly significant is the humanitarian project of building a village in Aceh for those who lost their homes in the 2004 tsunami.

Nevertheless understanding the recent appreciation for China mostly as a consequence of China’s soft power ignores several interesting questions. While it is true that the new image of China in Indonesia is favourable, and hence might be further manipulated as a source of soft power by the Chinese State, it is nevertheless a result of an investment in that discourse felt by people as members of very different groups. Each of these groups promotes a certain perception of China for their own reasons. For example, a study conducted by Daniel Novotny argues that the Indonesian elite developed a positive perception of the phenomenon of the rise of China because it fitted their own agenda (Novotny 2010:222-223). Similarly, we may assume that different sectors of middle class Indonesians might have different causes for their enthusiasm for China. What does being a China enthusiast mean for the people of
each group? The discussions in the following chapters also seek to throw some light upon this question.

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Before beginning that analysis however, let me explain the immediate political context of the changes in discourse on China. This study focus on those who can be categorized as middle class Indonesians. Accordingly it explores the enthusiasm for China among scholars, journalists, businessmen, politicians, and religious leaders, even though I also consider the voices of people outside these categories. The reason I focus on this group of middle class actors is because they are likely to be opinion leaders.

As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the educated middle class in particular are concerned with the present condition of the Indonesian nation. Since it was first ‘imagined’ in the early years of the twentieth century, the idea of the Indonesian nation has gone through various changes. The composition, essence and history of the nation of Indonesia have been a subject of contestation, both in the last period of Dutch colonization as well as in the post-independence era, especially during the Sukarno years. However, since Suharto gained power in the aftermath of the 1965 failed coup, voices promoting alternative ideas about Indonesia that were different to the version of the New Order regime were silenced, at least in the public
sphere. As an authoritarian State, the New Order sought to maintain a systematic surveillance of its citizens in order to detect dissenting voices. The regime tended to respond to those who expressed such dissension with a ‘security’ approach, claiming certain alternative political projects threatened the prosperity and unity of the nation. In this way, the New Order state maintained what it called national stability for a long period. On the other hand, the bureaucratic authoritarian model also enabled the regime to gain control over people’s access to knowledge and information. By placing even the religious sphere as an institution under its control, the New Order was able to inculcate Indonesians with the state’s ideology, an ideology that stressed uniformity and development (as well as enmity with China).

Further the New Order regime circulated its vision of development through a state-controlled media and education. Writing in 1997, Ian Chalmers reminded us that, “In the 1970s and 1980s senior state officials made frequent, and often almost daily, reference to ‘economic take off’ as the ultimate purpose of the nation.” (Chalmers 1997:3). Indonesians who were born in 1970s or earlier are likely to be familiar with the term ‘take off era’ (era tinggal landas), the regime’s dream of a future and developed Indonesia characterized by justice, prosperity, and welfare. The regime devised a five year development plan to achieve that dream. Their ambition was that Indonesia would be successfully
modernized by the end of the sixth five-year development plan.

However, at the end of the sixth five-year plan several Asian countries, including Indonesia, were hit by a monetary crisis. Unlike other Asian countries (such as China and Malaysia), Indonesia failed to survive the crisis. The monetary crisis expanded to become a general economic crisis, and finally turned into a political crisis.

The crisis incited massive demonstrations that ended with the collapse of the regime in May 1998. Somewhat typically, the crisis also resulted in a brutal anti-Chinese pogrom provoked by the regime. The departure of President Suharto from office took place about a week after the May 1998 pogroms broke out in several big cities. The collapse of the New Order regime not only brought an end to the dream of the developed Indonesia that it had constructed, but also of the ‘social order’ that it had maintained by using the security approach.

Post-Suharto Indonesia is characterized by democracy, but also by ethnic and religion-based conflicts, as well as by conflict among elite groups. ‘We have too much democracy’, said an Indonesian historian to me (Personal conversation with Prof A. Dahana, Jakarta, 4 September 2009). For him at least, the Indonesian state is in danger of becoming so weak that it
is unable to maintain social order or properly negotiate with foreign powers. Indeed, the independence of the Indonesian State (kemandirian) in the face of foreign influence, be it of foreign states, multinational Corporations, or international financial institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund or IMF) is often questioned by Indonesians (see, for example, Kweek 2006, Rais 2008). They complain about the submissive attitude that, in their view, the Indonesian state has demonstrated.

This situation has created a wealth of grievances, especially amongst middle class Indonesians. In response people have begun to dream of an improved Indonesia. For some people, their dream can come true with a better model or a less corrupt State. Others are concerned with the ‘human’ quality of Indonesian people. Meanwhile, those who adhere to Islam, the religion of the majority of Indonesians, have an additional source of grievance: their religion is often associated in the West with radicalism, violence, and terrorism. Indonesians have understood that this portrayal of Islam is widespread in the Western media following the September 9th terror attack (popularly remembered as 9/11). In Indonesia, this is exacerbated by frequent suicide blasts perpetrated by groups allegedly related to hard line Muslim organizations. In response, Muslim Indonesians are making efforts to construct a different face of Islam, the face of a peaceful
Islam that may become a blessing for all (rachmatan lil alamin).

As we shall see in the chapters below, Indonesian enthusiasm for China is related to these efforts to find a better model of state, to develop ‘better’ human resources, and to construct a liberal face for Islam.

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Last, let me talk about certain methodological decisions in relation to the thesis. The research was focused on middle class Indonesians, based on field work carried out in Indonesia between July 2008 and October 2009. During this field work period, several important events have occurred inside and outside Indonesia. Indonesian parliamentary general election was held in April 2009. Three months afterwards, the Presidential election took place. Outside Indonesia, the Beijing Olympic was held in August 2008. The field work was mainly conducted in Surabaya (for roughly eleven months) and in Jakarta. The reason I spent most of my fieldwork period in Surabaya was because it is the city where the Suramadu construction project was located. Short visits to several other cities (such as Semarang) were also conducted during the fieldwork period. In addition, I also made another short visit to Jakarta and Surabaya in April 2010.

During these months, I talked with over 60 people from various occupational backgrounds. They
consisted of fourteen academics and researchers, twelve businessmen, a number of journalists, eight professionals (that is, engineers and managers), a number of religious leaders, several Non-Government Organization (NGO) activists, one university student, one high school teacher, one artist, one labourer, three taxi drivers, and one public transport driver. As the majority of them have middle class occupations, I argue that they represent a middle class sensibility and political subjectivity. However, they cannot be categorized on their occupation only. In fact, six of the academics, one of the NGO activists, and one of the businessmen held key positions in large Islamic organizations, and hence might be regarded as Muslim leaders. Two of the businessmen and one of the journalists actively participated in formal politics in 2009 and 2010. At least three of the academics, one of the businessman, one of the journalists, and one of the NGO activists (all of them younger than 35) had participated in the 1998 student movements that helped bring the New Order regime to an end. Some of them are still in touch with other former and current student movement activists. Meanwhile, seven of the ethnic Chinese informants (consisting of both businessmen and professionals) were actively involved in Chinese Indonesian organizations that had been established soon after the collapse of the New Order. Thus my informants represent at least three groups within the Indonesian middle class: Muslim leaders, politically active young people, and politically re-awakened Chinese Indonesians. These positions
legitimize their participation in the discourse on Indonesian contemporary politics and on nation building. Such participation is particularly observable among those who work as academics, journalists, and NGO activists because these occupations provide them with space to voice their views. This is the reason why this research is focused on the articulate middle-class. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork I also gathered information from other groups of informants, including those working in lower class occupations such as construction worker and taxi drivers. In doing so I sought to identify whether and to what extent an image of China has circulated beyond the groups focused on in this research.

As the research is focused on the articulate middle class, the image of China revealed in this research cannot be considered as representing the views held by the whole Indonesian people. They are just the views expressed by a number of informants belonging to the groups of middle class Indonesians mentioned above: Muslim leaders, politically active young people, and politically reawakened Chinese Indonesians. However, it is worth noting that even the informants that could be subsumed as one of the above groups have various different organizational backgrounds. For example, the Muslim leaders whom I interviewed consisted of the senior as well as young leaders of NU (Nahdlatul Ulama, or the ‘Revival of Muslim scholars’) and Muhammadiyah, the biggest Islamic organizations in
Indonesia. Similarly, the politically active young people whose views are represented in this study were mid-career academics affiliated with several well-known public and private universities in Surabaya and Jakarta, political activities working for a number of NGOs, and members of certain political parties. As they came from diverse organizations and institutions, the similarity of the views of China that they expressed may be seen as an indicative that such views may have become popular among people belonging to the groups of middle-class Indonesians observed in this research.

Chang Yao Hoon (2006:70) notes how he attempted to ‘go native’, for instance, by eating in a roadside warung (food stall) and taking public transport, while conducting fieldwork in Jakarta, in order to “fit in to the conceptual schema of the intertwined ‘native’ race, language, and culture.” In my research, I tried my best to do the opposite, to observe the phenomenon I encountered from a non-native eye, in order to discover meanings and causes of phenomena that were less apparent to my informants or below their ‘horizons’ of expectation and history. The same ‘habitus’ applied in many ways of course to myself, given the similar attitudes and motivations that informed my own practices as a member of the Indonesian middle class. This ‘self-estrangement’ was not easy work (though not particularly difficult either!). The change of attitude toward China and Chineseness occurred before I began this study. Chinese decorations have been installed each
Chinese New Year (known as *Tahun Baru Imlek* in Indonesia) in shopping centres in Indonesian big cities since the early 2000s, as have billboards advertising Mandarin courses, study in China, or tours to China. Accordingly I sought to carefully record such developments as if they were things that I saw for the first time.

An opportunity to practice ‘going native’, came in Surabaya, where I spent a good period of my fieldwork period. Surabaya is roughly eight hundreds kilometres from my home city. Nevertheless the modernization project carried out since the beginning of New Order era has resulted in many similarities between big cities in Indonesia. Surabaya, albeit smaller in size, is not too different to Jakarta. Like Jakarta, it is also characterized by tall buildings, heavy traffic, and busy people. True, natives of Surabaya speak in an accent slightly different to Jakartans. But the domination of Jakarta’s accent transmitted through various TV programs has made this difference less significant. After staying there for a couple of weeks, my ears went native, in the sense that I could tell whether a person was Surabayan or not from the way they spoke. But I was never able to speak as a Surabayan to the extent that locals would believe that I was a native of that city.

Being a ‘native’ who did research in his ‘own home’ advantaged me to a certain extent. I began my fieldwork by using the networks I had already
established in previous research. Thus the first people I met in Surabaya were two senior Surabaya-based Indonesian academics. From there, I began to expand my networks by meeting with people whom those two academics suggested. Everyone suggested I meet with others as well, until I had a network of informants that provided me with adequate information. I also expanded this network by attending any events recommended to me. During those events, I usually had a chance to talk with more people relevant to my research. I also frequently listened to public speeches and statements that might help me understand the topic I was studying.

Meeting people working at the Suramadu construction site was more complicated. The site was virtually closed to outsiders. I had to wait for several months before I finally interviewed a senior East Java former leader. It was from this leader that I got the contact number of an Indonesian official related to the project, who in turn introduced me to people on the construction site. After meeting them, I was permitted to visit the construction site, including the one in the middle of the Madura Strait where Chinese workers and engineers worked. Meanwhile, in Jakarta, I used my old university network to begin the research. However, there were some cases in which my informants in Surabaya suggested I meet other people in Jakarta, and vice versa.
My conversations with informants did not resemble formal interviews even though some of them were conducted in a formal setting. In most cases, I introduced myself as a student whose research was related with the rise of China, curious as to how it was viewed by Indonesians. In many cases, my informants responded to such questions by detailing their opinions about China. If that happened, then I would probe the informant with questions relevant to the topic that we were already discussing. I usually inserted questions regarding their background while we spoke. Sometimes I refrained from asking about their personal background until the second or third meeting, when we had a closer relationship.

There were also some informants that I met by chance. I was often introduced to a person by a colleague or friend, without having any plan to interview them. When I told them that I was a student conducting research on Indonesian perceptions of China, many volunteered their own perception of China. This often led to another meeting, when I began to learn more about their perceptions and personal background. However, informants selected through this process only constituted a small percentage of the whole informants.

In short, the stories, narratives, opinions and polemics that we will encounter in the chapters that follow are based on information given to me in response to my questions. It is not based on the observation of
‘natural’ conversation, but of talk triggered by the ‘bait’ that I dangled in the first place. Nevertheless, I sought to minimalize my role in order not to lead informants in any direction. I also combined the above information with other kinds of activities and observation. Some of these included attending meetings, observing news and articles, browsing book stores, walking around shopping centres, watching TV programs, and so on. The thesis is an analysis of data gleaned through these combined methods.

However, it is worth noting that while most of the stories, narratives, opinions, and polemics analysed in this study present positive views of China, it does not necessarily mean that only such views are present in contemporary Indonesian society. In fact, as discussed in Chapter Two and Four, negative views of China still exist in Indonesian society today. Nonetheless, this study focuses its analysis on the positive image of China because as a phenomenon hardly observable during the three decades of the New Order period, its recent appearance in Indonesian public is worth our special attention. Likewise, as will be described in the last part of Chapter Two, negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians are also still prevalent in Indonesian public recently. But unlike in the past, today one may face serious consequences for publicly expressing such attitudes. This may explain why members of the Indonesian elite or middle class tend to refrain from making negative comments about this ethnic group.
Chapter One introduces the important topic of Indonesian nationalism and its history, focusing on four developments in particular. First I examine accounts regarding how the nation was constructed in the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly in relation to Dutch colonialism. Second the chapter discusses how in the Sukarno era, nationalist sentiment in the form of an eagerness to build a modern and independent (mandiri) Indonesia was transmitted in the acts and speeches of the country’s first president. A third concern is to explore how this emphasis on independence was replaced by the idea of development and stability by the New Order regime. And finally, we will evaluate how in the Post-New Order era, the idea of independence has been revived, particularly in the form of peoples’ resentments against the state, which in their view has lost (at least some of) its ability to maintain its sovereignty and independence.

The second chapter aims to show the political history of Indonesians’ perceptions and actions directed towards China and against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia in the broader context of the history of Indonesian nationalism. It begins with a brief discussion of the situation of ethnic Chinese during the Dutch colonial era, followed with an argument about their condition in the aftermath of Indonesian independence. The focus of the chapter, however, will be on the New Order period. This
discussion of how the New Order regime used the issue of China and the ethnic Chinese for its own political purpose provides the proper context from which to understand the different representations of China and Chinese in the present.

Chapters Three and Four explore the social arenas in which enthusiasm for China takes place. It argues that the enthusiasm constitutes a discourse that not only conveys an appreciation of China, but also claims that Indonesia should learn from China. The chapters show the ways in which the narratives promoted by the discourse have appeared in Indonesian public life. It also discusses how the narratives have appeared in the mind of individual Indonesians and how these relate to present conditions in the country.

The following chapter, Chapter Five, is devoted to a discussion of how an appreciation for the quality of the Chinese worker or work ethic has emerged. It also discusses a discourse acknowledging or even praising the ‘business skills’ of Chinese Indonesians. As we will see, this perception is based on old stereotype, although it is justified by contemporary ‘evidence.’ What is new is the conclusions drawn in relation to this perception. Unlike in the past, Indonesians now express a determination to learn from the Chinese (of China) and from Chinese Indonesians in term of working ethos and business professionalism.
Chapter Six investigates a particularly fascinating subject, the relationship between the discourse on China and the conditions experienced by Muslim Indonesians in relation to the recent portrayal of Islam promoted by the Western media. It explores how Indonesians use Islam to legitimize their admiration and appreciation of the success that China has achieved. But on the other hand, they also use a discourse on China to construct, or perhaps to strengthen, a desired form of Indonesian Islam, presented as peaceful and modern, in order to contest the negative portrayal of Islam developed in the Western media.

Chapter Seven focuses on how Chinese Indonesians too have been enthusiasts for the rise of China as well. It will investigate the way in which the discourse has been meaningful for them. By circulating the discourse and encouraging Indonesians to emulate China, Chinese Indonesians feel that they are making a contribution to Indonesia. In this way, they gain a space they previously never had in the Indonesian history of nationalism during which they were located not only as outsiders, but also a powerful ‘black book’, especially in the New Order Indonesia. In addition, this chapter will also examine the way in which Chinese Indonesians make use of the discourse on China for various other purposes.
This chapter aims to situate the current growing enthusiasm for China in the history of Indonesian nationalism. It will conclude by examining ways in which Indonesians have understood the nation since the demise of Suharto’s New Order government in 1998. Which concerns about the nation have been most prominent among the Indonesian public? In which ways do these issues relate to the history of nationalism in Indonesia?

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first will briefly discuss the early makings of the Indonesian nation, which took place about a century ago. Section two will show how Indonesia – under the leadership of its first president, Sukarno – launched an ambitious nation-building project aimed at forging a prestigious nation characterized by independence from the influence of more ‘established nations’ (read
Western countries). Section three will be devoted to a discussion about how President Suharto’s New Order Indonesia shifted its focus to internal order and effectively closed off Indonesian society from the wider world. It will reveal how despite growing dependence on Western countries (which in turn provided Indonesia with significant development aid), nationalist sentiments against those Western countries and Japanese were still present. The final section will discuss the way in which Indonesians today understand the current predicament of Indonesia.

The Emergence of Indonesian Nationalism

The Southeast Asian archipelago that constitutes the territory of Indonesia consists of more than ten thousands small and big islands, of which Papua, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Sumatra, Java, and Bali, are the six biggest. These islands are historically inhabited by people who in 1850 were called by the English traveller George Samuel Windson Earl, as ‘Indu-nesians’, a term from which the word ‘Indonesia’ (and ‘Indonesian’) evolved (Elson 2008: 1). These people consist of more than three hundreds groups, each with their own

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5 Indonesia shares the Papua Island with Papua New Guinea, which occupies the eastern part of the island, and Kalimantan with Malaysia, which occupies its northern part.
language, culture, and history. Differences in language and culture are massive. Geographical distance only partly account for this. Acehnese in Sumatra and the Papuans in the easternmost parts of the territory are separated by a distance of more than five thousands kilometres and their languages and cultures are very different. Yet two neighbouring villages or districts anywhere in Indonesia may also display a similar variety in culture and language. The Javanese, who constitute the ethnic majority of the Indonesian people, are also culturally diverse. As Clifford Geertz’s research has revealed, even among Javanese who dwell in a small city in East Java Province, one may observe the presence of several different cultural strains (Geertz 1960).6

Given nationalism’s prime tenets, these cultural, language, and religious diversities have posed a challenge to nation building from the very conceptions of the nation onwards. Moreover, for thousands of years, the forefathers of Indonesians lived in different regions that were separated politically. The connections between these regions were weak and often hostile

6 As Geertz pointed out, in a single town named Modjokuto live the Abangan, who stress the animistic aspects of Javanese syncretism broadly related to the peasant element in the population; the Santri, who stress Islamic aspects of the syncretism generally related to the trading element; and the Prijaji, who stress Hinduist aspects related to the bureaucratic element (Geertz 1960:5-7).
(Kingsbury 2005: 34). Most people were subjects of various kingdoms that had risen and fallen from time to time. Meanwhile, those who remained relatively ungoverned by higher structures of rule lived under local chieftains. It is true that some of these kingdoms, such as Sriwijaya and Majapahit, were in control of a larger part of the archipelago. But they were often seen as foreign powers by the people or local rulers in the regions. Furthermore, by the time Europeans arrived in the sixteenth century, these kingdoms had mostly lost their powers. The Islamic sultanates that replaced them were fragmented. When the Dutch established colonial rule on the island of Java in the seventeenth century its society was politically unintegrated (Kahin 1952:3). Kahin mentioned further that

Moreover, Mataram, the largest of the Javanese states, was during much of this period seriously weakened by civil wars. Initially, only by playing off the sultanate of Bantam against Mataram were the Dutch able to maintain their trading post in Batavia. It was to an important extent because of the division and mutual enmity of the chief Javanese states that they were, thereafter, by playing one state against the other, eventually able to dominate the island completely. (Kahin 1952:4)
This situation persisted until the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, we may say, as Professor Elson also states, that “before the twentieth century, there was no Indonesia and thus no Indonesians” (Elson 2008: 1).

It was the Dutch colonial power, established gradually since the seventeenth century that began to shape the Indonesian archipelago as a political entity (with territorial boundaries that are still the nation’s border today). Through negotiations and wars, either with other Europeans or with local kingdoms, the Dutch secured the border of a political unit called the Netherlands East Indies. The process of putting the major part of the archipelago under the control of the Netherlands East Indies proved to be a daunting task. It saw its official completion in the first decade of the twentieth century. The last regions to be subsumed under Dutch government were Aceh, Bali, eastern Nusa Tenggara, inland Kalimantan, and Sulawesi (Kingsbury 2005: 33). Meanwhile, West Papua in the eastern part of the archipelago had been under the Dutch colonial rule since the mid of the nineteenth century (see Singh 2008:19-21). A territorial unity emerged as

a result of enhanced transport infrastructures, notably the railways and roads of Java and the shipping networks woven by that of the efficient Dutch shipping line, the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, of a unified currency, and
of centrally driven, centripetally minded administrative, taxation, and legal systems. (Elson 2008:5)

Thus in the first decade of the last century, the Netherlands East Indies State “effectively came into being with its own bureaucracy, currency, financial and legal institutions, and languages (Dutch and Malay)” (Reid 1974:1; see also Anderson 1983:479). This state was home to people who since the eighteenth century onwards had been subsumed into categories based on colonial race distinctions. The Dutch constituted the ruling minority of the state. Together with other Europeans, they occupied the top layer of the social stratification. Asians from other countries, such as the Arabs, Chinese, Indians, and Japanese, were placed below that elite. At the bottom of the stratification were those who were called ‘natives’ (inlander). This category included the local people of the archipelago, the majority of the people of the Netherlands East Indies State.

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If “the rulers of the political unit belong to a nation other than that of the majority of the ruled” the nationalist sentiment of the latter, given certain conditions and influences, is capable of being forged into a new political force (Gellner 1983:1). When a movement based on such a sentiment evolves, the
construction of a new nation might occur. Indeed, as Gellner points out,

It is nationalism which engenders nation, and not the other way round. [...] nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. (Gellner 1983:55)

In Indonesia the beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a nationalist movement, especially among those categorized as the natives, which slowly envisioned the existence of an Indonesian nation. During that period people began to voice their grievances towards the Dutch, in particular for being treated unequally. They also became aware that even though they came from different regions they shared the experience of being a native in interaction with Europeans. They began to see themselves as members of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1991), that is, an Indonesian nation that should be ruled by themselves and for themselves. They projected a dream of reconstructing the ‘glorious past’ of the nation, when Sriwijaya and Majapahit Kingdom reigned over a territory similar to the then Netherlands East Indies. Paradoxically, this dream was founded on the knowledge of those kingdoms as produced by Dutch
scholars, such as J.L.A. Brandes (Elson 2008:14). The ultimate goal of these early independence fighters was for Indonesia to be *merdeka* (‘free’). In their view, a free Indonesia would bring a better life for them and all Indonesians.

The pioneers of the movement were a small group of Western-educated Indonesians. They were few in number, even among the elites of the natives. However, their number steadily increased as a result of the introduction of the so-called ‘ethical policy’ (announced by Queen Wilhemina in 1901). The policy aimed to change the treatment of the people of the Netherlands Indies so that they were no longer “viewed as objects of exploitation, but were instead to be helped upward to a higher material and spiritual level of existence” (Van Niel 1979:108). As Ingleson noted

> Under the aegis of what became known as the Ethical Policy the Indies government slowly extended opportunities for children of the Indonesian elite to attend Dutch language primary and secondary schools. By the end of the First World War the new education policy was producing a small but increasing number of graduates. (Ingleson 1979:1)
A few of these graduates continued their study in the Netherlands, while some others went to university level education institutions which began to be founded in 1920s (see Ricklefs 2001:201 for the founding of those institutions).

It was among these groups of educated Indonesians that the Indonesian nationalist movements began to evolve. Throughout the region but in particular on Java, organizations among the educated elite proliferated in the first and second decades of the twentieth century, even though most of them were based on ethnic identities (Ricklefs 2001:211). Inspired by Dr Wahidin Soedirohoesodo, students at STOVIA, a school for native medical doctors known as ‘dokter Jawa’, founded Budi Utomo, an organization “to promote cooperation in the harmonious development of the land and peoples of Java and Madura” (Elson 2008:10). Also other organizations were founded by students of this school, such as Tri Koro Dharmo, which in 1918 became Jong Java (Young Java), Jong Sumatranen Bond (Young Sumatrans Union), the Studerenden Vereeniging Minahasa (Minahasan Students Union), Jong Ambon (Young Ambon) and many other groups (Ricklefs 2001:212). As Ricklefs argues these organizations reflected the new enthusiasm for organization but they also showed the continuing strength of ethnic and communal identities. Thus “the concept of an all-Indonesian identity had as yet hardly any following at all” (Ricklefs 2001:212).
The concept of ‘Indonesian identity’ was still in the making. In the land of the colonizer, the Netherlands, a small group of Indonesian students founded a social organization named as *Indische Vereeniging* (IV, Indies Association) in 1908. The major aim of the organization was “to promote the common interest of the *Indiers* in the Netherlands and to keep in touch with the Netherlands East Indies” (Elson 2008:9). In mid 1920s, a new generation of IV members transformed it into an organization primarily concerned with political issues. As part of its new nationalist identity it adopted the Indonesian name *Perhimpunan Indonesia* (PI) and re-named its journal ‘*Indonesia Merdeka*’ (Indonesia Free). (Ingleson 1979: 1-2)

This organization developed several ideologies; one of them was national unity, that is, ‘the necessity of setting aside particularistic and regional differences and forming a united front against the Dutch in order to create an independent united Indonesian nation-state’ (Ingleson 1979: 5).

Meanwhile, in their homeland, the *Indische Partij* (IP, Indies Party), a political organization whose Eurasian members outnumbered the Indonesian counterparts, was founded in 1912 by Douwes Dekker, Cipto Mangunkusumo, and Suwardi Suryaningrat. The IP was
“a party for all persons who regarded the East Indies as their home” (Van Niel 1979:129). It is this party that developed the idea of unity among Indonesians based on “shared experience and the specific solidarity that flowed from it” (Elson 2008:15). It was also this party that delineated this idea of shared experience in term of “a shared sense of oppression ... and of a golden past ...that had been lost through that oppression” (Elson 2008: 15). By advancing this argument, the IP was promoting the construction of an Indonesian nation, which encompassed all different ethnicities in the Indonesian region. In fact, the IP’s version of the Indonesian nation also challenged racial boundaries that were constructed by the Dutch.

Islam, the religion of the majority of the Indonesian, had to some extent also contributed to this evolving sense of unity. For many, “Islam was synonymous with nationality. Being a Muslim meant that the person concerned belong to the indigenous population, whether Malay, Javanese, or others” (Noer 1973:7). Furthermore, “Islam was not just a common bond” but also functioned as “a sort of in-group symbol as against an alien intruder and oppressor of a different religion” (Kahin 1952:38). The effort made by Tirtoadisurjo (which later on was joined by H Samanhudi and H. O. S. Tjokroaminoto) to establish the Sarekat Islam (SI) in 1911 illustrates this as it received a warm welcome from the Muslim communities in and outside Java. But this was frustrated by the SI as it reproduced
the racial differences constructed by the Dutch government. The membership of SI was restricted to those categorized as natives; even Arab (Hadrami) Muslims—formerly active members of SI—were later on forced out of the organisation on the grounds that they belonged to a ‘foreign race’ (Mobini-Kesheh 1999:152). This kind of racially based nationalism was also expressed in attacks against Chinese, whom the nationalists often saw as foreign competitors, as people not loyal to an independent nation, and finally as collaborators with the Dutch.

Nevertheless the idea of unity among Indonesians continued to evolve, not only through organizations, but also as promoted in the print media. By the 1920s, the idea had been enthusiastically accepted among most of those categorized as the natives. By that time they were more likely to call themselves Indonesians, ‘the inhabitants of Indonesia’ than people of a certain tribe or region (See Elson 2008:44-45). In 1923, Tjokroaminoto established a National Indies Congress in which he declared

let us never forget the idea of National unity. Let us make no distinction between races and peoples, Sumatrans, Balinese, Javanese and people from Sulawesi and Borneo, for they are all Indiers. (Elson 2008:45)
This spirit of unity was reiterated more assertively in the second congress of Indonesian youth in 1928, in which the participants declared that they recognized Indonesia as their nation and motherland, and that Bahasa Indonesia is their ‘uniting language’ (bahasa persatuan). However, the concept of the Indonesian nation that prevailed was one that was still racially based. Thus only indigenous Indonesians were regarded as Indonesian. Hence, people of other races (such as the Eurasians and other Asians) were located outside the nationalist movement.

Nationalism in the Post-Independence Indonesia

The nationalists declared the independence of Indonesia in 1945 but the transfer of power from the Netherlands to the Republic of Indonesia was only conducted in 1949. The period between 1945 and 1949 was known as the period of ‘Revolution for Independence’ (Revolusi Kemerdekaan). Only after a considerably more stable condition was achieved could the new Indonesian State begin to build the nation that was still far from being finished. Disagreement over what Indonesia should be like was prevalent (Friends 2003:47). Resentments in the regions outside Java against the Javanese elite led to rebellions (Friends 2003:58). Meanwhile, some of the Muslim groups were not satisfied with the withdrawal of the clause in the constitution (Undang Undang Dasar...
1945) that demanded Indonesian Muslims be enabled to practice the law of Islam.

Despite those problems, President Sukarno, the first president of the country, projected his nationalistic imagination of a great and modern Indonesia. In the process he received worldwide recognition. This dream became manifest in the country’s foreign policy. In an effort to be recognized as assuming a leading position among the third world countries, Indonesia hosted the 1955 conference of the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung 1955. The conference “brought together twenty-nine delegations, thirteenth of them headed by prime ministers” (Friends 2003: 57). But Sukarno did not retain his non-aligned position for long. In the 1960s, he forged a new alliance that he called the ‘New Emerging Forces’ (Nefo), that is, “a looser grouping, congregated around Sukarno’s vision of an aggressive, confrontational politics of anti-colonialism.” It included all socialist countries (Lindsay 2010:237). In relation to this new alliance, Indonesia hosted the first sports games of the New Emerging Forces (Genefo) in 1963, a year after it put on the Asian Games in 1962. Apparently for Sukarno these games “could project a future in which Jakarta, in the eyes of neighboring nations, could be seen as ‘the beacon of the New Emerging Forces’ of Asia” (Kusno 2000:56).

The effort to project ‘Jakarta as the beacon of the New Emerging Forces’ was carried out not only by
hosting those games, but also by building modern infrastructure. In preparation for the Asian games, a huge stadium to accommodate over 80,000 people (named Gedung Olah Raga Bung Karno or Sports Building Brother Karno, as President Sukarno was popularly known) was constructed in the centre of Jakarta. A modern hotel (Hotel Indonesia) located several miles away from the stadium was also built. Sukarno instructed the construction of the first modern shopping centre in the country, the Sarinah Shopping Centre, in 1963. And he established Monas, the National Monument, an obelisk with a height of over 100 meters in 1963, near to a convention centre named the Conefo (Conference of New Emerging Forces) Building in 1966.

In addition, Sukarno decided to build “a national mosque in a ‘modern’ monumental architectural style at the center of Jakarta” (Kusno 2000:1). He envisioned it to be a mosque that was different from traditional Indonesian mosques in Demak and Bogor. He wanted the mosque to be as modern as the mosque in Cairo, but larger in size. As Kusno puts it,

By breaking with traditional form of the local mosque, and projecting the national mosque outward, Sukarno produced a narrative of progress, internally, for Indonesia, and externally, marking the nation on the map of the great countries of the world. (Kusno 2000:2)
Sukarno also attempted to actualize his dream of a prestigious Indonesian nation by breathlessly reminding Indonesians that they needed to rely on themselves and that they could not depend on other nations. The slogan *Berdikari* (*berdiri di atas kaki sendiri*, basically meaning ‘self-reliance’), which was actually the economic slogan of the Indonesian Communist party (PKI), was adopted and promoted by Sukarno, with support from “the left wing in the Indonesian government” (Mortimer 2006:267). This slogan was later combined with others to constitute a united concept that Sukarno called ‘*Trisakti.*’ Introduced in a speech delivered in late 1966, the concept appeared to include ‘sovereignty and freedom in politics’ (*berdaulat dan bebas dalam politik*), ‘ownership of a culture that reflects ‘Indonesian personality’ (*berkepribadian dalam kebudayaan*), and ‘economical independence’ (*berdikari dalam ekonomi*). In brief, *Trisakti* emphasized the sovereignty of the nation. Sukarno envisioned an Indonesia that was free from foreign (especially Western) influence. A couple of years earlier, he conveyed to Indonesians that

> We feel free... Now we are really self-reliant. This is the great advantage of teaching ourselves to become a free people, no longer one that always asks ‘aid, aid please. Give us aid, please, give us aid.’ Some time ago I said go to hell with your aid. We don’t need it.” (Weinstein 2007:220)
Unfortunately, most of the above tenets remained limited to slogans until the end of Sukarno’s era. He apparently lacked the time to implement the messages of those slogans in his government’s programs or to actualize his dream to build a Glorious Indonesia (Indonesia Raya). The government’s program to achieve self-sufficiency in rice in the 1960s ended up with an increase of rice imports, despite some growth in local production (McDonald 1980:69). By mid 1960s, high inflation of 6000 per cent hit the country in the aftermath of the ‘September 30th Movement’ in 1965. Disgruntled students, backed by the Indonesian Army under the command of General Suharto, launched massive demonstrations. In 1966, Sukarno was forced to transfer his power to Suharto, who in 1967 became the new president of the country. With the departure of Sukarno from Indonesian public life, the political stance against the West and the slogans that he introduced began to fade in the consciousness of the Indonesian public, despite some Indonesians continuing to cherish them. If they appeared incapable of improving Indonesia’s economic condition, they “could still make the ‘little man’ proud of being an Indonesian” (Abdullah 2009:327). As we shall see later, some of those slogans, or at least the spirit that imbued them, have reappeared in Indonesian public discourse after the demise of Suharto’s regime. Indonesia continues to be a nation in the making.
Nationalism under Suharto

Suharto gained power roughly a year after the ‘September 30th Movement’ (also known as the ‘1965 Coup’). As soon as his power was established, Suharto and his associates found ways to maintain it. One method to achieve this goal was to create a bureaucratic authoritarian regime, characterized by “its attempt to achieve a limited pluralism, using repression, cooptation, and typically, a network of corporatist organizations, and thereby control opposition to the regime” (King 1982:111). Indeed, for most of its period in power this regime, named the New Order, “has effectively coopted key elements of Indonesian society into the power structure at every level by controlling access to the benefits which it can offer its supporters, and withhold from its opponents” (Mackie and MacIntyre 1994:3).

For the whole period of its existence, the New Order regime emphasized order and stability as its key virtues and priority. It used a socio-economic goal to justify this. The regime introduced to Indonesians the concept of ‘pembangungan’ (development), which “prescribed both the nation’s destination and the path by which that objective will be reached” (Chalmers 1997:1). For the regime, national development and security were interconnected. Consider the statement made by Ali Murtopo, one of Suharto’s important assistants:
National stability and national security are most important to economic development. National stability and national security are the first and foremost conditions for the continuity of the decision-making process in the framework of development in Indonesia. (Elson 2008: 245).

To implement development, Suharto devised a five year development plan (which interestingly resembled the five year plan applied in communist China). The goal of this development plan was to bring Indonesians into an era called *tinggal landas* (the take-off era). Suharto sought to instil in Indonesian people the dream of living in an ideal society, where justice and welfare were guaranteed.

To achieve this goal, Suharto relied on Indonesian technocrats. He appointed a group of them (mostly educated in the United States) to head ministries related to economic management. These technocrats began to implement economic policies that to some extent liberalized the Indonesian economy. Indonesia under Suharto also increasingly aligned itself to the West. It relied on financial (and military) assistance from the Western countries. As early as 1967,

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7 Some of them were trained at University of California in Berkeley. Thus they were dubbed the Berkeley Mafia.
Indonesia submitted a request for aid totalling 200 million US dollar in an informal meeting with European and Japanese creditors (McDonald 1980:72). McDonald reported that

This meeting, the first of an informal arrangement that came to be known as the International governmental Group on Indonesia (IGGI), was attended by delegations from Australia, Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the USA, with observers from Canada, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland. International agencies present were the IMF [International Monetary Fund], the World Bank [IBRD], the United Nations Development Programme, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the Asian Development Bank. (McDonald 1980:72)

The result of the combination of policies adopted by these technocrats and financial assistant provided by a group of developed countries was dramatic. McDonald points out that

Inflation, which in Jakarta had been 839 per cent in 1966, dropped to a ‘mere’ 113 per cent in 1967, and the following year to 85 per cent with
little increases in prices during the last quarter of 1968. From 1969 Indonesia entered a period of price stability in which the Jakarta cost of living index rose by only 22 per cent over three years. [...] According to one estimate real national income per capita surpassed then best pre-1965 levels [attained in 1952 and 1957] by 1969. By 1970 exports had regained the share of gross domestic product held ten years previously. (McDonald 1980:79)

Even a scholar who is critical of the regime, such as Mortimer, admits that “from a strictly growth standpoint, progress in Indonesia since 1968 has been quite striking” (Mortimer 1973:54). The continuous rapid growth prevailed between 1971 and 1981, with real GDP (gross domestic product) increasing at an annual average rate of 7.7 per cent (Hill 1994:63). A lower average rate of 4.6 per cent took place between 1982 and 1986, but from 1987 to 1991, the GDP average rate rose again to 6.9 per cent annually (Hill 1994:63).

Yet as early as 1973, Mortimer has argued that the economic improvement of the country should be understood merely as growth, not development. In his view,

For that growth to be developmental, it must be so managed as to improve the country’s capability of innovating
successfully on the basis of national resources and skills so as to meet the needs of its people on some basis of equity and to withstand external pressures upon it. (Mortimer 1973:52)

Improvement in the country’s capability as mentioned in the above citation was absent in New Order Indonesia, at least in its early years. As Mortimer shows, “the spectacular increase in Indonesian GNP and exports has been strongly influenced by massive injections of Western aid and a considerable and growing volume of foreign investment” (Mortimer 1973:54). Indeed, during the New Order period, Indonesia became too reliant on foreign assistance. Over a decade after Suharto established his power, “such foreign assistance accounted for 18 per cent of government revenue in a budget still officially described as ‘balanced’ ” (McDonald 1980:73).

Due to this reliance, the Indonesian government could not maintain its autonomy over economic planning. The IMF and World Bank placed a number of their staff in the country to be involved in the planning of key economic sectors and even to assist in preparing Indonesia’s annual submission to the IGGI (McDonald 1980:74). This lack of autonomy had in turn triggered nationalist sentiments among various groups of Indonesians.
The first group is bureaucratic nationalists. The stance of this group might be seen in the voice expressed by intellectuals associated with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which was close to Ali Moertopo. One of these intellectuals was Jusuf Panglaykim, a Chinese Indonesian economist. Robison explains that Panglaykim’s ideas were

Heavily influenced by two models for development established in Meiji Japan, and in Singapore in which the state played a central role in determining investment priorities, providing infrastructure, mobilising finance and investment capital and co-ordinating domestic investment. (Robison 1986:150)

Panglaykim’s emphasis on the state’s central role in economy was supported by many writers, among them was Kwik Kian Gie. He also argued for

The establishment of nationally integrated units, combining state power and resources with private business interests and building ‘national giants’ in an attempt to counterbalance the power of the ‘foreign giants’. (Robison 1986:151)

The presence of the above views shows how a push toward state-led national capitalism emerged in the
1970s. This view was supported by many political figures close to Suharto, including Ibnu Sutowo, the then President Director of the state oil company (Pertamina), Ali Murtopo, and Soejono Hoemardani (Robison 1986:151).

A different kind of nationalist sentiment came from other groups of educated Indonesians, that is, from students. Leftist students argued that the Indonesian economic strategy adopted by the technocrats “was inherently damaging to Indonesian society, providing a structural framework for concentration of wealth and entrenchment of mass poverty” (Robison 1986:161). They criticized the New Order regime “for being an integral participant, in collusion with foreign capital and the larger Chinese business groups, in the exploitation of Indonesia” (Robison 1986:161). In 1974, a growing resentment against the presence of Japanese business interests led to a massive demonstration. Nevertheless, the regime managed to control the people’s anger by channelling it into anti-Chinese riots.

Finally, Suharto himself began to revive Indonesian nationalism, especially in the 1990s, as the US began to (somewhat hypocritically) criticize the lack of democracy and human rights violations in Indonesia. Indonesian elites began to talk about a wish to be independent from foreign influence. Suharto also reproduced and began to appeal to the ‘Asian values’
Nationalism in Post Suharto Indonesia

On Friday, 13 March 2009, I attended ‘Bangbang Wetan’, a monthly event held in Surabaya as well as in other big cities in Java. The event was organized as a sort of Islamic religious meeting (pengajian) but was open for people of various religious backgrounds. “It is a multi-religious event”, said Mr. Suko Widodo, an Airlangga University lecturer who helped to organise the event (personal communication, Surabaya 11 March 2009). There were several presentations, mostly by well-known local public speakers, academics, or religious leaders. It was the speech given by MH Ainun Najib, a Muslim leader popularly called Cak Nun that the audience waited patiently to listen to. As usual, the speech was given at the end of the event (as in most cases, after midnight).

I arrived just after 9 pm. Mr. Joko Susanto, a young social scientist affiliated with Airlangga University, was giving a talk. Mr. Susanto reminded his audience of the negative images circulating about Indonesia today. “We are known as a weak nation (bangsa yang loyo)”, he declared. According to him, the image spread as a result of the Indonesian government’s willingness to
“bow down in front of the International Monetary Fund and behave as if the IMF is our master [ndoro]”. In his view, the IMF intervened in Indonesia not only by influencing the Indonesian government, but also by corrupting the actors of the reformasi movement, a movement that began as a response to the economic crisis that hit Indonesia since 1997. “Reformasi is a program imposed by outsiders”, he argued. “It was not the idea espoused by the reformists. Instead, it is the IMF’s idea, the commodity of IMF [dagangan IMF]”, he declared.

Joko Susanto’s statements illustrate a disappointment that has spread far and wide in Indonesia today. A decade after the demise of the New Order regime, Indonesia is seen by many to be incapable of solving various serious social, political and economic problems. These problems became apparent immediately after Suharto was forced from office in 1998 and since then has become source of concerns not only for Indonesian people but for foreign observers as well. Some observers developed a pessimistic perception of Post Suharto Indonesia and sketched a negative transition from ‘order to disorder’ (Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken 2007:1). As Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken noted,

After decades of authoritarian centralist governance, attempts to introduce political and economic change seemed
doomed, in the face of bureaucratic sabotage, corrupt power politics, shortterm opportunism, and the absence of a widely shared vision of the future. In the light of outburst of ethnic and religious violence in various regions of the archipelago, regional resistance movements, the inability to restructure both the army and the economy and to curb collusion, nepotism and corruption, pessimists were inclined to classify Indonesia in the category of ‘failing’ or ‘messy’ states. (Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken 2007:1)

Among the many problems listed above, ethnic and religious violence is one that has become a major concern for many Indonesians. The idea that Indonesians like conflict and cannot agree with each other has been widespread in the Post Suharto Indonesian society. Indeed, since the beginning of the post-Suharto era, horizontal conflicts between various groups of people have taken place with increasing frequency. Conflicts between ethno-religious groups took place in Ambon, the capital of Maluku Province (see Bertrand 2004:114-134), in North Maluku (Wilson 2008), in Central Sulawesi, and in Kalimantan (between Dayak and Madurese). In Papua conflicts between ethnic groups and between Papuans and the military continue to emerge.
The presence of the ongoing conflicts in many parts of the country has made many Indonesians resentful against the state which in their view has not done enough to maintain social order and to protect its citizens (Suryaningtyas 2012). Moreover, violence has also occurred in places closer to the centre of the nation. In February 2011, a small group of ‘Jamaat Ahmadiyah’ in Cikeusik, a village in Banten Province, was attacked by an angry mob claiming to be Muslim. Three victims perished during the attack. Ironically, it took place in front of police officers, who did not intervene to stop the attack. Such cases have also triggered criticism of the State. Kontras, a Non-Government Organization that campaigns against violence, wrote in its report that the case of Cikeusik showed that the State is failing to prevent such violence from happening. In his statement, Laode Ida, a sociologist and politician, mentioned that

We are trapped with a leadership characterized by hesitation. This has an impact on the attitude, actions, and characters of the government apparatuses (the law enforcement apparatuses) in the scene. They became so sluggish and hesitate to act to prevent conflicts and death. (Ida 2011)

Corruption is another problem that Post Suharto Indonesia has to sort out. Corruption has become systemic in Indonesia especially during Suharto era. The
term KKN (corruption, collusion, and nepotism) – which ironically was introduced by Suharto himself – has become so popular since the last decade of his presidency. Since the fall of Suharto it has become more uncontrollable. As Aspinall and van Klinken revealed, although according to the World Bank Indonesia had by 2008 improved to 31 percent on ‘control of corruption’ from an absolute low of 9 percent in the chaotic year of 1998, it is still lower than its late New Order level of 33 percent measured in 1996 (Aspinall and van Klinken 2011:5). Furthermore, public opinion surveys in Indonesia demonstrate a low level of trust in public institutions, and a common view that corruption is all-pervasive (Aspinall and van Klinken 2011:5). True, the post-New Order Indonesian government has made various efforts to fight corruption. But as a scholar maintained,

While there have been a number of noticeable efforts by the post-New Order legislature, executive and civil society, not enough has been done about curtailing the systemic character of corruption in Indonesia. (Schütte 2009:81)

The establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in 2003 might be seen as one of the above efforts. Two years after its establishment, the KPK had brought 24 cases to the anti-corruption court (Schütte 2009:81). In 2010 alone, 65 cases were brought
to court by the KPK (Laporan Tahunan KPK 2010:20). But for many Indonesians, the performance of the KPK was far from satisfying. In 2011, a group of NGOs focusing on the battle against corruption complained that despite receiving a higher budget for each corruption case it investigated (roughly 10 times as much as the budget allocated for the Indonesian police to investigate each similar case), the KPK’s achievement remained considerably low (Kompas.com 15 September 2011). Furthermore, the KPK is facing resistance from some groups of people as well as from other government institutions. As revealed by Mochammad Jasin, a former vice chairperson of the KPK, various attempts had been conducted to weaken this institution, among others by seeking a judicial review of what was known as the ‘KPK law’ (Sulistianingtyas 2009:86). In addition, this institution is sometimes involved in a conflict with the Indonesian police. These conflicts took place in 2009 and 2012 and are considered as debilitating by the Indonesian public. People were disappointed by President Yudhoyono’s reluctance to intervene to solve these conflicts as in his view such intervention was against a democratic system. As well as many other cases, the presence of these conflicts has made people question the government’s commitment in solving the problem of corruption. In the view of Syafii Ma’arif, a renowned Muslim leader, ‘the state was never serious in eradicating corruption’ (Kompas.com 18 October 2011).
Economic policy is another issue that Indonesians – especially middle class Indonesians – are concerned with. Despite some achievement in economic development, the current government has received heavy criticism for adopting an economic strategy which in the view of middle class Indonesians is accommodating neoliberalism. Harvey defines neoliberalism as a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2005:2). According to this theory, the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey 2005:2). Middle class Indonesians, especially Indonesian academics, are at best concerned with the negative impact that the neoliberal political economic practices might have on Indonesian people, particularly on those who are economically weak. At worst, they suspect neoliberalism as a strategy adopted by developed (Western) countries to dominate Indonesia. Many equate neoliberalism with colonialism and imperialism, arguing that neoliberalism is either a new form of colonisation of Indonesia by foreign countries, or a reincarnation of Western imperialism (E.g. Mutaqqin 2009, Ridwan 2008:2-3). In general, Indonesian academics and intellectuals see the government’s growing tendency to privatize state-owned corporations and support free market as an
indication that the government has been submissive to those foreign powers. Protests against neoliberalism were frequently held by student activists in 2009. Voices that criticise President Yudhoyono for adopting neoliberal economic policies were so strident that while running for his second term, the president considered it necessary to deny that he implemented such policy (Jakarta Post, 20 May 2009). These protests and critiques should be seen as more than just a rejection of a certain economic or development strategy, but an expression of people’s resentments against what they perceive as the domination of foreign powers. Indeed, many Indonesians are becoming increasingly disgruntled with the ‘soft’ response that the government has made against foreign countries that have in their view trampled on Indonesia’s sovereignty or dignity.

A book written by Dr. Amien Rais, former speaker of the Indonesian People Consultative Body (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR) provides a good example of the expression of these concerns. In the Preface Rais reminds Indonesians of the importance of regaining national independency and sovereignty that in his view is in decline. He succinctly describes the crisis of Indonesian nationalism in the following statement:

Our nationalism has become a shallow nationalism. We defend red and white [the colours of the Indonesian flag] only in relation to symbolic things. When our
natural resources are extracted and ransacked by foreign companies, when our economically vital sectors, such banking and industry, have been controlled by foreigners, even when foreign powers dictate [mendikte] our law and political decision-making processes, we are silent. It seems that we have we have lost our self-respect and dignity. (Rais 2008: xiii, my translation)

Rais further explains that

Actually, without national awareness to establish national sovereignty and independency in economic, politics, and security and defence, perhaps we do not need to dream and talk about the future of Indonesia. (Rais 2008:xiii, my translation)

Amien Rais concludes that present-day Indonesia faces problems that are not too much different from those that existed in the pre-independence period. “In the past, physical and military occupation by the Dutch caused Indonesia to lose its freedom, independence, and sovereignty in politics, economy, social, law and defence”, he argued. But today, although that kind of colonization has ended, “we as a nation have lost sovereignty, and to a far enough extent, we also have
lost economic sovereignty. In many aspects, we are still dependent on foreign power”, he declared (Rais 2008:1-2, my translation).

In Amien Rais’ understanding, this situation continues to exist because many Indonesians (especially Indonesian leaders) are still captives to what he calls the “*inlander* ['natives'] mentality” that Indonesians inherited from the colonial era. Only certain Indonesian leaders, such as Sukarno, Hatta, H. Agus Salim, and Syahrir had successfully replaced such a mentality with spirit of independence and confidence. But current Indonesian leaders have regressed:

Many (Indonesian) leaders were afraid and worried before President Bush came to visit Indonesia in the end of 2006. The security preparations made to welcome the US president [...] were more that what was needed [...]. No country in this world has welcomed President Bush in the manner of welcoming a king of the kings. Only Indonesia under the leadership of Susilo B. Yudhoyono did it, as if Indonesia was a protectorate of the US. (Rais 2008: 9, my translation)

Amien Rais also claims Indonesia is increasingly dependent on what is popularly known as the ‘corporatocracy’, that is a collective ensemble of
corporations, banks, and governments (Perkins 2004:viii). Rais defines this term as a machine that aims to control economic and global politics and that has seven elements: big corporations, certain government’s political power, especially the US and its accomplices, international banking, military forces, mass media, coopted intellectuals, and finally but not least important, national elites with inlander, comprador, or servant mentality in the developing countries. (Rais 2008:83, my translation)

Rais goes on to provide examples of Asian and Latin American countries that have bravely resisted the domination of the corporatocracy. His examples all suggest that Indonesia is lagging behind in its lack of resistance to the IMF, World Bank, and the United States. Among the list of those countries are Malaysia (under Mahathir Muhammad), Iran (under Ahmadinejab), Venezuela (under Hugo Chavez), Bolivia, Equador, and China. He contrasts the political stance of the leaders of those countries with that of Indonesian leaders. “Our national elite seem to have totally surrendered to the international financial institutions. The Indonesian banking system has bowed down in front of global economic forces”, he lamented (Rais 2004:158).
The critique expressed by Amien Rais is reproduced, in different words, in a book by Alam entitled *Di Bawah Cengkeraman Asing* (Under the Grip of the Aliens), published in 2009. In the first chapter of this book, Alam asks the readers whether they were aware of the fact that each of the activities they conducted during the day involved the use of a product produced by a company owned by foreign investors. Following this question, he provided the following information:

Just see, you are drinking spring water *[aqua]* (74 percent of its shares are owned by DANONE, a company from France), or sipping *Sariwangi* tea (100 percent of the share belong to the Unilever, England), consuming *SGM* milk (produced by *Sari Husada*, whose 82 percent of the stocks are owned by the Numico, the Netherlands), taking a bath with Lux soap, brushing teeth with Pepsodent (both produced by Unilever, the Netherlands), to smoking Sampoerna cigarettes (97 percent of the stocks belong to Philips Morris from the US). (Alam 2009: 13, my translation)

For Alam the list shows “how dependent we are on foreign companies” (Alam 2009:15) and makes him lament the situation of the nation: “our nation actually
... is already colonized by foreign nations. If in the past, only the Dutch and Japan (colonized us), nowadays, many different foreign nations have grasped [mencengkeram] our country” (Alam 2009: 15, my translation).

Like Amien Rais, Alam also regrets the fact that Indonesia is increasingly dependent on foreign aid. According to him, this reliance on foreign assistance is not a recent phenomenon. He laments, “Our leaders [...] have taken the path coercively offered by foreign power. This path includes relying on foreign loan or credit, to finance [Indonesian] development” (Alam 2009:81-82, my translation).

In his view, this is ironic as Indonesia is actually bequeathed with rich natural resources. “With the richness of Grasberg Mountain”, he wrote, “Indonesia is still begging for loans from many countries.” The reason for this is because “the reserve of gold and copper that could be used to pay all Indonesia’s debt has instead been given to the foreigners” (Alam 2009:57).

The critique offered in these two books illustrates the existence of a grievance among Indonesians, especially regarding their nation’s weak position in the world. This grievance is an expression of nationalist sentiments. According to many Indonesians, this weak position is not only apparent in relation to developed (Western) countries, but also in relations
between Indonesia and other Asian countries. Anti-Malaysian nationalism grew following Malaysia’s claim that an Indonesian traditional song ‘Rasa Sayange’ and a Balinese dance ‘Tari Pendet’ were really Malaysian. ‘Rasa Sayange’ is popular in Indonesia as a song that originally came from Maluku province. However, it is also popular in Malaysia and is there seen as a traditional Malay song. In 2007, Malaysia used the song in its ‘Visit Malaysia’ campaign (claiming that the song was Malaysian). This induced strong anti-Malaysia responses among Indonesian people.

A couple of years later, in 2009, Malaysia once again allegedly used an Indonesian traditional art, in this case the Balinese ‘Tari Pendet’ in its ‘Malaysia Truly Asia’ campaign. Once again, Indonesians responded to this with massive demonstrations against Malaysia in Jakarta. Critics argued that these cases happened because the Indonesian nation is weak. “Malaysia knows we are a weak nation, because we don’t want to learn from (our) experience. [...] Malaysia knows we are a weak nation, because Indonesians easily fight with each other”, said someone in Kompasiana, a blog administered by Kompas, one of the biggest daily in the country (Nugraha 2009).
Conclusion

Nationalist grievances, once the bedrock of anti-colonialist nation-building in the early part of the century, appear to have revived in post-Suharto Indonesia in a different form today. Decades ago, indigenous Indonesians were angry with the fact that they were second or even third-class citizens in the Netherlands Indies while being the majority of its citizens. With growing awareness of a global discourse on rights and nations, they began to imagine the existence of a ‘shared experience’ between the people of the Archipelago, and began to construct a nation based on this ‘shared experience’, dreaming of bringing back the ‘glorious past’ to the present. They shared a dream of constructing an independent Indonesia that might become a great nation.

The dream that Indonesia might become a great nation continued under the leadership of President Sukarno. He emphasized the independence of the nation even at the expense of its economy. Suharto on the other hand focused more on economic development and internal order. He turned the country to the West, especially to the US, which inundated Indonesia with aid. But still, nationalist sentiments emerged both among the people close to him as well as in the wider Indonesian society, represented by students resentful of Indonesia’s over-dependence on foreign aid. Furthermore, nationalist feeling was incited by Suharto
himself. To legitimize his authoritarian rule, Suharto argued that Indonesia should have a democratic model quite different to the West, that is, the *Pancasila* Democracy.

In the aftermath of the New Order demise, criticism of Indonesia’s over-dependence on foreign aid has once again reappeared. As did Sukarno in the past, many Indonesians are now concerned with the risk of domination by foreign powers. What Sukarno called ‘neo-colonialism’ is now seen in the form of international financial institutions, such as the IMF, and the World Bank. People are also concerned with the State’s failure to exercise its power within its bounded territory (by maintaining order) not to mention with its apparent inability to retain national integrity. Meanwhile political issues, such as corruption cases involving Indonesian politicians are rampant. This has contributed to further criticism of the current state of the nation by Indonesian people.

In the view of many critics, solutions to this situation appear in various forms. One of these is by pointing to the example of other countries that in their understanding have successfully solved similar problem. China, India, and some Latin American countries are often mentioned. The most striking of these exemplars is China, a developing country that has recently emerged as a global power. China and its people are frequently referred to in various conversations about social and
political situation of contemporary Indonesia. From a country that for decades was pronounced to be Indonesia’s antagonist, China is now seen as a place where Indonesians might learn a lesson to further develop their country. How has reference to China (and to the Chinese) been apparent in the nationalist critiques of Indonesia? What does this range of emotive critiques mean for Indonesian middle class, including Muslim and Chinese Indonesians? We will deal with these questions in the later part of this thesis. To answer these questions, however, we need first to comprehend how China and Chinese Indonesians have been located in the history of Indonesian nationalism.
Chapter Two

China, Ethnic Chinese, and the Construction of
Indonesian National Subject

As clarified in the Introduction, the purpose of the thesis is to examine the enthusiasm for China as well as for the Chinese in present day Indonesia. In order to carry out such an examination, a discussion of the way China and the Chinese have been located in the history and context of Indonesian nationalism should first be provided. This history will inevitably bring to the fore the construction of negative images, representations and sentiments about the Chinese that have dominated Indonesian’s nationalist imagination about citizenship, ethnicity and indigeneity. It will also focus on the way in which such images, together with the negative representation of China, have been used in the construction of an Indonesian national subject, especially during the period of New Order Indonesia.

The chapter will be organized as follows. Section one will provide a brief historical discussion of the Chinese who migrated and resettled in the Indonesian archipelago, with special attention given to the emergence of negative perceptions and stereotypes
about such migrants. Section two will describe the reproduction of those negative perceptions and stereotypes in post independent Indonesian society, from the birth of the republic until the last days of President Sukarno’s presidency. Sections three and four will portray the processes of proliferation and popularization of negative representations (and perception) of China and of Chinese Indonesians during the New Order era. Finally, in the concluding section to this chapter I will give a general picture of developments post-Suharto by way of prelude to the major concern of the thesis proper.

**Ethnic Chinese in the Colonial Period**

Interaction between the natives of the Southeast Asian archipelago – who since the late nineteenth century began to be known as Indonesians – with people from China is a phenomenon that predated the establishment of the European colonial power in this region. Chinese already stayed in this region as early as the end of thirteenth century, in the aftermath of the invasion of Java by the Mongols in 1293. Some of the troops remained voluntarily in Java, and were among the first Chinese that settled in this Island (Reid 2009:74). Thus a hundred years afterwards when the Chinese Muslim Ma Huan visited Java, he reported that there were only three kinds of people in Java: Muslims in the west, Chinese (some of them Muslims) and the heathen
Javanese (Ricklefs 2001:6) Besides, for centuries before ships from Europe arrived in the Indonesian ports, Chinese merchants were sailing to these Southeast Asia islands. They were ‘active as intermediaries in the exchange of local and Chinese goods’ (Kahin 1952: 8). They reportedly settled as a group along the coast of Java. When the Dutch sailors made their first visit to Jayakarta – the pre-colonial city on whose foundations Batavia the later capital of the Netherlands Indies was built – they recorded a Chinese settlement headed by its own chief in the area near the mouth of Ciliwung River (Lohanda 2001: 6). There were fairly large Chinese communities on other islands as well. But unlike in Java, their main activity was not only trading. The Chinese who went to Bangka Island for example were involved in tin mining (see Heidhues 1992), while those who spread to West Kalimantan searched for gold (See Heidhues 2003).

But in the seventeenth century, as the Dutch colonial administration in the region developed, a changing picture of Chinese communities in the archipelago began to evolve. The Dutch Indies Company (VOC) officials preferred to populate the newly founded Batavia with the Chinese than with the free burghers from their country due to the fear that the free burghers might threaten the VOC’s trade monopoly and its authoritarian political structure (Ong 1989: 157). Thus they attracted the Chinese to stay and conduct activities in Batavia in order to stimulate growth. By then, the Dutch’s perception of the Chinese was mostly positive.
General Governor Coen himself commented that there were ‘no people he desired to have more of than the Chinese and that there could not be too many of them’ (Purcell 1965: 395). It is thus no surprise that the policy to ‘import’ Chinese from mainland China to be employed as workers in sugar plantation in the vicinity of Batavia continued to be implemented. Meanwhile, a different role was assigned to or appropriated by the Chinese merchants – they became intermediaries between the VOC and the local population (Kahin 1952: 8).

In many respects the seventeenth century marked the beginning of the Chinese position as ‘brokers to the expanding state’ (Reid 1997: 43). Not only did they function as intermediary businessmen, some of them were also involved in revenue farming, a system that reached its apex in the nineteenth century (Reid 1997: 44). Their role as revenue farmers put the Chinese in close contact with local people from whom they collected taxes. Interestingly ‘the system of assigning farming revenues to Chinese appears to have been copied by Javanese rulers in the 1680s directly from the Dutch practice, no doubt encouraged by the Chinese entrepreneurs who spread inland from the Dutch-governed coastal towns’ (Reid 1997: 45). The understanding of the Chinese as tax collectors has thus spread to areas under the authority of the Javanese aristocrats.

It is important to note that the changing role of Chinese did not only occur in occupation and economic
aspects alone. In the aftermath of the 1740 Chinese uprising in Batavia (which led to the massacre of thousands of Chinese by the Dutch) the colonial government began to apply a policy that made it easier to control these people. The policy banned the Chinese from settling in areas outside the district specifically designed for them. In the case of Batavia, the Chinese were relocated to Glodok, a district to the south of the city (Lohanda 2001:18-19). The policy of constraining the Chinese in a ‘ghetto’ resulted in the development of this Chinatown. And as the implementation of the policy extended beyond Batavia, a China town phenomenon became popular in almost all major cities in Indonesia. The ghettoization of Chinese contributed to the evolving stereotyping of the Chinese as ‘the other’.

Another development that contributed to the changing picture of the Chinese community in Indonesia in the course of Dutch colonial administration was the introduction of a social stratification based on race, which ‘differed substantially from the old Indonesian pattern’ (Wertheim 1959: 136). This stratification placed those classified as Europeans on the top of the social layer with a legal status different from those categorized as Native. The latter formed the lowest strata in the society in Java during that period. Meanwhile, the Chinese, together with the Arabs and the Indians, were categorized as ‘those equated to the Natives’ (Coppel 2002: 133). However, despite this equation with the Indigenous Indonesians, they were also classified as ‘Foreign Orientals’, a term that according to Coppel
emphasized the ‘foreignness’ of these people. Beginning in Batavia, this stratification system soon spread to other cities in Java so that about 1850 it ‘had assumed a fix form in Java’ (Wertheim 1959: 137). The implementation of the system also occurred in some other islands such as Bangka Island (Heidhues 1992: 95).

It is important to note that the changes in the position of Chinese since the seventeenth century did not immediately or automatically contribute to hostile attitudes towards Chinese. On the contrary, situations in which the local people regard Chinese as their ally and cooperate with them occurred from time to time. The alliances formed in the aftermath of the 1740 massacre in Batavia is an example of this. Chinese survivors of this massacre fled to central Java and joined the ruler of the Javanese kingdom to fight against the Dutch (Purcell 1965: 407, Reid 1997: 46). Another instance is when Raden Rangga Prawiradirja, a wedana (a Javanese officer overseeing a district) who was posted in a region in East Java, rebelled against Dutch rule. Soon after launching his rebellion, the Javanese aristocrat was said to have ‘proclaimed himself as the protector of Javanese and Chinese who had been mistreated by the European government’. He appealed for help from the Chinese communities, and when he was arrested by the Dutch, ‘twelve Chinese were reportedly amongst the hundred or so military retainers who remained loyal to him’ (Carey 1984:22). Similar alliances were also apparent outside Java. On Bangka Island, a rebellion launched by a local leader against the Dutch had been supported by
'some Chinese miners and their bosses, the Lieutenant of the Chinese in Merawang, and a small number of Muslim Chinese' (Heidhues 1992: 94).

Furthermore, intermarriage between the Chinese and the local people was not rare. Cases of intermarriage might be found, among others, in Java, Bangka, and Timor Island. In fact, most Chinese born in Indonesia (and other Southeast Asian countries) are a ‘product’ of these intermarriages. The first generation of Chinese migrants were predominately men. Soon after arriving in those regions, many married local women, from whom the next generation of Chinese men and women were born. Thus these locally born Chinese were exposed to their mother’s culture and developed a creole culture known as the ‘peranakan’ (Skinner 1996). In addition, quite a few of the Chinese converted to Islam. Meanwhile, later on, at the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth, interaction between the Chinese and other groups of people in urban areas that were under the Dutch rule did not only occur in markets, as implied by Furnival’s ‘plural society’, that is, a society that comprises two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit (Furnival 1939:446). Instead such interaction also took place in other aspects of life. Chinese even had a role in the development of popular art that began to emerge in those years. Lenong, a traditional theatre associated
with orang Betawi (people of Batavia) is an example of this. As Van Till explained,

The *lenong* theatre arose in the 1930s as a typically Betawi performing art and experienced its heyday in the fifties. The Chinese often took care of the business side of performances by lending money and buying equipment. Sometimes they also added songs and stories to the repertory. (Van Till 1996:462)

Similarly, the *Komedi Stambul* performances, that developed in the beginning of the twentieth century in Surabaya, were often sponsored by Chinese businessmen and usually took place in their compounds (Cohen 2006:8,231).

According to Carey (1984) organized attacks and violence against the Chinese frequently happened in the period between 1825 and 1830, when the Java War was ongoing. This anti-Chinese violence was thought to be a result of the changing behaviour of the Chinese revenue farmers prior to the beginning of the war. They treated the Javanese tax payer unfairly and appeared to put too much pressure on the Javanese, including aristocrats. Soon after the war ended, anti-Chinese violence was barely heard of for almost a century, even though the perception of the Chinese as greedy people who enjoyed
economic advantages from the colonial system remained.

The above brief overview of some aspects of the position and perception of Chinese in colonial Indonesia prompts the following question. When did the Indonesian perception of the Chinese as the ‘other’ and its actualization in the form of anti-Chinese disturbances and violence as we know it today actually emerge? Was it during the second decade of the twentieth century? By then street fights between Javanese and Chinese often took place and tended to develop into larger anti-Chinese violence. The rise of Sarekat Islam (SI), both as an organization and a movement whose anti-Chinese character constituted one of its prominent features (Karton 1973: 151), arguably is related to the emergence of violence against Chinese. Prior to the founding of the organization, no significant anti-Chinese disturbances occurred. Reports from Dutch officials specifically inform us that ‘before the founding of SI the relation between Javanese and Chinese were cordial, and were characterized by mutual help and toleration’ (Karton 1973: 161). Even Samanhudi, who could be regarded as the founder of SI, was once a member of a Chinese association named Kong Sing in Solo, which was mainly composed of smaller and poorer Chinese traders (Shiraishi 1990: 39).

But when Samanhudi later created Rekso Rumekso, a mutual help association which restricted membership to Javanese, the scuffles between Javanese
and Chinese in Solo and surrounding areas took place more frequently (Shiraishi 1990: 41). Fights, riots and violence against the Chinese became more frequent after the small *Rekso Rumekso* mutated into the SI. Along with the proliferation of the SI from 1912 onwards, anti-Chinese attitudes, combined with conflicts and violence against them, spread regionally to various small and big cities in Java (For a detailed description see Kartodirdjo 1973: 162-182). The anti-Chinese riots and violence in Kudus in 1918 is a well-known example.

Kartodirdjo (1973: 151-162) provides an interesting analysis of why the antagonism against the ethnic Chinese began in the early twentieth century and why anti-Chinese rhetoric became one of the characteristics of the SI movement. He suggests that the rise of Muslim traders and the SI as a nationalist movement is the main cause. As Muslim Javanese traders began to establish themselves in Surakarta and other cities on Java in the beginning of the twentieth century, they felt threatened by their Chinese competitors who dominated such typical Javanese industries as Batik. As this coincided with the widespread consciousness of Indonesian nationalism among indigenous populations, these Javanese traders regarded their competition with the Chinese as a competition between Indonesians and foreign people.

On top of that this perception was mixed with and strengthened by a growing discourse on religious divisions between Muslims and Non-Muslims, also
promoted by the SI. And finally, it was exacerbated by the attitudes of some Chinese who in the aftermath of the founding of the Republic of China in 1911 thought that due to the rise of the new republic the status of the Chinese in Indonesia would rise to that of Europeans (see Coppel 2002).

It is apparent that Kartodirdjo’s emphasis on the business competition (between the Chinese and the Javanese) and on the changing attitude of the Chinese was heavily influenced by the explanations offered by the Dutch officials (See Shiraishi 1997:188-189). Such explanations overlook the more profound structural changes taking place in Java in the beginning of the twentieth century (Shiraishi 1997:189). The revenue farming system, in which the Chinese had been involved for more than a hundred years, was abolished by the Dutch colonial government in the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time, the colonial government introduced an ‘ethical policy’ aiming to modernize and improve the quality of life of their colonial subjects. Thus by the early twentieth century the Chinese – who previously was a privileged social group whose investment, taxes, revenues collections, and trade activities were urgently needed by the Dutch businesses (Chua 2008:34) – had not only become useless for financing the state but had also come to be seen as a major obstacle to the progress of the Indies by the Dutch Indies reformist government (Shiraishi 1997:190). The Dutch officials now looked down on them as sharp dealers and imposed numerous restrictions intended to
curb their influence on the indigenous people (Fernando 1992:2-3). As the Chinese were no longer needed as the state’s financiers, they became vulnerable to violent popular hatred, and they were politically powerless even as they became an economically prosperous ‘middleman’ minority (Siraishi 1997:190).

Yet a number of points offered by Kartodirdjo are relevant to the wider discussion concerning the location of the Chinese in Indonesian history. Firstly, Javanese emphasized the ‘foreignness’ of the Chinese in Indonesia since the early twentieth century. This categorization was not unrelated to the business competition between Chinese and Javanese traders. As I will discuss in the next section, the emphasis of the Chinese as foreigners to the nation spread to other regions and has prevailed albeit in a different forms (such as Chinese as the descendants of foreign people, or keturunan asing) until the final days of the New Order period. Overall, this process of alienation of one ethnic group illustrates the way in which a category deemed important in a specific context during a certain period may become widespread and meaningful for almost all Indonesians.

The perceived foreignness of the Chinese is also intimately linked with the evolvement of the Indonesian nationalist movements. On the one hand, the idea of Indonesia as it began to be imagined in the first decades of the twentieth century emphasized ‘the notion of an Indonesian “racial” identity’ that exclusively included the ‘indigenous Indonesians’ (see Elson 2008: 78). To be
sure, other ways of imagining the Indonesian nation, such as the idea of Indonesia as a nation that encompasses various races and ethnic groups living in the region, as promoted by the ‘Indische Partij’, did emerge. But for a variety of reasons, they failed to survive. This exclusive definition for the nation meant that the ethnic Chinese (together with Eurasians and ethnic Arabs) would not be able to become full members of the then flourishing nationalist political organizations. At best, they could join as associate members.

In such an environment it is not surprising that most Chinese remained ‘aloof from the nationalist issue, preferring to direct their attention to Chinese politics. At worst many actively supported the Dutch position’ (Brown 2003: 114). Among politically active Chinese in that period, only those who joined the ‘Partai Tionghoa Indonesia’ (Indonesian Chinese Party) supported the independence of Indonesia.\(^8\) This exacerbated existing negative attitudes toward the Chinese as well as the perception of the Chinese as different from Indonesian nationals.

We may also see that the Chinese were also ‘othered’ because of their religious beliefs. They were often seen as non-Muslims and sinful pork eaters. As a result, they were also seen as ‘infidels’ (kaffir). This

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\(^8\) For a detailed discussion of the ethnic Chinese political views in the first half of the twentieth century, see Suryadinata (1981)
image of the Chinese as the ‘pork eating infidels’ persisted for many decades afterwards (see Coppel 1983:28)

**Ethnic Chinese, China and Post-Independence Indonesian Society**

Indonesian nationalists proclaimed the independence of Indonesia in 1945. The euphoria was short-lived as the following 4 years were marked by conflict with the Dutch. While Indonesians in general experienced a difficult life inflicted by the war with the Dutch, Chinese Indonesians suffered a different kind of ordeal. The revolution period is notorious for its violence against Chinese. Chinese frequently became the target of attacks, arson, and massacres, in particularly from Indonesian paramilitary troops and gangsters (popularly called as *laskar*). The Chinese were targeted because they were perceived as collaborators with the Dutch.

There were several reasons put forward to justify this perception. First, many Chinese youths had joined the vigilante troops called as *bao an dui* (lit. ‘security units’) formed by the Dutch to protect their own residential areas from the gangsters (See Cribb 2008:162). Secondly, Chinese business owners were more likely to ignore the Indonesian’s call to boycott the Dutch or British by refusing to sell goods to them. The fact that at least a small number of Chinese had fought on the Indonesian side, as in the case of a group of leftist
Chinese in Surabaya during the battle against the British, could not do much to mitigate popular perception of Chinese as disloyal to the struggle for Indonesia.\footnote{Sumarsono, a former commander of the Indonesian troops during the battle on Surabaya (pertempuran Surabaya), told me that he had a company of 250 leftist Chinese Indonesians in his troops. The commander of the company was a Chinese known as Chou Tek Jun (a Fujian name). Unfortunately, Sumarsono could not provide me with the Mandarin version of his name (Personal communication with Sumarsono, 2010).}

When the conflict with the Dutch was over and Indonesia entered a new period in which the independent government began to concentrate on dealing with domestic problems, the negative perception of the Chinese did not wither away. It began to evolve within a new discourse constituting a portrayal of the Chinese as people ‘whose Indonesian nationality was at best dubious’ (Coppel 1983). A booklet entitled *The Chinese Problem in Indonesia* by Muaja (1958) is a telling example of the popularity of the stereotypes. In this booklet, Muaja reminds his readers that except for some strictly individual cases, the Chinese population never felt itself so attached to Indonesia to identify itself completely with the Indonesian people’s national cause. The Chinese have on the contrary always been either on the side of
the Dutch or remained loyal to their native China. (1958: 7)

He also claims that this kind of negative perception of the Chinese was rampant in his day (Muaja 1958:10).

Stereotypes that depicted the Chinese as a group that had gained preferential economic advantages during the colonial era also persisted. Such stereotypes were reproduced from assumptions about the Chinese that were widespread in the early decades of the twentieth century. The resulting stereotype was even quite apparent in the minds of Indonesian elites. As an example, in 1956, Mr Assaat, one of Masyumi Party leaders, asserted the following:

The Chinese, who deliberately came from their country of origin to Indonesia for a better life, were used by the Dutch as a tool to obstruct the wave that may come from the indigenous who wanted to progress. The Chinese made the most of the opportunities given by the Dutch. They took the benefit from the political situation at that time, even though they were aware that this would bring disadvantages to the indigenous people. The position of these Chinese in the economic field became gradually stronger, and finally they controlled all
economic sectors. (Jahja 1991: 57, my translation)

There were several cases in which the above perceptions and stereotypes materialized in the form of action. Mr Assat, for instance, proposed that the government was willing to provide special treatment for indigenous Indonesian businesses to protect them from competition by foreigners in particular Chinese. The proposal was backed by Masyumi and was developed as a political movement that became popularly known as the Assaat movement. Nevertheless, the movement never grew big and failed to achieve its goal (Coppel 1983: 37). This failure was due to the involvement of the movement’s supporters in the rebellion movement called the PRRI (Revolutionary Government of Republic of Indonesia). At the same time it should also be understood as a result of the resistance of the Chinese Indonesians through a mass organization named Baperki (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia, Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship). In its effort to contest the Assaat movement, the Baperki gained support from several nationalist political parties, including the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Catholic Party, Indonesian Christian Party (Parkindo), Murba Party, and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) (Siauw 1999:253-254).

The failure of the Assaat Movement to achieve its goal does not mean that the Chinese were free from discriminatory regulations or other policies that would
disadvantage them. A presidential regulation that had a great impact on the Chinese business and life appeared several years afterwards. This regulation and its impact is widely remembered by the Indonesians as the Presidential Regulation Number 10. Decreed in 1959, this regulation banned retail business activity for Foreign Citizens (Warga Negara Asing, WNA) conducted outside provincial capitals and regencies’ cities (Coppel 1983). While the regulation only prohibited foreign citizens, it affected many Chinese Indonesians because at the time the regulation appeared many of them were still foreign citizens due to the earlier citizenship claim made by the People Republic of China over Chinese overseas.¹⁰

¹⁰ China based her citizenship on the *ius sanguinis*, and therefore had earlier claimed any Chinese overseas as her citizens, while on the other hand Indonesia by then adopted *ius soli* system that allowed all who were born in Indonesia to be Indonesian citizens automatically. Thus there were many Indonesian born Chinese who had dual citizenship. Negotiation was made between Indonesian government and China to solve this problem. The agreement known as dual citizenship treaty was a result of that negotiation. According to the agreement, the Chinese Indonesians who at that time held Chinese and Indonesian citizenship at the same time were given a period of two years to opt either to become an Indonesian citizen or the citizen of China. Those who opted to become Indonesian citizens should actively renounce their Chinese citizenship. However, this system had made many Chinese Indonesians, who were not adequately informed of the agreement and therefore did not renounce their Chinese citizenship, ‘aliens’ in Indonesia.
Furthermore, its psychological impact extended to the Chinese who had become Indonesian citizens.

Despite the presence of the negative perceptions, there was still a space for Chinese Indonesians to participate in the country’s politics. There appeared a number of Chinese Indonesian ministers before the New Order era. And Chinese Indonesian social organizations were allowed to exist. Baperki, a large Chinese Indonesian organization mentioned earlier, was one of them. Baperki even contested the 1955 general election even though it claimed that it was not a political party. Established in 1954, Baperki attempted to fight for equal rights for Indonesian citizens regardless of racial origin (Suryadinata 1993:87). But in particular, it fought against the negative attitudes toward the Chinese minority. Those who joined this organization believed that integrating the Chinese into Indonesian society without necessarily changing their particular cultural characteristics should solve the problem. In their view, “the Chinese minority was one of Indonesia’s ethnic components, comparable to other Indonesian ethnic groups such as the Javanese and Sundanese” (Suryadinata 1993:87). Thus they did not have to assimilate into the ‘indigenous’ Indonesian society. The view held by the Baperki was known as the ‘integration’ view.

There was however another group of Chinese Indonesians, consisting mostly of the younger generation, who disagreed with the Baperki. The latter
group proposed that the Chinese Indonesians should assimilate by adopting indigenous Indonesians practices. This should be done, among others, by conversion to the religion of local people, conducting intermarriage with Indigenous Indonesians, changing their names into names that sounded ‘more Indonesian’, and so on. This group was known as the ‘assimilation group’.

During the last decade of the Sukarno era, the Baperki and its ‘integration view’ were more influential than the ‘assimilation group’. One of its leaders, Siauw Giok Tjhan (Mandarin: Xiao Yucan), was a supporter of President Sukarno and the PKI. In those days, the PKI was a large political party with a membership of approximately 3 millions. In supporting the President and the PKI, Siauw consistently brought the Baperki along (Winarta 2008:60). Due to its close relationship with the PKI, the Baperki was banned by the New Order anti-communist regime which resumed power in 1966. The ideas suggested by the ‘assimilation group’ became subsequently more popular. The New Order regime favoured the idea of assimilation and made it part of the government’s official policy.

Along with the stereotypes of the Chinese Indonesians, China and its citizens (that is the Chinese of Mainland China) were also negatively represented. As Carl Taylor has revealed, in a number of publications, historical China was regarded as an expansionist empire that had a tendency to invade other countries (Taylor 1963:166-167). For example, the interaction between
historical China and the Indonesian kingdoms was remembered in the form of story of the invasion of Java by the Yuan Dynasty (even though the dynasty was founded by the Mongols). The Chinese were also understood as people who felt themselves superior to others and thought that their country was located in the centre of the world.\textsuperscript{11} They were also thought to be non-believers (sinners) or believers in superstition (Taylor 1963:169). Most general, modern China was viewed as a big country, and it was this perception of China’s bigness that triggered fear among Indonesians (Taylor 1963:170).

Amid all these negative images of China and Chinese a number of Indonesians did mention the good characteristics of China and the mainland Chinese. They praised the People Republic of China as a newly rising power, in ways rather similar to the present. Mohammad Hatta, one of the founding fathers of the Indonesian nation, was among the Indonesian leaders who showed his admiration of what was taking place in China in the 1950s. As pointed out by Hong Liu, in a serialized essay published in 1957, Hatta commented that ‘any sane and objective person must admit that China has carried out massive nation building’, that the speed of China’s amazing economic growth was beyond his expectation, and that he admired the nation for

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Zhongguo}, the Chinese name for China, literally means the middle state.
having achieved ‘unthinkeable progress in such a short time’ (Liu 2011:92)

Further the view that Indonesia should learn from China in the world of literature and arts was not unpopular, at least among certain segments of Indonesian society (see Liu 2006). Such a view was especially popular among those affiliated with the PKI, such as members of the Indonesian Institute of People’s Culture (Lekra), a cultural organisation under PKI leadership. Lekra’s leaders visited China and returned with positive impressions (Liu 2006:197). But a similar view was also held by Indonesian artists and writers outside the socialist camp. For instance, after a visit to China in the 1950s, Indonesian artists and writers such as Barioen, Armijn Pane, M. Tabrani, and Bagong Kussudiardjo expressed their enthusiasm with the position of art and literary work in their contribution to national struggle and national progress (Liu 2006:194).

Overall a negative perception of the Chinese, combined with hostile attitudes toward them, continued to exist in Post-Independence Indonesian society. Representation of the Chinese as a group of people who were advantaged by the Dutch colonial system and who had a more powerful economic position compared to the Indigenous Indonesians persisted in this period. This representation was complemented with a particularly unsettling image of the Chinese as allies of the Dutch during the revolutionary period. This kept the Chinese effectively out of the nationalist discourse paving the
way for subsequent legislation that would deny them full citizenship. This was also the time when negative perceptions of Chinese were actualized into actions, as in the case of the Assaat Movement and the Presidential Regulation Number 10 launched in 1959. However, before the establishment of the New Order regime, room for Chinese Indonesians as a group to participate in Indonesian politics still existed. As for China, negative representation of China was also observable in Indonesian society soon after the birth of the nation.

China and the Ethnic Chinese in the New Order Indonesia

The notion of China and the Chinese Indonesians as the ‘other’ of Indonesian state and society began to be intensively and systematically reconstructed and promoted during the period of the New Order. The notion appeared in the form of the perception of China as a lifelong threat to Indonesian national security. It also appeared by locating the Chinese Indonesian identity and culture outside Indonesian national discourses. However, at the same time, at least some among the Chinese Indonesians were used by the regime to support its effort to construct its version of Indonesia. This was conducted by encouraging the Chinese Indonesians to develop their big businesses. However, this also further promoted the image of them as ‘economically powerful but politically weak
outsiders’. This section and the following one will be devoted to a further discussion of this.

*Perception of China as a threat*

The New Order regime began to rule Indonesia following an event that in Indonesian history is popular as the 1965 coup. The event took place on the 1st of October in 1965 and was launched by a group of junior officers in Indonesian Army.¹² Six senior army generals and one lieutenant died during the event. In response to the event, the commander of the Army reserve corps, Major General Suharto, took over the command of the Army. He declared the event to be a coup attempt which he alleged was masterminded by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). He immediately deployed troops under his command to crush the perpetrators of the coup. Soon after the coup was thwarted, Suharto battered the PKI and other organizations affiliated with it. Hundreds of thousands of people, many of them not active members of the communist party, were slaughtered by the Indonesian military, Muslim vigilantes, and Catholic youths. Many others were jailed

¹² The puzzle of who actually masterminded the coup and whether it was really meant to be a coup has still not been clearly solved. As Dhakidae (2003: 201-208) notes, there have been at least five different versions of explanations for what actually happened in that year.
or expelled to Buru Island in the South Moluccas. In less than a year Suharto and his allies managed to found the so-called New Order of Indonesia (see Cribb and Brown 1995: 97-111, Vickers 2005: 156-160).

As Rizal Suma (1999: 46) has noted, the newly founded regime had a different character from its predecessor, the so called ‘Old Order’ regime. The regime made the maintenance of national stability and national development its highest priorities. This emphasis on stability and security shaped the context in which the image of China was constructed. To legitimate its suppression of any possible security disturbance, the regime circulated the ‘threat of communism’ more broadly. They developed the picture of communism in Indonesia as an extremely resilient entity, with a prolonged capability to ‘come back’, even after being almost totally devastated during the anti-communist campaign following the ‘1965 coup’ (see Dhakidae 2003). Thus the danger posed by communism was always to be present. This kind of understanding was observable in the government’s frequent reminders to their citizens to be vigilant against the ‘communist latent danger’ (bahaya laten komunis). The construction of what Rizal Sukma (1999) called the ‘China threat perception’ should be understood in relation with this manufactured threat of the ‘latent danger of the communism’.

The construction of the ‘China threat perception’ was based on several rationales. One of these was the
New Order regime’s allegation of China’s involvement in the 1965 coup attempt by providing some help to the PKI. The validity of that allegation has been a subject of debate (see Mozingo 1976: 242-244, Suryadinata 1990: 683-684) but overall it was considered an intervention in Indonesian internal affairs. As a historian notes, ‘in Suharto’s mind, China had committed the serious sin of intervening in the domestic affairs of a friendly nation’ (Elson 2008: 271). The second rationale is the regime’s belief that China had maintained its relationship with Southeast Asian communist parties, a belief that China never satisfactorily denied even until late 1980s when the diplomatic ties between Indonesian and China normalized (Van der Kroef: 1986: 910-911). This kind of relationship was a source of concern for the Indonesian government as it thought that it would eventually help the Indonesian communists in their efforts to ‘come back’. The third rationale was the prevalence of an understanding of historical China as an expansionist power. This understanding was anchored on circulating historical narratives, especially the ones that mention the Yuan dynasty’s invasion of Singasari, a Javanese kingdom, in the late of 13th century (Sukma 1999:52). By then, China was under the rule of Kublai Khan, a Mongol emperor.

Had the above perception been confined to the minds of the ruling elites, it may not have had a significant impact on the way Indonesian society saw China. But what actually happened was the actualization of that perception in the form of state’s policies. An
example of this is Indonesian decision to freeze its diplomatic ties with China in 1967. But there were other policies that arguably had a broader effect in Indonesian society, as they regulated almost all things related with China, including the life of Chinese Indonesians (which will be discussed in the later section). These included the closure of Chinese schools, the restriction of Chinese language learning and the prohibition of the use of Chinese characters (unless it was conducted in two universities, that is, the University of Indonesia and a private university which for many years had a retired army general as its rector), and the policy to use the term *Cina* to refer to China and the Chinese (before that, Indonesians used the term *Tiongkok* to refer to China, and *Tionghoa* to refer to the Chinese). The existence of those policies made a much broader Indonesian society familiar with the impression of China as a negative power.

At the same time, the perception of China as a threat was also actively transmitted to the public in various ways. The most effective vehicles for this transmission were Indonesian media, film, and schools. It should be noted here that during the New Order era, the state imposed its power on the production processes of knowledge as well as its transmission (see for example Dhakidae 2003: 330-360). Indonesian media was considerably powerless and could not help being used by the state as an extension of its arm. Film industries could not escape the state’s influence as well. The discourses constructed by the state were dominant
in many aspect of social life, but especially in the formal education domain. These discourses were traceable in many subjects taught at schools, such as history, religion, and so on.

In Indonesian media, the perception of China as a threat appeared as the dominant discourse, especially in the form of statements made by the elites. For example, in the mid-1980s, when a question over whether Indonesia would normalize its diplomatic ties with China or not was widely discussed, the then Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mochtar Kusumaatmadja was reported as announcing that Sino-Indonesian diplomatic normalization would be closer if China ‘honestly admitted’ its coup involvement and stated that it would no longer help underground communist movements in Southeast Asia. In the same occasion, he also reportedly declared that, ‘Indonesia remains vigilant against the latent communist danger’ (Van der Kroef 1986: 914). Meanwhile, similar perceptions also resurfaced in the opinions made by the media and its journalists. For instance, in 1989, one of the newspapers stated in its editorial that China could not be trusted as it had stabbed Indonesia in the back since the era of Kublai Khan (Suryadinata 1990: 693). Even Tempo, the most critical Indonesian weekly could not escape from the power of the discourse. While reporting on the reopening of the direct trade between Indonesia and China in the 1990s, the magazine explained that for about twenty years, China ‘has been viewed with suspicion because of their role in the G-30-S/PKI Event,
and their attitude that continuously supported the PKI’ (Tempo, 13 July 1995). The existence of this view among even then most critical journalists implies that for many Indonesians in those days the presence of China as a potential threat to Indonesia was a ‘reality’.

As for film, the perception can perhaps be most clearly found in a movie titled ‘Pengkhianatan G 30 S/PKI’ (The Treachery of the 30th September Movement/PKI), based on the government’s version of the ‘1965 Coup’. The movie was released in 1984 and screened annually by Indonesian TV stations either on the 30th of September or on the 1st of October, until the end of the New Order’s era. The production of this movie and its massive distribution should be considered as one of the regime’s ways to remind Indonesians of the danger that might come from the communists. However, together with the portrayal of the Indonesian communists as a scary monster, the perception of China as a threat is presented in the early minutes of the movie.

The perception that appears in this movie is mostly related to China’s alleged involvement in the coup. A spectator is furnished with the appropriate information regarding this involvement after watching the movie for about six minutes. The movie begins with a prologue in which a narrator explains the background of the event. In one of his statements, the narrator explains that the PKI had requested the government to arm the workers and the peasants in order to form a
‘fifth force’, ‘on the advice of the Prime Minister of the People Republic of China (PRC), Zhou En Lai’. The narrator also mentions the Prime Minister’s promise to provide a hundred thousands of light rifles for Indonesia and maintains that this promise was as actually ‘not separated from the preparation of the armed forces used by the PKI in the September 30th Movement’. The narration is combined with a picture of Prime Minister Zhou and a subtitle saying ‘Perdana Menteri RRC Chou En Lai’ (PRC’s Prime Minister Zhou En Lai). As the film continues for another ten minutes, there is a scene demonstrating a Chinese medical doctor examining President Sukarno, followed by him disclosing the information regarding the president’s critical condition to D.N. Aidit, the then Chairman of the PKI. He later in turn uses this information as an important consideration in launching the coup. The existence of those scenes reveals the movie’s wish to inform its viewers of China’s entanglement in the ‘1965 coup’.

The narrative of China as a threat was also disseminated to students of secondary schools (and to some extent, even of primary schools). First of all, the fact that the above movie was made compulsory screening for the schools for about two decades helped circulate the discourse. But even if the schools had never assigned their students to watch this movie, the students would still learn the fact that China is a threat during history classes, for which the curriculum and teaching materials were produced by the government. Furthermore it was not only China’s alleged involvement
in the ‘1965 Coup’ that was taught in the schools. Other aspects that might construct the perception of China as potential threat were also introduced. Among them was the expansionist view of China, which had appeared in the textbooks even earlier before the production of the above movie (see Sukma 1999: 52-53).

In brief, the perception of China as a threat emerged in relation to the New Order’s development and nation-building strategy. Together with the ‘latent danger of communism’, this perception became one of the reasons used by the government to justify the security approach that it took to create stability in the name of rapid economic development. The perception began to evolve in the aftermath of the 1965 coup attempt, as an allegation of China’s involvement in that attempt. Following this, the perception constituted a discourse that penetrated into Indonesian society in many ways. Among the various ways through which this perception circulated were government policy, media, movies, and elementary schools. As its circulation took place in a systematic and intensified manner, it is not surprising that the perception became popular ‘fact’ in the New Order era. It persisted until the end of the New Order period, even though it began to weaken in the aftermath of the resumption of the two countries diplomatic ties in the beginning of the 1990s.
Ambiguity toward the Chinese Indonesians

Unlike its perception of and policy toward China, the New Order’s policy concerning Chinese Indonesians was ambiguous. On the one hand, the negative perception fostered by the regime concerning China also extended to Chinese Indonesians as well. Regardless of their citizenship status, Chinese Indonesians became the target of the New Order regime’s suspicion and discriminative regulations. As in the case of the perception of China, the state’s negative perception of the Chinese community was also transmitted to the Indonesian society through policy and media, including televised performances and movies. As a result, negative stereotypes of the Chinese, combined with hostile attitudes toward them, became very popular among Indonesians.

The New Order government adopted the previously existing view of the Chinese Indonesian communities as a problem and made it its official stance. The regime then assigned to itself the task to ‘solve’ this problem. This task was carried out by making a set of policies. Thus, as they did with China, President Suharto’s administration implemented specific policies concerning these communities as well. Some of these products of law began to appear as early as 1967. Among them are the preference to use the term ‘Cina’, instead of ‘Tionghoa/Tiongkok’ to refer to the Chinese and China, the closure of the Chinese schools (which were mostly affiliated with China), and the restriction of
Chinese language learning and the use of Chinese characters. Many other regulations, however, specifically targeted the Chinese Indonesians, even though their impact on the image of China should not be ruled out. Examples of these are the decision of the Presidium of the Cabinet to urge Chinese Indonesians to change their Chinese name into names that sounded more Indonesian, the presidential Instruction that regulated the religion and the tradition of the Chinese Indonesians, and the elimination of the Chinese media.

The existence of the above regulations and many other policies concerning Chinese Indonesians limited the social, cultural and political aspects of these people’s life (see Coppel 1983: 37). As Chinese schools, media, and organizations – which were regarded as the three pillars which sustained Chinese society and identity in the country (Suryadinata 1997: 12) – were eliminated by the new regulations, the Chinese encountered difficulties in preserving their cultural identity. Furthermore, as the government did not allow Chinese religious beliefs to be preserved, Chinese Indonesians had to adopt one of the five religions officially recognized by the Indonesian state, that is, Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, or Protestant Christianity. Those who insisted to strictly preserve Chinese religious beliefs could get in trouble in one way or another. The case of Budi Wijaya and Lanny Guito, a Surabayan Confucian couple, is an example of this. This couple went through a wedding ceremony in a Confucian temple in 1995. But the Civil Registration Office refused
to register their marriage on the basis that in 1979 the government had already decided that Confucianism was not a religion (See Putra 2000). Chinese cultural performances, such as the lion dance or the dragon dance, were also not allowed to be conducted in public spaces. They were only confined within the walls of those temples.

The presence of these policies was ostensibly meant to force the Chinese Indonesians to forget their Chineseness and assimilate into ‘mainstream Indonesian society’. But ironically, they were also prevented from forgetting their categorical difference (Ang 2001:56). The New Order government put a special code in the Chinese identity cards so that their ethnicity could easily be identified. The Chinese Indonesians were also required to show their SBKRI (evidence of the citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia) when they were dealing with bureaucracy and sometimes had to pay an extra fee. This is clearly a discriminatory practice as a ‘pribumi’ Indonesian was not even required to have such a document.

Furthermore, just as their new social existence was accompanied by a set of negative representation of the Chinese Indonesians, these policies also reproduced and intensively promoted negative attitudes toward the Chinese among Indigenous Indonesians. Instead of reducing the negative stereotypes of the Chinese, the government’s assimilationist policy reinforced the idea of Chinese Indonesians as outsiders because only
outsiders needed to be assimilated into local society. Together with the Chinese Indonesians’ status as citizens of foreign descent, which once again emphasized their ‘foreignness’ (Coppel 2002:145), the promotion of the idea of the Chinese Indonesians as outsiders became an important process in the construction of Chinese as one of the nation’s and the regime’s major Others (Heryanto 1998:97). Furthermore, the regime had encouraged Chinese Indonesians to concentrate on business activity while at the same time reducing their opportunity to participate in politics or work in fields other than business (such as joining the Indonesian Armed Force [ABRI] or becoming government civil servant). This had resulted in the rise of new Chinese businessmen in the early decade of the New Order era. In this way, the image of the Chinese Indonesians as ‘foreigners’ who took advantage of Indonesian conditions to maximize their own profit was continuously reproduced. Alongside this image, what George Aditjondro called as ‘the myth of Chinese domination’, has spread since the mid-1990s, following a statement made by Michael Backman, an executive officer with the East Asia Analytical Unit of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra (Aditjondro 1998). According to this myth, the Chinese Indonesians (which constitute only 3 or 4 percent of Indonesia’s population) controlled roughly 70 percent of Indonesia’s economy (Aditjondro 1998). Clearly, the circulation of such images was beneficial for the New Order regime. As Chua pointed out, this
provided the politico-bureaucratic powerholders of the New Order with the means to depict the constantly intensifying economic conflict in Indonesia as an ethnic one between the ‘indigenous’ and the Chinese, using the latter as a buffer to deflect criticism of the regime. (Chua 2008:4)

As in the case of negative perceptions of China, the image of Chinese Indonesians as outsiders, and hence as the Indonesians’ Other was also perpetuated in various ways. But unlike China, on which not too many studies were conducted in Indonesia, Chinese Indonesians were represented in various studies by Indonesian researchers. Many of the representation that appeared in those works reproduced the above image of the Chinese Indonesians as outsiders. The questions that were usually raised in such studies were about whether a Chinese community in a certain place has assimilated to the mainstream society or not, and how the process of assimilation should take place. Thus as Thung Julan has argued, most of the works on Chinese Indonesians during the New Order period were biased by the notion of ‘assimilation’ and the ‘Chinese problem’ (Thung 1999:21).

News media and television programs were also used as vehicles for popularized negative images of Chinese. For their part, news producers made a significant contribution to the reproduction of the image
of the Chinese in Indonesian society. News covering negative activities conducted by any Chinese who had an Indonesian name usually enclosed the person’s Chinese name, either as an alias, or as ‘the name given when she/he was born’ (terlahir). These included reports on fraudulent activities or corruption cases involving Chinese Indonesian businessmen (see for example Prasetyo 2002: 39-44, Irene 2002: 14-24). On TV the puppet series entitled ‘Si Unyil’, which was designed for young viewers and screened in the Indonesian TV between 1981 and 1993, provides an interesting example of this. The setting of the show was ‘Desa Sukamaju’, an imagined village where a little boy named Unyil and his friends lived. Interestingly, the show inserted a Chinese family among its characters. Meilan, the main character of this Chinese family, was portrayed as a girl with slanting eyes. Staying in Meilan’s house was her grandfather (usually called in Chinese words, Kong Kong), an old Chinese man, also with slanting eyes, who spoke in a ‘Chinese accent’. Meilan’s grandfather was created as one of the bad characters in that puppet show. He was portrayed as someone who was not evil, but who had a one-track mind, focused on money. Kong was always dreaming about his glorious homeland (tanah leluhur), which showed that he was not fully assimilated with Indonesian society. (Kitley 2000: 119)
Another example is the TV series titled ‘Jejak Sang Guru’ (the Trace of the Teacher, produced in 1995), in which a Chinese student is portrayed as physically weak. In this film, the teacher, performed by a senior Indonesian actor, says to the Chinese character, ‘you are the weakest among the students’. This series also shows that as this Chinese student grew up, he became a businessman while his ‘indigenous’ friends opted to become professionals, such as a medical doctor, or even to join in the military.

The circulation of the image of the Chinese Indonesians as outsiders and the Other during the New Order period was complemented with a negative attitude toward them. The presence of this attitude contributed to outbreaks of anti-Chinese riots and violence. These people were regarded as outsiders, richer, politically weaker and unbelievers and thus sufficiently dehumanized to get attacked and denigrated. This facilitated the targeting of Chinese by indigenous Indonesians whenever groups or classes of people felt trapped by financial, political, or economic frustration. Anti-Chinese pogroms and violence occurred many times during the Suharto era. And the biggest of them were the May 1998 pogrom during which many Chinese Indonesian women were gang raped, some Chinese Indonesians were murdered, and hundreds of their properties destroyed or damaged —marking the end of Suharto and the New Order regime.
On the other hand, the New Order government used the Chinese Indonesian businessmen to support its development program. As mentioned earlier, the government dissuaded the Chinese from participating in politics, working as civil servants, as well as joining the military. Instead, they encouraged them to plunge into business. This encouragement coincided with the experience of many young Chinese Indonesians who could not continue their studies due to the closure of the Chinese schools by the government. Many of these Chinese who had already completed their basic education by that time did not have sufficient proficiency in formal Indonesian language, and thus found it difficult to enroll at Indonesian universities. Meanwhile, many more who were still in school at the time the Chinese schools were closed could not continue their studies and thus found it difficult to get formal employment. These people tended to start small or medium business, or worked with Chinese Indonesian business owners. As a result, the New Order period witnessed an increasing number of Chinese Indonesian businessmen and traders.

To support its development program, the New Order regime needed to form a ‘domestic private business class’ (Chua 2008:46). Chinese Indonesian businessmen were recruited for this purpose as they “turned out to be the only group with relevant business experience, entrepreneurial skills, and networks to generate profits and to support general economic growth” (Chua 2008:46). The promotion of the
discrimination against the Chinese and the negative representation of them was apparently a part of the regime’s plan to use this ‘middleman minority’. As the Chinese Indonesians became aware of their vulnerable position, a number of them entered into what is called as ‘predatory clientelism’ (Nonini 2004). The patron-client relationship with powerful military and government officials allowed Chinese Indonesians to do business with peace of mind as they were protected by their patrons (Schwarz 1999:107-108). Such a system was advantageous especially for Chinese Indonesian businessmen as it gave them an opportunity to become big tycoons in a relatively short time. As for the New Order regime political elite, the system provided them with a group of capitalist highly dependent on them (Chua 2008:48). While the financial strength of these Chinese businessmen was very useful for the political elite, they were relatively harmless as they came from a minority group perceived negatively by the majority of Indonesian people.

As a summary, the attitudes toward the Chinese Indonesians during the New Order might be regarded at best as ambiguous. While Chinese were encouraged to develop their business, they were also made the target of various discriminative regulations as well. These regulations limited the social, religious, and political life of the Chinese. Meanwhile, the negative images of the Chinese that had existed previously were heavily reproduced in this period. The reproduction process took place through the publication of literature that
might provide a justification for the image, through media (including television), and through arts, as in the case of the puppet show series and the movie.

This ambiguity was not without reason. Through the reproduction of the negative images and through the emergence of Chinese big businesses, the perception of the Chinese as the other was widespread. Thus the New Order regime had a group of harmless businessmen that might be useful to support its development programs and to help financing its political elite (Chua 2008:29). But the perception of the Chinese as the other might also be used for other purposes. As a Surabaya based scholar told me, ‘it became ammunition ready to use whenever the regime needed it, as in the case of the May 1998 Riots’ (Interview with Masdar Hilmy, Surabaya 19 March 2009).

**Fertile Soil for a Changing Image?**

Since the early 1990s, several developments that potentially reduced negative and suspicious attitudes, especially toward China, emerged. One of these developments is the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, which marked the beginning of the ‘post-cold war era’. The arrival of this era has made the Indonesian government’s discourse of the ‘communist danger’ less powerful, even though it did not totally disappear. In fact, it is still alive today, especially when it comes to the Indonesian Communist Party.
The ending of the cold war was soon followed by another development, namely the emergence of China’s rapid economic development in the early 1990s. Indonesian elites developed a rather optimistic view of this economic development. This view appeared especially in the aftermath of the resumption of Sino-Indonesia diplomatic ties in 1991. For example, writing in the second half of the 1990s, Tarmizi Taher, a retired Navy admiral and former minister of religion explained that

if the double digit economic development that had happened so far can be continuously maintained, it is possible that in the next three decades, that country would place (itself) in the most forefront position. (Taher 1997: 91, my translation)

This resumption of diplomatic ties has had a certain impact on people’s attitude toward China. The Indonesian middle class, especially those who engaged in business, began to anticipate a more intensive business relationship between people of the two countries. As a result, people felt encouraged to learn more about Chinese culture, particularly the Chinese language. As a result, quite a few of middle class Indonesians, including of the younger generation, began to learn Mandarin. Consequently, the demand for short
courses in Mandarin for professionals skyrocketed.\textsuperscript{13} Many tertiary institutions responded to this enthusiasm for learning Mandarin. Advertising Mandarin courses was used for attracting new students. They inserted the basic introduction of Mandarin in their curriculum, notwithstanding the fact that restriction on teaching the language was not yet lifted.\textsuperscript{14} The University of Indonesia and the Darma Persada University which were allowed to conduct Mandarin teaching activity also saw the rising enthusiasm with this language as a business opportunity. They began to offer short term courses in Mandarin. In 1993, the University of Indonesia launched its Mandarin course, which was administered by the university’s ‘centre for language service’ (Sulanti and

\textsuperscript{13} The growing need for Mandarin teachers was often met by inviting graduates from the Chinese studies programs, either from the Darma Persada University or University of Indonesia. Outside the universities, several companies offered Mandarin as part of their human resources capacity building efforts. They generally invited a training centre to provide a Mandarin learning module for their managers and officers. An example of this is the Jakarta based management training centre, which since 1996 has provided a Mandarin learning program for big companies and hotels in Jakarta. It is worth noting that these activities were conducted despite the fact that the teaching of the language was still formally banned.

\textsuperscript{14} Several academies of secretary and management located in Jakarta and Tanggerang began to include Mandarin in their so called ‘crash program” as early as 1996.
Kabul 2010: 210). A couple of years later, the Dharma Persada University started joint ventures with various smaller size language centres all over the Jakarta metropolitan area, enabling these centres to teach Mandarin under the auspice of the university.\footnote{Between 1996 and 1998, I taught Chinese language at one of the centres affiliated with Darma Persada University.}

Coincidentally, the Indonesian television industries also started to flourish in this period. For over four decades since Indonesia’s independence, the majority of Indonesian people could only view the TV programs broadcast by the government-owned TVRI (Televisi Republic Indonesia). But by the beginning of the 1990s, several private TV broadcasters were established. The first private TV industry, the RCTI (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia) was launched in 1989 in Jakarta, followed by the Surabaya-based SCTV (Surya Citra Televisi Indonesia). In a couple of years, other new broadcasters, such as the Anteve, Indonesiar, and Indonesian Television of Education (TPI) accompanied these two pioneers. The establishment of these TV broadcasters provided a space for some aspects of Chinese culture to appear in the Indonesian public. Chinese movie series have been broadcast in some different TV channels. They were warmly welcomed by Indonesians. For example, the screening of the prominent Chinese movie series entitled ‘the Return of Condor Hero’ by Indosiar attracted a lot of viewers.
Alongside a number of other Chinese martial arts series, it “succeeded in winning top ratings nationwide for Indosiar” (Thomas 2005: 141). A similar response was evoked by the ‘White Snake Legend’ series, which was aired by SCTV (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia) in 1994 and was popular with the public (see Heryanto 1999: 173).

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The May 1998 pogrom, which victimized many Chinese, led to the emergence of an antiracist movement among middle class Indonesians, particularly among pro-democracy activists. These people promoted a multicultural attitude demonstrated also by their support for Chinese Indonesian culture. For example, soon after news of the pogrom broke, a group of activists established a crisis centre to advocate compensation for its victims. Later, this group established an NGO called the Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa (SNB, the Solidarity of the Island and the Nation) to promote anti-racism in the society. As a result of this antiracist movement, middle class Indonesians are increasingly aware of the problem of racism. Today a public statement that might be considered racist will evoke negative reactions from many people. The most recent example is a statement by a senior politician, Siswono Yudo Husodo, who was forced to publicly correct a racist comment he had made about Chinese (See Detiknews, Thursday 10 March 2011). Meanwhile,
Chinese Indonesians themselves thought that it was now time to launch a campaign to demand better treatment and recognition of their cultural and political rights. They established various organizations to express their voices (See Chapter 7). Soon after Gus Dur was appointed as President in 1999, Chinese Indonesians began to participate more actively in politics. They have been involved in Indonesian politics either through Chinese Indonesian political parties or non-ethnic based political parties (See e.g. Hoon 2006:170-209, Freedman 2003:444-445). Two became cabinet ministers (Kwik Kian Gie and Mari-Elka Pangestu), while many others have been elected as members to the Indonesian parliament. All of these developments have been able to occur because the New Order authoritarian government collapsed a week after the May 1998 riots broke out. The demise of the New Order regime resulted in the emergence of a more democratic Indonesian society, in which the above developments could take place. Furthermore, the Post Suharto Indonesian governments have abolished a number of discriminatory regulations against the ethnic Chinese while the newly elected parliament have passed several new laws which ensure that all Indonesian citizens receive equal treatment, at least theoretically (See Winarta 2008).

Another significant development is the global discourse on the rise of China. This discourse is circulated throughout Indonesia in books, articles, and media. Many versions of this discourse entered Indonesian public discourse in the form of translated
works written by foreign authors as well as in the form of works authored by Indonesians. Simultaneously, the development assistance provided by the Chinese state has arrived as well. In 2005 China agreed to provide an 800 million dollar loan to help Indonesia build its infrastructure (*People Daily*, 26 April 2005). One of the projects funded with Chinese money is the Suramadu Bridge. This project was also carried out by Chinese contractors, who brought about 300 Chinese workers as well as 46 Chinese technicians and managers into the country. They were assisted by several Indonesian contractors who brought their own workers. Thus the construction process itself has allowed people of the two countries to interact and know each other. I will discuss the bridge construction in relation to growing appreciation for Chinese work ethos in Chapter Five.

It is worth noting that besides providing development assistances to Indonesia, China is also making an effort to promote the circulation of stories about its friendly relationship with Indonesia in the past. Chinese scholars play an important role in this process of promotion. As mentioned by Hong Liu (2011:7), these scholars tend to focus their studies on the cultural exchanges between China and Indonesia. In their works,

China is portrayed as a benevolent power that brought, over centuries, various cultural amenities and enrichments, ranging from vocabulary items in Bahasa
Indonesia and the design motifs of batik to specific forms of literary expression. (Liu 2011:7-8)

Today, works by such scholars have been published in Bahasa Indonesia. Kong Yuanzhi’s book on the life history of a Ming Dynasty’s Muslim Eunuch who is believed to have visited Indonesia in the beginning of the fifteenth century (published in 2000) is an example of these. So is Liang Liji’s historical account of the interactions between China and Indonesia (published in 2012). Since books of this kind usually put their emphasis on the warm relationship between China and the kingdoms existing in the Indonesian archipelago before the coming of the Europeans, the impact that they may have on the image of China in Indonesia should not be ignored.

However, this raft of changes and transformations should not lead us to believe that only positive views of China have been spread in Indonesian society. Alongside those positive views, negative effects of China’s economic development are also widely discussed by elite and middle class Indonesians as well. Writing about the perception of the elite, Daniel Novotny pointed out that,

Whereas in the early and mid 1990s, China was still viewed as a threat mainly because of its military actions in the South China Sea and large-scale arms
purchases, from the mid and late 1990s, the Indonesian elite’s concern has increasingly shifted to the booming Chinese economy. (Novotny 2010:213)

Indeed, many Indonesians today are worried about the impact of China’s productivity on the Indonesian economy, especially in the aftermath of the ACFTA (ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement) in 2010. One of its most discernible consequences was the massive arrival of products with a lower price from China into Indonesian markets. While these products had been available in Indonesia since the second half of the 1990s, their presence appears more noticeable in recent years (See Djumena 2011). These textile and electronic products are considered a threat by Indonesian businessmen, including ethnic Chinese businessmen. Indonesian researchers and opinion leaders doubt the ability of Indonesian manufacturers to produce goods that might compete with products from China. They worry that if this phenomenon continues, Indonesian industry will only be able to grow slowly, if at all.

Nevertheless the presence of these products is not unanimously taken to be negative. Indonesians with lower income see the arrival of such products as a blessing. For them, the existence of electronic products such as mobile phones at a cheaper price means that they too can afford to buy stuff that in the past were only owned by people with higher incomes. Businessmen who are engaged in retail business also
find the availability of low price commodities an advantage as it enables them to sell more products and make more profit.

Discriminatory practices and negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians still exist post Suharto, albeit in a less aggressive manner. A research conducted in 2004 by the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights revealed that Chinese Indonesians were sometimes still required to produce their SBKRI by lower level officials despite the central government’s decision to abolish such a requirement (Departemen Hukum dan Ham RI 2004:34-35). However, unlike in the New Order period, today this requirement applied only to some Chinese Indonesians whose documents (such as birth certificate) were regarded suspicious by those officials (Departemen Hukum dan Ham RI 2004:34-35). A story told by Mr Gunawan (a pseudonym), my interviewee in Surabaya, confirmed the existence of unofficial discriminative practice (complemented with a negative attitude) against Chinese Indonesians amongst lower level officials. He recounted his experience in the following passage:

Recently, I went to a kelurahan (sub district) office to renew my identity card. I informed an officer in the counter of my purpose, and then took a sit to wait. But after waiting for a long time, my identity was still not ready. So I asked the officer, who then asked one of his colleagues in
the next room. Unaware that I was right in front of the counter, the officer in the next room said to his colleague, “let him wait a bit more, he is Chinese anyway”. Hearing of this statement, I became so angry that I shouted loudly, “Hi you, come out and face me”. The officer was so scared that he hid inside the room. But his colleague apologized on his behalf and produced me with the renewed identity card. (Interview with Mr. Gunawan, 7 November 2008)

Negative attitudes toward Chinese Indonesians were also clearly observable during the Jakarta gubernatorial election that was held in 2012. Joko Widodo and his Chinese Indonesian running mate, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known by his Chinese nickname Ahok), surprisingly won the election with 43 per cent while the then Governor, Fauzi Bowo, who ran in pair with Nachrowi Ramli, a retired three stars general, only gained 34 per cent of the vote. However, as none of them took more than 50 per cent of the vote, a second round of the election had to be held two months afterwards (on 20 September 2012). Immediately after his first round victory, racist comments against Ahok became so rampant. Rhoma Irama, a popular musician who turned into a Muslim preacher, urged Muslims not to give their vote to Joko Widodo because his
running mate was a non-Muslim Chinese. Blackmails against Ahok’s ethnicity were everywhere during the campaign period. A video which blatantly threatened ethnic Chinese was posted in You Tube (Republika, 23 August 2012). A scene of the 1998 anti-Chinese pogrom appeared in this video, combined with a narration requesting Chinese Indonesians to refrain themselves from participating in the gubernatorial election. Anti-Chinese tone was also observable during a debate between the governor and vice governor candidates that was lively aired roughly a week before the second round of the election took place. During the debate, Nachrowi Ramli greeted Ahok with the word ‘haiya’ (an Indonesian version of Chinese acclamation ‘aiya’). There is no doubt that such a greeting was meant to remind the audience of Ahok’s ethnic background.

However, despite these circulating anti-Chinese comments, Joko Widodo and Ahok successfully won the gubernatorial election. Political analysts suggested that the above greeting, together with other racist comments allegedly made by Fauzi Bowo and Nachrowi Ramli’s supporters, had brought the voters away from these candidates (Kompas, 20 September 2012, Merdeka.com, 21 September 2012). But negative comments against Ahok’s ethnic background still some times appear. For
example, in January 2013, Farhat Abbas, a recently popular lawyer, made an allegedly anti-Chinese statement on twitter. Abbas was commenting on Widodo and Ahok’s plan to regulate entry to public roads in Jakarta based on the vehicle numbers. Abbas wrote that ‘whatever the number is, (once a Chinese) is always a Chinese’.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief description of the social and political process of constructing a portrayal of China and of Chinese Indonesians as ‘the other’. Chinese people interacted with the inhabitants of the archipelago well before the arrival of the Europeans. However the perception of the Chinese as the other began to be heavily propagated in the beginning of the twentieth century, along with the implementation of the Dutch ‘ethical policy’, the rise of Indonesian nationalist movements, and a religious movement launched by Muslim Javanese traders. The perception persisted even after the independence of Indonesia, particularly after Suharto came to power. In Suharto’s era, Chinese Indonesians were encouraged to do business and some of them were supported by the regime to become big tycoons. Yet the regime also reproduced and promoted the image of the Chinese as a minority group which dominated Indonesian economy and exploited
Indonesia’s resources. The regime did it so that these people remained politically weak and heavily dependent on the state.

In the case of the negative perception of China, it first emerged not too long after the Indonesian republic was founded. But it was also reproduced in the form of the image of China as a threat in the aftermath of the 1965 coup. The image was then circulated in various ways during the New Order period, making the representation of China as one of Indonesian’s other a ‘reality’ in Indonesian society.

However, the sign of changing attitudes only came in the early years of the 1990s. And it was only in the aftermath of the May 1998 riots and the demise of the New Order period that new developments led to changing attitudes toward China, the Chinese, and Chinese Indonesians. These developments have occurred side by side with the flourishing of a global discourse on the rise of China and then with the implementation of China’s development assistance in Indonesia. What kind of attitudes have Indonesians developed in this new situation? How have these attitudes been circulated? Have they found these attitudes meaningful for them? I will try to answer those questions by providing a number of telling accounts in the following chapters.
Chapter Three

Inspired by our Former Antagonist? Enthusiasm for China in the Post New Order Indonesia

The previous chapter discussed the way in which the negative perceptions about Chinese Indonesians and their ‘ancestral land’ evolved in Indonesia’s modern history. For about half a century since independence Indonesians were encouraged to perceive China as a threatening expansionist power that in the past made attempts to attack the Indonesian kingdom of Singasari. China was also seen as a communist threat to national security, especially during the New Order era. In contrast, more recently we see a number of developments in Indonesian society that contribute to changes in the understanding of China and the Chinese. In this and the next chapter, I will elaborate on representations of China and of the Chinese that have emerged since the demise of the New Order regime. The focus of these chapters will be on the image of China as a state, not on the Chinese in Indonesia. I will begin with a discussion of the ways in which a new image of China is apparent in the Indonesian public today. Subsequently, I will provide a number of accounts that
show the ways in which certain individuals are enthusiastic about China.

The Changing Image of ‘Imperial China’ in Public Discourse

Less than a decade after the end of the New Order regime a new discourse on China has emerged in Indonesia. A set of discourses that associates China with ‘peace’, ‘friendship’, and ‘development’ began to appear. Such discourses are manifest in the form of popular histories of Indonesia which express a positive image of China and the Chinese. Those narratives are often based on stories about early encounters between Chinese and Indonesians. Besides these popular histories similar appreciation for China is to be found in the discourses that take a positive look at certain recent developments in China itself.

Narratives that construct a new positive representation of imperial China usually rest on the stories of Admiral Zheng He (popularly known in Indonesia as Cheng Ho). This Ming Dynasty’s Muslim eunuch – who in the beginning of the fifteenth century was appointed by Emperor Yong Le to lead several expeditions around the world – has suddenly become a popular element in Indonesian historical imaginations after a book on his voyages was published in 2002
(Menzies 2002). Three years after the launch of the book, events to commemorate his voyages were held in many cities all over Indonesia. Since then, stories about Zheng He became increasingly popular and were recounted or referred to at academic conferences and seminars, in arts performances, and in the media.

Contemporary narratives about Zheng He contest previously popular narratives based upon an earlier historical epoch, that is, when the Mongols, who by then had established the Yuan dynasty in China and invaded the Javanese Kingdom at the end of the thirteenth century. This event popularized the image of the Chinese as invaders and thereafter has been used by the regime as a historical justification for the construction of China as a threat (Sukma 1999: 52). By contrast, current narratives about Zheng He portray China as a friendly neighbour that paid close attention to regional peace and development. According to this new take on China’s majestic ventures, his journey emphasizes China’s desire to help solve conflicts between local communities as well as China’s eagerness to assist its neighbours in their development efforts. This kind of narrative has been popularized by a number of Chinese and Southeast Asian scholars, for example Tan (2007). It is however also still contested by scholars who interpret Zheng He’s expeditions as forms of proto-colonialism (e.g. Wade 2009).
In their method, the Ming, through these maritime missions, were engaged in what might be called maritime proto-colonialism; that is, they were engaged in that early form of maritime colonialism by which a dominant maritime power took the major East-West maritime trade network, as well as the seas between, thereby gaining economic and political benefits. (Wade 2009:132)

The general public is more influenced by the growing amount of activities that organised to celebrate Zheng He and his voyages to Southeast Asia. To illustrate the resulting widespread present-day positive take on the Zheng He’s expedition I will discuss an event that I observed in the beginning of my fieldwork.

On 30 July 2008, a commemoration of the arrival of Admiral Zheng He in the Indonesian archipelago was held in Semarang, the capital of Central Java. The event took place in Klenteng (Chinese temple) Tay Kak Sie, which was located in the China town of the city. The ceremony opened with several speeches, including one by Mr. Ali Mufiz, the then governor of Central Java. He reminded the audience that “Zheng He set an example of developing a good relationship between two regions."

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16 Zheng He is believed to visit this city in one of his voyages, see Suryadinata 2007.
Therefore, we should follow his example” (my emphasis).

Toward the end of the happening, a Yogyakarta based Kethoprak group known as the ‘Kethoprak Ringkes’ performed a play under the title of ‘Zheng He’s Expedition to Java’. The performance highlighted Zheng He and his troops’ role as peacemakers during the civil war between the Western and the Eastern Kingdoms of Majapahit. In one dialogue, Zheng He was asked by one of the warring parties to become their ally but he explained that he could not take side because “our mission is a mission for friendship”. In addition, the Chinese role in introducing civilization to the Indonesians was also narrated. It was presented in a dialogue whereby a local fisherman came and cried in front of Zheng He. He explained that the reason he cried was because he did not want to be a fisherman anymore.

17 Kethoprak, according to Barbara Hatley (2008:1), is a form of Javanese-language popular melodrama with a repertoire drawn from Javanese history and legend. While it is understood by Indonesians as a Javanese traditional popular art, it was only invented as late as 1923 (Geertz 1960:389).

18 Ricklefs (2001: 22) mentions that the civil war apparently took place in 1405-1406. The war was between Bhre Wirabumi, a son born to a concubine of King Hayam Wuruk, and Queen Suhita, the heir of Majapahit throne. Bhre Wirabumi was finally defeated and decapitated by a follower of Suhita (Poesponegoro and Nototosusanto 2008:469-470).
but instead wished to be a farmer. Listening to this explanation, Zheng He called one of his assistants and commanded, “Help this person with the equipment required for agriculture!” (Field notes, 1 August 2008)

As recorded in the note above, both the governor’s statement and the dialogue in the *kethoprak* performance introduce a picture of an imperial China characterized by peacemaking, friendship, and willingness to give assistance to neighbours. While these characteristics were attributed to Zheng He, at the end of the day the ‘credit’ went to China as a whole. This is because within these narratives, Zheng He is understood as an ambassador of the Ming dynasty. He is seen as the representative of the emperor and his expedition is understood as an actualization of a mission organized by his master, the then emperor of the Ming dynasty.

Apart from the content of the narratives (that is the positive representation of imperial China), it is also worth focusing our attention on their circulation process itself. In the case of the above event, we see how the narratives appear as a dialogue in a cultural performance. Indonesian cultural activities such as the *kethoprak* are a major vehicle for the dissemination of narratives. The above *kethoprak* play has been repeatedly performed in other occasions and places, such as in the concert hall of the Taman Budaya (Cultural Park) in Yogyakarta on 29 March 2008 (*Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 26 March 2008).
Another example is a traditional ballet show that also takes the Admiral’s voyage as its theme. It was staged in Jakarta in July 2007. In the beginning of the performance, the organizing committee, which is chaired by the wife of the then Indonesian house speaker, introduced Zheng He to the audience. He is called ‘a great sailor during the era of Emperor Zhu Di (the official name of Yong Le) of the Ming Dynasty’ and is also described as a person who ‘not only had political and trade mission, but also taught farming method, house construction, and culture to local communities’ (Rahardjo 2007: 17). He was also said to have taken part in building the Islamic empire of Demak in 1475, notwithstanding the fact that he already passed away at the time this Islamic kingdom was founded. The information conveyed in this prologue was presented in detail in several scenes of the show. For instance, in scene four, there is a description of Zheng He and his men helping local people to build a lighthouse off the shore of Cirebon. The lighthouse construction process is described as a ‘sweet mutual cooperation’ between the Chinese and the Indonesians’ (Rahardjo 2007:28). Such descriptions, combined with other stories narrated during the event, introduce to the audience a portrayal of the Chinese not only as agents of development, but as good friends willing to work together with the Indonesians for the benefit of Indonesia.

An even more significant example can be found in the screening of a soap opera series titled *Laksamana*


Cheng Ho (‘Admiral Zheng He’). This series is composed of fifty episodes and was screened on Metro TV every Saturday evening for almost a year as of August 2008. The longevity of this series has facilitated the introduction of Zheng He to the wider Indonesian community. Furthermore, Yusril Izra Mahendra, a very popular and highly respected actor played Zheng He.\textsuperscript{19} It is likely that the series has had an impact on people’s image of imperial China.

Similar to the Kethoprak and traditional ballet performances, the TV series Laksamana Cheng Ho also contains a narrative portraying China as a good friend willing to help its neighbours, even though in this narrative emphasis is given to Zheng He’s effort in persuading the emperor to behave in that way. The episode opened with a story of what had happened in China before the plan to conduct great voyages to the

\textsuperscript{19} Yusril Izra Mahendra is an academic who in the post-New Order period became a politician. He is the former chairman of an Islamic political party named as the ‘Partai Bulan Bintang’ (the Moon and Star Party). Yusril was among those nominated as presidential candidates in the first post New Order presidential election even though shortly before the election was conducted (by the people’s consultative assembly) he withdrew from the race. He also had served as a minister under President Wahid, President Megawati, and President Yudhoyono.
South was made. A power struggle between Emperor Zhu Yunwen and Prince Yong Le ended up in the victory of the latter, who gained support from Ma He. After becoming the next emperor, Yong Le showed his gratitude to Ma He, by bestowing him the surname Zheng (which apparently was used by the Ming dynasty’s emperor). Thus since then Ma He became known as Zheng He. The emperor also appointed him as the guard of the ‘taikam’ (eunuchs) and therefore he was named the ‘sanbao taikam’ (also popular as the ‘Sampo Taijin’).

The subsequent scenes present a discussion in the palace’s meeting room. The Emperor Yong Le declared that he wants to lead and unite the countries in the Nan Yang regions beyond the southern border of China to let the world know that the Ming was stronger than the Yuan Dynasty. In response to this ambition, Zheng He expressed his opinion to the emperor, saying that “it is more important to be admired than to be feared.” In order to be admired, it was suggested to the emperor that he “strengthen the navy fleet, and develop a friendly relationship with the neighbouring countries.” Zheng He explained that by saying that, “we can help them to go forward” (‘membantu mereka agar menjadi maju’). He explained that “if they have been going forward, they can buy our goods; if they can buy our goods, the trade between us and them will be more developed; and there will be peace among us; as a result, we can
use the money for the welfare of our people, not to finance a war.”

The emperor thought that Zheng He’s argument was plausible. Thus he prepared several expeditions and appointed Zheng He as the admiral. In the next scene, the emperor once again asked Zheng He whether or not he understood the mission he should accomplish. Zheng He assured the emperor that he understood it, and mentioned that the three important missions he should carry out were: (1) to try to establish peace (*mengusahakan perdamaian*); (2) to try to develop friendship (*mengusahakan persahabatan*); and (3) to help to solve the conflict.

We see a narrative that describes China as a friendly great power willing to help its neighbours. The narrative describes imperial China as an agent of development and civilization. When Zheng He suggested to Emperor Yong Le that he help their neighbours to ‘go forward’, the words that he used were ‘*menjadi maju*’. The meaning of the word ‘*maju*’ is not just to progress, but also to develop. The *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian Language Dictionary) that was published in 2008 also defines the word *maju* as ‘having achieved a high level of civilization’. The dictionary uses the words ‘*bangsa yang telah maju*’ (nation that has achieved a high level of civilization) as an example of the usage of this word. Hence, helping neighbouring countries to go
forward has a similar meaning as helping them to develop or to achieve a higher level of civilization

The Discourse on Learning from China

As well as the narratives on imperial China, narratives that represent contemporary China as a benign power from which ‘resources’ for the development projects of poorer countries (including Indonesia) might come have also emerged. These narratives do not necessarily portray China as a source of funding despite the fact that quite recently this country has agreed to provide Indonesia with significant financial assistance for development. Some of this money has been used to finance infrastructure projects such as the Suramadu Bridge, which became the first project in which China has been financially (and technically) involved. However, the narratives put more emphasis on non-material aid. They represent China as the source of model, spirit, and inspiration for development.

This narrative usually appears with the following logic. At first, a description regarding the present condition of China is narrated. It suggests that China is no longer a political and security threat for Indonesia. To illustrate this, people describe how China has now changed from a less developed communist country into a developing economic giant ready to embrace
globalization. The narrative also indicates that while technically not anti–neoliberal the Chinese state is able to play a certain role to ensure that China and the Chinese people receive the benefits of an principally wrong neoliberal system. It also mentions the Chinese state’s strategy of maintaining the internal social order as well as its ability to achieve a higher position in the international stage, especially in its relation to more powerful countries, such as the United States of America. The narrative explains that China is capable of achieving this because the country is endowed with good leaders and hardworking people, and both are imbued with a spirit of progress. Finally, after one or more components of the above narrative have been recounted, the argument that China’s efforts to achieve its present condition are worth emulating. Indonesia has to emulate China’s development model. This argument is presented plainly: ‘learn from China’. This phrase has been used widely in recent years and has become a code word in public discourse.

The protocol that suggests that Indonesia and Indonesians ought to learn from China is circulated in Indonesian society in a variety of forms. In the course of the last decade, many books that discuss China’s recent condition or China-Indonesia relations have been published (Wibowo 2004, Dharmawan 2006, Iskan 2008, Tanggok et. al 2010, Mursitama and Yudono 2010, Wibowo and Syamsul Hadi 2009, Widyahartono 2004, and Zaenurrofik 2008). This list does not include
translations into Indonesia of books written by foreign authors (for example Brahm 2002 and Shenkar 2007). Below I will discuss some of the books authored by Indonesians to show how they convey the above ‘learning from China’ narratives.

In 2004, a book entitled Belajar Dari Cina: Bagaimana Cina Merebut Peluang Dalam Era Globalisasi (‘Learning from China: How China Seizes Opportunities in the Globalization Era’) was launched. The author of the book is Ignatius Wibowo, an Indonesian political scientist with a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. All the chapters were previously published as separate articles in various newspapers and magazines between 2002 and 2003. This did not appear to reduce its marketability though. On the contrary, it was so widely sold that it appeared in reprint four times within three years. On top of that, the book became the first to promote the popularity of the phrase, ‘learning from China’. Indeed, it was only after the publication of this book that the phrase ‘learning from China’ became widely used by journalists, in their reports on activities related to the cooperation between Indonesian institutions and their Chinese counterparts, as well as by individuals writing blogs that discuss the need for Indonesia and Indonesians to emulate China.

Wibowo discusses the process of transformation in China since the 1990s. He begins the introduction of
his book by questioning whether it would make sense to learn from China.

For many years, even decades, or even for a hundred years, we never heard China has become a model for anything. How come [now] should people have to learn from China? Isn’t this country of one billion citizens more widely known as a poor country whose people have been stranded [terkatung-katung] as migrants in foreign countries? As a communist country, isn’t China notorious as a country that poses a security threat?’ (Wibowo 2004: 1, my translation)

Next Wibowo explains how China, which in the past was called the ‘bamboo curtain’, has changed radically. He introduces the social and political changes happening in China recently. The detailed discussion touches upon the way in which a process of globalization has occurred. It also mentions that the ideology applied in that country today is no longer communism, but ‘the ideology that rules in Great Britain, the United States, and in any part of the world at this moment, that is, neoliberalism’ (Wibowo 2004: 23). The economic liberalization taking place in China as well as this country’s decision to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2002 is also discussed. Wibowo emphasizes that the process of this economic liberalization has taken place in a gradual
manner. Even after joining the WTO, China was still reluctant to comply with this international organization’s requirements that demanded the acceleration of the process of economic liberalization.

In Wibowo’s view, by joining the WTO, China intends to change some of the rules of this organization from within (Wibowo 2004: 75-76). In describing how China has departed from its communist ideology, but at the same time is still reluctant to fully liberalize its economy Wibowo introduces to Indonesian readers an economic model based on what Deng Xiao Ping called ‘Socialism with Chinese characteristics’ (you zhongguo tese de shihuizhuyi). In his view, this is a ‘new and unique economic model which suits China’ (Wibowo 2004: 60).

While Wibowo does not deny the existence of many problems currently faced by China which might potentially derail its development project, he considers the model developed by China a good source of learning for Indonesia. He suggests that Indonesia ‘has tried to apply various models of development but has not found a suitable one’ (Wibowo 2004: 5). In the Preface the publisher states that ‘there is nothing wrong for us (Indonesians) to learn from China’s success...’ The publisher suggests that also the stories regarding the failures of China were worth learning from (Wibowo 2004: x).
Two years after the first edition of Wibowo’s book, another book, edited by Bagus Dharmawan appeared with the title Cermin Dari China: Geliat Sang Naga di Era Globalisasi (‘Mirror from China: the Dragon’s Stretch in the Era of Globalization’). This book compiles more than forty journalistic articles written by several different journalists attached to Kompas, one of the largest daily in Indonesia. All of the articles, except the preface written by the publisher were published earlier as ‘special reports’ in Kompas.

While the book attempts to provide a critical report of recent developments in China by providing a space for the discussion of its negative aspects, it does not disguise its preference to emphasize the positive aspects of China’s development. Indeed such a tendency is apparent from the titles of some of the chapters. Examples include China, Dari Paria Menjadi Magnet Investasi (‘China, from Pariah State to an Investment Magnet’); ‘Sistem Kendali Terpusat, Dasar Kemajuan China (‘The Centralized System, the Basis of China’s Progress’), and Tak Ada Ampun Buat Koruptor (‘No Mercy for the Corrupt’). These articles deliver the message that China is an economically developed country, that the strategy applied by China has enabled this county to make significant achievement in improving its economic performance, and that the Chinese state is also committed to solving the issue of corruption.
The emphasis on the positive side of China’s development may be more clearly seen in the content of the chapters. In the prologue, for example, a quote from an Indonesian businessman who visited Guangzhou is presented. The businessman reportedly said, “‘Wow, we (Indonesia) lag behind; we are nothing (kita nggak ada apa-apa nya)’” (Saragih 2006: xiii). In another chapter, China is dubbed as a once sleeping giant who now is running fast (Luhulima 2006: 43) and in yet another chapter, China is described as patient and careful in making its moves (Luhulima 2006:5). This once again shows how China’s rapid development and the careful strategy it has applied to achieve it is presented simultaneously.

In addition to the discussion on China’s economic development, the book also provides a discussion on its military condition. The author of this chapter, James Luhulima, argues that China’s military development should not be seen as a threat.

China’s military development is a positive thing because with this military development, China has appeared as a counterweight to the power of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus here the United States cannot act arbitrarily, as it has done in Iraq. (Luhulima 2006: 210, my translation)
This argument provides an example of the popularity of the discourse regarding China as a potential counterweight to the United States which many in Indonesia see as the source of injustices that come with capitalism and limited respect for Islam.

The reader is continuously reminded not to be afraid of China, even though the developments taking place there are fast and overwhelming. Instead of being afraid, those impressive developments should “open the eyes (of Indonesians) so that (they) may know what have been achieved by a nation which in the past was once slumped in a condition worse than that of Indonesia” (Dharmawan 2006: xi, my translation). In other words, the publisher wants the stories told in this book to become a source of inspiration. Nevertheless, the publisher also hopes that Indonesia, seen as a railroad car, might make use of China as a locomotive to pull its own economic development. The symbolization of Indonesia as the railroad car in this analogy is interesting as it shows how Indonesians have positioned their country not only behind China, but also in a static condition, needing a foreign locomotive to make it move.

A third book through which we may understand the discourse on learning from China is entitled Pelajaran dari Tiongkok: Catatan Dahlan Iskan (‘Lessons from China: Notes of Dahlan Iskan’) published in 2008. This publication is also a compilation of journalistic
articles in which Iskan shares with the readers his experiences of his frequent visits to China. Iskan is a well-known figure in Surabaya, especially amid the middle class and the elites. He is the CEO of the *Jawa Pos* Group, the largest media group in East Java. In 2009 Iskan became the director of the Indonesian National Power Company (PLN) and in 2011 he was appointed by President Yudhoyono to become the minister of state-owned enterprises. The articles by Iskan appeared earlier in the *Jawa Pos*.

In the Preface, Iskan declares that the most important reason of his frequent visits to China is ‘to learn the spirit of China’. He further argues that “no one has the spirit to progress and to develop as much as is happening in China” (Iskan 2008: ix, my translation). It is this ‘spirit to progress’ that he wants to possess and use in order to further develop the *Jawa Pos* group together with his colleagues. Next, he equates China today with the United States in the past, which he dubs as a place to ‘shop for the idea’. He even regards contemporary China as ‘a closer and cheaper America’ (Iskan 2008: ix).

The idea of China as a source for spirit to develop reappears in many parts of his book. Thus the book is fraught with appreciation of China, even though some of its pages are left for criticism as well. Many of articles included in this book have bombastic titles. An example of these is *2020, Tiongkok Nomor Satu* (‘2020, China [become] Number One’). The article under this
title discusses various arguments contending that China will overtake the United States in the near future. Another example is a chapter entitled *Jalan Tol Menjulur dari Ujung ke Ujung Negara* (‘Toll Way Protrude from One to Another End of the Country’). It describes how fast the infrastructure development in China is, especially if compared to similar development in Indonesia.

In 1987, when Surabaya already had the 43 km long Perak Gempol Toll Way, China did not have any toll way at all (still 0 km). But in the end of 2003, toll ways in China have reached 30,000 km long. Meanwhile, the length of Perak Gempol Toll Way has not increased even by 1 km. (Iskan 2008:84, my translation)

But alongside the narrative on China’s rapid development, Iskan’s book also contains the discourse concerning Chinese working ethics that may become a source of inspiration. In one of the articles, Iskan recounts the story about a female doctor working in the hospital where he was once admitted. One day Iskan found the doctor loitering in the patient ward to ask if any of the patients put some money in her pocket. The reason for her to do so was because she found some money in her pocket even though she was sure that she had not put any in there. According to Iskan, a patient who wanted to show her gratitude did it without the
doctor’s consent. The pocket – where she usually put her stethoscope – was so big that one could insert money without being noticed. The doctor however refused to keep the money because she felt that it was her duty to take care of patients (Iskan 2008:162). Iskan shows his appreciation of this kind of work ethics. He gives an impression to his readers that such attitude is widespread in China by recounting a similar story; this time is about a janitor who refused to receive his tip even though Iskan was giving it when nobody else was around.

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Besides appearing in written material, the narratives that view China as a source of learning and inspiration also circulate through certain statements and actions made by elite Indonesians. Examples of these are abundant, but perhaps Prabowo Subianto made the most impressive claim that I came across during my field research. Prabowo is a retired three star-general of the Indonesian army the son-in-law of late President Suharto. In the last period of Suharto’s presidency, Prabowo commanded the Army Strategic Reserve Corps (Kostrad), a highly prestigious corps which in the 1960s was commanded by Suharto himself. Furthermore, he was allegedly instrumental in instigating and protracting the May 1998 pogroms that victimized many Chinese Indonesians, despite his consistent denial of any involvement. Later in 2008 he joined a newly founded
party named as the *Gerakan Indonesia Raya* (Gerindra, ‘Movement for a Greater Indonesia’) and was appointed as its chair. In 2009, the Partai Gerindra and the *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDIP, Indonesian Democratic Party in Struggle) built an alliance for the 2009 the presidential election. The alliance supported former President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Prabowo for president and vice president respectively.

It was as part of his campaign for vice president that Prabowo visited Surabaya and gave a speech. In this speech he expressed his view that China should be regarded as a good example for Indonesians in their struggle to develop the country.

An example from which I have learned is the example of China. When Mao Zedong led China and when it was led by Deng Xiaoping, China did not change. Beijing is still Beijing. Yangzi River is still Yangzi River. China is still China. But in Mao Zedong’s time, China was fraught with problems, famine, and Cultural Revolution. Once Deng Xiaoping led China, China woke up. For more than 20 years, it has maintained its two-digit development. And it is expected that China will overtake the US three decades from now. What can we learn from it? We should learn that if a nation has
leaders with a long-term vision, with a glorious dream for their people, with a strong determination to learn from any source, it can achieve great development and progress. (Surabaya, 24 June 2009, my translation)

This statement clearly presents a portrayal of China as a country that has proven itself to be able to change its condition from a nation ‘full of problems’ into an economically developed state with the potential to overtake the United States. But the statement also touches an issue other than economic, namely Chinese leadership. It considers the quality of the Chinese leaders to be inspiring and important for Indonesia. Thus, in the view expressed above, Prabowo reminds his audience that Indonesia should have leaders as good as those of China – like himself – in order to achieve a similar development progress.

Another example is the work conducted by the National Economic Commission (KEN), a team consisting of Indonesian businessmen, academics, and public intellectuals assigned by President Yudhoyono to advise his government on economics. In December 2010, the team paid a visit to China. As explained by Chairul Tanjung, the chairperson of the team, the goal of the visit was ‘to understand the economic transformation taking place in China’ (Kompas, 14 December 2010). Tanjung also maintained that the visit was conducted
because the ‘Indonesian President was impressed with China’s economic progress’ and instructed the team to prepare a master plan to accelerate Indonesia’s economic development (Kompas, 14 December 2010).

Other politicians have also organized this kind of exposure tours. Quite recently, Aburizal Bakrie, the chairperson of the Partai Golongan Karya (Golkar), the political party that was the backbone of the New Order regime, visited China. During this visit, Bakrie declared the party’s plan to send its cadres to China to learn from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Detiknews, 19 April 2011). It wanted to emulate the CCP’s morality, work ethic, organizational system, and the way in which it instructs its cadres with the party’s ideology. This aim is striking - the idea of learning from a communist party would be worse than blasphemy just a decade ago. In contrast, today the elite of several political parties are inspired to do the same. As well as the Partai Golkar, the Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, ‘Prosperous Justice Party’), one of the biggest Islamic parties founded just after the fall of Suharto, announced that they too planned to initiate cooperation with the CCP (Interview with Aminudin, Inilah.com 20 June 2010).

Besides politicians, state institutions also often express the idea that Indonesia ought to learn from China. An example of this is the trip to China made by the former chairperson of the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), Taufiequrrahman Ruki, in
During this trip, Ruki maintained that his goal of visiting China was ‘to learn the method to eradicate and prevent corruption in order to significantly improve people’s welfare.’ This statement was reported in the Indonesian media with the headline ‘Ketua KPK Belajar Berantas Korupsi ke Cina’ (KPK Chairperson Learns to Eradicate Corruption in China) (Tempo Interaktif, 28 July 2005). Six years afterwards, that is, in March 2011, the leaders of a similar institution in China visited Busyro Muqoddas, the current KPK chairperson. After the visit, Muqoddas explained to the media that the KPK commissioners and their Chinese counterparts shared their experiences in dealing with corruption. He also declared that if needed, the KPK would again learn from China. This assertion soon appeared in the online media with the headline KPK Siap Belajar dari Cina (‘The KPK is ready to learn from China’) (Hukum Online, 14 March 2011).

Indonesian elites share the idea of learning from China. Mere pragmatism may account for this. But the fact that politicians and other elite Indonesians feel able or well advised to make use of these narratives indicates how powerful the discourse of learning from China is. On top of that, these activities and statement also stimulate further spread of the changing image of China. This happens especially through the media coverage of these activities and statements. For example, the article in Kompas on the KEN’s visit to China was titled
Indonesia Akan Tiru Ekonomi China (‘Indonesia Will Copy China’s Economy’) (Kompas 14 December 2010).

It is also worth noting that in the Indonesian media the words ‘learning from China’, which only began to be popular after the publication of Wibowo’s book, is used interchangeably with *tuntutlah ilmu sampai ke negeri Cina* (‘seek knowledge as far as China’). During the New Order period, Indonesians were familiar with this saying, which derives from the *hadith* (oral teachings) of the Prophet Muhammad. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, the more literal association between learning from China and this *hadith* is recent. The saying often appears in articles advocating ‘learning from China’. For instance, the media report on the KPK chairperson’s visit to China in 2005 began by quoting the *hadith*, before commenting that this ‘*hadith* of the prophet has been observed in reality by the chairperson of the KPK’ (*Tempo Interaktif* 28 July 2005). Thus the *hadith* is often cited or uttered in non-religious contexts. Further departure from its religious origin, the saying is often also thought to be an Indonesian proverb (*pepatah*). Thus when the Indonesian current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, delivered a speech in Beijing, in 2005, he began his speech with the following statement: “there is a proverb that says, ‘seek knowledge as far as China!’ I visit this place to accomplish this advice, (to) learn as far as China…” Indeed, this proverb has recently been so widely used that even a journalistic article about food and taste is
able to use a modified version of it in its title. This article, under the title of berpetualang rasa sampai ke negeri Cina (‘taste adventure as far as China’) appeared in an Indonesian magazine in the beginning of 2010 (Femina 13-19 February 2010).

The ubiquity of the proverb ‘seek knowledge as far as China’ and its association with the discourse of learning from China has obviously had an effect on wider Indonesian society. Commencing with the newspaper articles and books it has now become part of popular discourse. My conversation with a Jakarta taxi driver in May 2011 provides an example of this. In the last night before departing for Sydney, I left my parent’s house to stay with my mother in law, who planned to drive me to the airport on the next day. The taxi picked me up at my parent’s house, and as we left the house, I had the following conversation with the driver:

Taxi Driver: You have a travel bag. I thought you would go to the airport.

Me: I do plan to go to the airport, but tomorrow.

Taxi Driver: Where are you flying to?

Me: Sydney

Taxi Driver: O, are you working there?
Me: No ... I am studying

(silence for several seconds). It’s a shame isn’t it, someone as old as me still studying

Taxi Driver: Not at all. That’s all right.

Isn’t there a proverb saying ‘seek knowledge as far as China?’

What makes this conversation interesting is the fact that the taxi driver responded to my joke about studying in my late 30s with a comment related to distant country. It would have been more suitable to say, for example, that there is no age limit for learning. But the driver’s reference to the hadith illustrates the popularity of the proverb. It illustrates that this part of the hadith often comes to mind when people are reminded about studying or learning. In the same way it is currently seemingly natural for people to make an association between the words ‘study’ or ‘learning’ and China.
In the preceding chapter, I have discussed the way in which China is represented in the media and in academic and politicians’ discourses in contemporary Indonesian society. In these public narratives, China is depicted as the locomotive for pulling development in Indonesia, both in the past, when the political entity called ‘Indonesia’ did not exist, as well as in the present. An important question arises about both the dissemination and reception of such images in broader society. Do these representations resonate at a micro level or in the interaction between individuals in small groups? To investigate this, we first need to ascertain the images of China that exist at this level. After I have done that I will go on to analyse whether there are similarities between these images and the representations of China circulated by opinion makers identified in the previous chapter.

First of all let me report on some of my conversations with individuals with higher educational backgrounds, many of whom themselves have worked
or were working in the fields of education and research, journalism, and the arts. They are opinion leaders. Most of them live either in Surabaya or Jakarta. Some others live in smaller cities connected to these two capitals, such as Sidoarjo close to Surabaya, or Depok, located just south of Jakarta. One important difference between the public discourse sketched in the foregoing chapter and the representations below is that I was able to engage in informants’ opinions and arguments in a more intimate and interactive way.

**Inspiration Despite Anxiety**

A conversation between Donny, Erwin, and myself illustrates the way in which talk about China may proceed in a small group interaction (sometimes but not always prompted by myself). Donny is a Jakartan who was living in Surabaya between 2008 and 2009 to help his cousin run a small café in the Ngagel district. Erwin and I (my Chinese Indonesian housemate) often visited their café at night for a coffee, and during those occasions we always had a chat with both Donny and his cousin. In February 2009, when Erwin and I accidentally met Donny in a shop close to his cafe, he told us that he was moving to Bali, to help his cousin open a new café. He invited Erwin and me to his place to have one last chat before leaving. During this conversation, Donny asked Erwin, who was still an undergraduate student,
what he planned to do after completing his study. After listening to Erwin’s comment that he was keen to find a job in Surabaya rather than going back to his hometown (a small town in Flores Island), Donny probed further: ‘Why don’t you go to China? China is developing so fast now, isn’t it?’

I found Donny’s question interesting, especially the implication that someone of Chinese descent (who had never been to China) would feel ‘naturally’ interested or able to move to China. I asked him how he got information regarding China’s development. Donny told us that this issue was now widely discussed. He noted a talk show on a TV channel aired at the time President Obama was inaugurated as the President of the United States.

In that talk show, one of the guest speakers argued that it was not impossible for China, together with India, to become superpower states soon. And according to them, it could happen as early as 2012. (Interview with Donny, 19 February 2009)

This anecdote constitutes an example of how an appreciation of China’s development may be expressed in a conversation about someone’s career opportunities. But it ended up with a discussion of the development taking place in China. This discussion happened even
though I had not informed Donny that I was conducting field research focusing on the Indonesian perception of China today.

While this conversation gives some indication of the dynamics in a micro situation in which China’s development is raised, it may tell us more about the reception of the discourse itself. As Donny narrated his own life story he provided us with information that was useful in understanding his background. Compared to the majority of Indonesians of his generation, Donny (who was born in 1976) was lucky to be given a chance to continue his study after finishing his high school. He went to Jakarta Institute of Art (IKJ), a good higher education institute. In the later stage of his undergraduate degree, he was busy producing scripts for Indonesian soap operas. He was proud of the fact that several TV channels had screened some of his soap operas. Even though by the time I met him he was busy with activities unrelated to television he retained his passion about the TV and movie world. The last time I contacted him, just before I left Surabaya, he was assisting a friend in producing an independent movie.

During our conversation it became apparent that Donny’s image of China was at least partially constructed on his observation of what may be called ‘the Chinese goods phenomenon’. This refers to the arrival of cheap products from China, starting with Chinese motorcycles in the late 1990s to electronic and
garment products later on. Donny worried that these goods would have a negative impact on Indonesian society. For instance, he said that the ‘triumph’ of those cheaper products from China in Indonesian market threatens Indonesian industries and therefore threatens Indonesian workers as well. It does not mean that Donny regards all aspects of this phenomenon as bad. He acknowledges that in certain cases the phenomenon might help Indonesian industries reduce the cost of commodity production due to the new availability of machines with a low price from China.

But even in that case, the interest of the Indonesian workers would be sacrificed. He gave as an example the screen printing companies that in the past had employed people with art skills to do the printing manually, due to the high price of machines. “But now, with the coming of cheap machines from China, owners of the printing companies prefer to use machines, because it may reduce the time and cost needed to produce a screen printing,” he said regretfully. For Donny, the existence of these cheaper products in Indonesia is harmful in other ways too. For instance he complained how Indonesian merchants who sold garments and clothes at Pasar Tanah Abang (a wholesale market located in Central Jakarta) now lost many of their Nigerian buyers who in the past would buy Indonesian products for sale back home. “Today, you will hardly find those Nigerians in Tanah Abang. Do you know why?
Because they all have gone to China, to find cheaper stuff,” Donny asserted.

On the other hand, despite considering many aspects of Chinese development as a threat, Donny did not escape the influence of the positive discourse on the rise of China widely circulated in Indonesia in recent years. This is apparent in the way in which he appreciates China’s success in development projects. While being concerned about the negative impacts it may have had on Indonesian economy, Donny regards the recent economic growth and development of China as a good learning source for Indonesia. This view can be seen in the explanation below, which he gave after expressing his dislike of Chinese products causing Indonesian unemployment, and so on.

Indonesians may have both negative and positive perceptions of present day China. The source of the negative perception, as I explained just now, is fear of the threatening effect of China’s low price products on the Indonesian economy. But as we often see, a positive perception of China does exist. Today, many more Indonesians admire China. I think, we should ask a question, ‘why do they admire China?’ For me, the answer is because they (the Chinese) are excellent. They have progressed very quickly. Today,
they can even be categorized as a developed country. And it only took a short period for them to become a developed country. Why can’t we learn from their progress? So don’t be afraid, but learn from them. (Interview with Donny, Surabaya, 19 February 2009)

Perception that China’s economic development may be threatening to Indonesian economy, but at the same time may also be seen as a good learning source for Indonesia is commonly apparent during my interviews with Indonesian academics and intellectuals. Professor Kacung Marijan, an Australian graduate academic affiliated with Airlangga University, is among those who have such perception. During a discussion with me at his office, Pak Kacung expressed his fear of the impact that the arrival of products from China may have on local industries. In his view,

China is a formidable competitor, not only for the Indigenous, but also for Chinese Indonesian businessmen. Their commodities, especially textile, footwear, and electronic products, are incredibly cheap. It is hard to know whether this is a result of a highly efficient process of production or of a dumping policy. Today, such products have even penetrated local industry centres. Tanggulangin, an
industry centre where shoes, bags, and other products made of leather are produced and sold at a competitive price, is one of the locations where we can find cheap goods from China marketed together with local products. And their prices are cheaper than our products. I think this can kill our industries. This is why even Chinese Indonesian entrepreneurs see China as a competitor. (Interview with Prof. Kacung Marijan, Surabaya 27 July 2009)

Nevertheless, Pak Kacung also thinks that the development that takes place in China today may become an inspiration for Indonesia as well. Such a thought is observable in the following statement:

We especially can learn from China’s fast economic development. How has its government, which in the past was so centralized, been able to play an important role in inciting economic growth? What kind of role has the Chinese state played? Indonesia also had a centralized government in the past, even though there was a slight difference between Indonesia and China. Indonesian government was authoritarian, while Chinese government was totalitarian. But
both were centralized. However, despite the fact that China has never experienced a strong political democratization, it is able to undergo a de-bureaucratization and facilitate economic development. What kind of facility has the Chinese state provided? What kind of model of governance has China developed? I think this may become a valuable lesson for Indonesia. (Interview with Prof Kacung Marijan, Surabaya 27 July 2009)

Thus as Pak Kacung’s statements above have suggested, Indonesians may respond to the phenomenon of the rise of China in a complex way. Anxiety about the negative impact of the phenomenon does exist, but it is combined with a perplexity about the ability of China, a country which in the past was considered to be lagging behind Indonesia, in making a significant progress in about two decades. As a result of this perplexity, they begin to be curious about the strategy that the Chinese state has employed to achieve such a progress, and pose a question whether or not some aspects of that strategy may be applicable in Indonesia.
Learning from the ‘Chinese Model’?

Donny’s and Pak Kacung’s ideas about China can be seen as an example of how despite the presence of the fear of the negative effect of the arrival of the cheap products from China, the traces of the discourse on ‘learning from China’ are reproduced among the wider public. These traces can be found most commonly among educated Indonesians today. In discussing the meaning of China with educated Indonesians, nearly all agreed that Indonesia should emulate China and make China’s experience a lesson for their nation. Which aspects of China do they think Indonesia should learn from? And why do they think that the developments taking place in China should be replicated?

One of the themes that frequently come to the fore in public discourse is the strategic role played by the Chinese state. It seems that many educated Indonesians now believe that the economic developments taking place in China today are the result of the state’s determination and its capacity to play a leading developmental role. Airlangga Pribadi’s (Angga) views on China illustrate this. I spoke with Angga in 2009.

Angga is a political scientist currently teaching at Airlangga University in Surabaya. He was born in Jakarta in 1976 to a Javanese family. His father is a retired Indonesian Air Force officer who likes the nation-
building programme pursued by President Sukarno. Despite this fact, when a student Angga was drawn to what is known as the *Jemaah Tarbiyah*, an Islamic movement that has developed in Indonesia since the mid-1980s, and became popular among the university students in the 1990s (see Machmudi 2008: 2). However, while still a student he left the movement and joined the Islamic Student Association (HMI) that was established much earlier. Angga was involved in the 1998 *reformasi* movements which brought the New Order government to an end. By then he was still an undergraduate student of the Airlangga University. After completing his undergraduate degree, he began his career as an academic. A couple of years later, he went to Jakarta to enrol in a postgraduate program at the University of Indonesia. Angga’s often expresses his ideas in articles which he publishes in leading newspapers.

I met Angga in March 2009. I was introduced to him by Joko Susanto, another Airlangga University’s academic with whom I was having a conversation in March 2009. *Mas* Joko thought that it would be good for my research if I spoke with him. After asking for my approval, Joko called Angga and asked him if he had time to join us in a coffee shop located only several hundred meters from the university campus. Angga turned up about a quarter hour later and the three of us had a discussion on various topics related to current political conditions in Indonesia, especially about the
way in which economic policy was driven by the tenets of neoliberalism. For both Angga and Joko, this phenomenon had brought (and would continue to bring) immense problems for Indonesia. Indeed the issue has seized Angga’s attention. When he brought me to his office later on that day, I saw several books discussing neoliberalism scattered on his desk – among them a book written Rizky and Majidi entitled *Neoliberalisme Mencengkeram Indonesia* (‘Neoliberalism Grips Indonesia’) published in 2008.

It is this topic that became our initial topic of discussion when a couple of weeks afterwards we met again at the university campus. Angga explained how the application of neoliberalism was causing serious social problems. “That system puts the authority of the market over all other realms of life, looking at them in the context of transactions based on supply and demands,” he said. “As a result, the main needs of the public, such as education and health come to be seen as commodities.” Soon the theme of the Chinese state’s strategic role was mentioned and further discussed. Anga stressed the need to raise alternative economic ideas. He discussed several developmental models that may be considered, one that he referred to as the model Cina’ (Chinese model), a term used earlier by Wibowo (see Chapter 3).

Regarding the Chinese model, the state plays a significant role in the economy.
The basic foundations of China’s economy are the private sector, state-owned enterprises, and cooperatives. They function in synergy and hence are able to play strategic roles in the country’s economy that is based on the free market. So even though economic globalization is not rejected, and even though the neo-liberal free market is allowed to exist, the state still plays a role, even a decisive role, in the global economic system based on free competition. (Interview with Airlangga Pribadi, Surabaya, 22 July 2009)

Angga called the strategies used by the Chinese state a ‘flexible engagement strategy’. In his view, this is a smart strategy that is characterized by its gradualism and industrialization. Angga used the following examples to further explain this strategy:

The change from the era of Cultural Revolution, for example, the change from the system of collective rights over land into a system of private rights has been implemented gradually. Firstly, by introducing an incentive system for farmers, and then by introducing a leasehold system, and so on. They did not privatize the system all at once. In
addition, China also emphasizes the political economy of industrialization. She does not just rely on the breadth of the country as a market for foreign goods, but also builds large-scale industries based on the productivity of its people and the availability of cheap labour. These industries are able to produce goods at low prices, which in turn are distributed to many other countries. (Interview with Airlangga Pribadi, Surabaya, 22 July 2009)

From these snippets of conversation, we can begin to understand what Angga meant by the ‘Chinese model’. In his view, the Chinese model is a model where the state plays a more strategic role, especially when the country is embracing the globalizing free market. By playing this kind of role, the Chinese state has been able to get a benefit from the application of the free market system. “This kind of model”, said Angga, “should become a reference for us, and should become one of the models that we can learn from.”

According to Angga, the Chinese model is worth emulating. In his understanding, the Indonesian government, instead of applying a smart strategy, has been overly submissive to the free market.  

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20 The view that Indonesia has been submissive to the free market system and foreign powers is apparent in much
We don’t apply the flexible engagement strategy. There is no negotiation with the free market. We accept the coming of the free market system without reservations. Based on a journal that I read, ever since the *reformasi* movement was launched, a process of deindustrialization has taken place in Indonesia. There is no support for our domestic economy and industries so that they are able to compete in the free market era. So we let our country become a market for foreign goods. We invite foreign investors to invest here, arguing that it will trigger our economic productivity. But we do not strengthen our industries so that they can compete with foreign products. We welcome the arrival of the free market system, without having any ability to adapt and innovate. At the end of the day, the free market Indonesian public nowadays. For example, a senior journalist reminded in his book that Indonesians were controlled by foreign corporations and that through these corporations a ‘new style of colonization’ process was ongoing (Alam 2009: 13, 63). And a former Islamic student activist wrote that ‘the grip of foreign powers that have put their legs firmly in our motherland through financial organizations, the position and fate of Indonesia seem to be pressured to be ‘submissive and obedient’ to the neoliberal authority’ (Nafis 2009: 138).
system provides no advantages to our economy. (Interview with Airlangga Pribadi, Surabaya, 22 July 2009)

The appreciation of the Chinese state for playing a strategic or mediating role is common among Indonesian academics. It appeared also in the interview I did with Ronny Agustino, a social scientist who teaches at a private university in Jakarta. Ronny’s background is rather different to Angga’s. He was born in the early 1970s, and is a couple of years older than Angga. Ronny is an ethnic Batak and adheres to Christianity. He holds both a bachelor and a master in communication studies from the University of Indonesia, but he did not become an academic after completing his study. He likes media, and worked full time in the media business for many years. He became a university lecturer later on while still working as a communications consultant. Ronny was not actively involved in the student movements of 1998, although he admitted that he was in touch with them. He feels more comfortable as an observer. However, he likes politics, and he told me that he would like to become a politician in that position he could inspire people to develop a vision for the nation.

I have known Ronny since early 1990s. But after a few years not seeing each other we met again in 2009 when I was conducting my fieldwork for this thesis. A mutual friend of ours, a journalist who works as a program director in a private TV station, invited both of
us to meet and have a chat in a shopping centre in Jakarta. During this meeting, I told them about my research. The journalist began to inform me of both his own views and of the views expressed by his colleagues at his work place. Most of these views assessed negatively recent developments in China (I will discuss this in detail in the end of this section). But Ronny immediately disagreed with our journalist friend. He told us how he had come to a different kind of understanding of China based on many different sources of information, including discussions with his friends, many of whom were journalists, NGO activists, and academics.

The image of China that I have is totally different. I think development in China is positive. From the information that I receive on this issue, China is much more advanced than Indonesia. Her industries work well, the economy is growing fast, and she can even compete with the America the superpower. Her products enter Indonesia, and they even dominate our market. Doesn’t it show how great China is? As the most densely populated country with massive industries – although I do not like their products because they are not of good quality – but how come these products can enter and dominate the markets, especially Asian markets? I think that shows how
advanced China is. China needs to continue producing in order to support the country. As a result, she has to penetrate the markets of other countries, and she succeeds in doing it. Once again, that's the greatness of her. (Interview with Ronny Agustino, Jakarta, 29 August 2009)

In Ronny’s view, the fact that China has successfully ‘invaded’ other countries with her products shows how effective the strategy that the Chinese state has employed is. For him, the implementation of such a strategy is a sign of the power of a more centralized system. “China is successful, (because) everything is carefully planned, measured, and has direction,” he opined. Thus, like Angga, Ronny also appreciates the role played by the Chinese state.

Ronny also compared the performance of the Chinese state with the Indonesian state. He too thinks that Indonesian state does not have a good strategy, not only in securing the economic interest of its people, but also in defending its culture. Thus, besides facing economic impoverishment due to the arrival of the Chinese goods, Indonesians feel psychologically disappointed by the manipulation of Indonesian cultural symbols (such the Balinese *pendet* dance and the song titled ‘*rasa sayange*’) by Malaysia in its ‘Malaysia Truly Asia’ campaign. The latter has triggered massive protests
in Indonesia against Malaysia. But for Ronny, both the attack of Chinese goods as well as the act of Malaysia (which is often considered to be stealing by the Indonesian public) should be understood as a result of the absence of a smart strategy on the side of Indonesia.

This means that China has a good strategy. Indonesia does not have one. So it is understandable. I am not among those who condemn Malaysia in the case of the *pendet* dance. This happened because Indonesia does not have a strategy. Why can Chinese products arrive in Indonesia? It is because we don’t have a strategy ... a thief will only break into a house that is not guarded, a burglar will only ransack weak people. We should acknowledge that this is our condition. We don’t have any cultural strategy. (Interview with Ronny Agustino, Jakarta, 29 August 2009)

Ronny sees the way in which the Chinese state has acted to secure the interest of the nation worth emulating. He wishes that the Indonesian government would act in a similar way. In his view, the Chinese state made the benefit of the country its ultimate priority. For him this is a selfish but necessary attitude. He wishes that the Indonesian state would develop a similar attitude.
Indonesia should find whichever way to ensure that the county will always get maximum benefit from any trade relation or cooperation with foreign countries or bodies. We should keep this in mind during any negotiations. Don’t sign any contract that does not bring any benefit to us. Everything should be brought back to Indonesia. All the money should be brought back to this country. (Interview with Ronny Agustino, Jakarta, 29 August 2009)

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We have seen how perceptions of China as decisive evoke admiration and come from critique on Indonesia. Indonesians in general think that powerful political capacity is important and that only with strong leadership the nation can secure its independence. This awareness has led Indonesians to evaluate the political capacity of the Chinese state. As a result, educated Indonesians often ponder an appreciation of another aspect of the Chinese model, namely independence in relation to political capacity. In other words, the Chinese state’s autonomy has become another theme that often appears in conversation among Indonesians about China.
Such an appreciation appears, for example, in the way in which Ronny understands the shape of present-day China as a realization of the dream imagined by the Indonesian first president, Sukarno. In a speech delivered by President Sukarno in 1966 he declared that Indonesia should become a country that possesses political sovereignty, economic independence, and a national identity that reflected its culture. These three characteristics are referred to by the ideology known as Trisakti. Ronny mentioned this concept during our conversation. But it is worth noting that he used the term ‘independence’ (kemandirian) in relation to all of the three components of the ideology. This might convey how concerned he is with kemandirian. Ronny sees that the concrete example of the realization of kemandirian can be found in present-day China.

Do you remember the concept of Trisakti? The Trisakti of Sukarno. That is good. It is about political independence of a nation, independence in culture, and independence in economy. You know, China has all of them. So I think, even Sukarno emulated China early in those years. (Interview with Ronny Agustino, Jakarta, 29 August 2009)

Ronny sees China as a country able to maintain its relative independence in relation to other countries. It also shows that in his view this independence was
possessed by China as early as the 1960s. This is worth noting because it informs us how one’s appreciation of present day China leads people to perceive the past of their own country in a similar way.

The understanding of China as a country that possesses independence (kemandirian) may also be discerned in the view held by Rosdiansyah, a forty year old Surabaya based researcher. Mas Rudy, Rosdiansyah’s everyday name, was a journalist who started his journalistic career in the early 1990s. But in 2006 he began to pursue a master degree in social science in the Netherlands. Upon return to Indonesia he began to work as a legal assistant and freelance researcher in a law firm established by one of his colleagues. Rudy spent his after work hours mainly on reading books. He also frequently organizes book forums, in which he reviews – or invites experts to review – recently published books that he considers interesting and significant.

Rudy’s understanding of China is another example of how admiration for the strategy adopted and applied by the Chinese state exists side by side with an appreciation of its independence and political capacity. During an informal conversation between Rudy, Andri Aryan (a sociologist affiliated with the Airlangga University), and myself, Rudy showed his appreciation of the Chinese state’s strategy in dealing with the phenomenon of globalization. “Mainland China’s way of
thinking is sophisticated. They even know how to deal with the World Trade Organization (the WTO). The Chinese rulers are very open minded and know how to behave wisely in the waves of globalization”, he maintained. When asked what he meant by the words ‘China knows how to deal with the WTO’, he said that,

China today is different from what we thought in the past. It is not a communist country that may be referred to as the bamboo curtain country, as we previously used to do. Instead, China is really careful and clever. They apparently have studied all of the regulations by the WTO. They carefully observe all the changes that take place in this organization. I think, before they finally decided to join [the WTO], they had already developed a mature strategy. Thus, if one day all the regulations of the WTO are globally implemented, the only developing country that may survive, besides Iran, is China. (Interview with Rosdiansyah, Surabaya, 9 September 2009)

In Rudy’s view, China’s ability to deal with WTO is an example of how it has made an effort to retain its independence. But on the other hand, it was also a result of the ‘independent mental attitudes’ that China has developed.
China has developed because they believe in their own ability. They have a mental attitude that stresses independence, which is reflected in their behaviour. It is good to have such an attitude. It makes it difficult for them to be dictated to by international organizations. You see Russia after Gorbachev? Everything has become so messy. But see China, see how Mao Zedong laid the foundation, followed by Deng Xiaoping, and then by the current leaders. You may see that they have known since the very beginning where they actually want to go. I think the foundation laid by Mao Zedong, including the great leap forward concept has proven to be successful. But what is the key to their success? I think one of them is their independence. They have an independent mental attitude, they think independently, and they have built an independent economy. The administrators of that country do what is best for their people, not what is best for those international financial organizations. (Interview with Rosdiansyah, Surabaya, 9 September 2009)
This understanding of the Chinese state’s ability to achieve and retain its independence is often expressed in tandem with an appreciation of China’s ‘political capacity’. The latter is often expressed by exemplifying the Chinese state’s ability to deal with multinational corporations. While China’s dealings with international organizations such as WTO is understood as an example of how it has retained its relative independence, her method of dealing with multinational corporations provides an example of how she has executed her political capacity. An example of this is Joko Susanto’s view. Despite his concern with the development of democracy in China, Joko shows his appreciation of the Chinese state’s ability to negotiate with the owner of capital:

China is among those countries that can powerfully bargain in negotiations with giant capitalists. The [Chinese] state possesses bargaining power, because its power has been well consolidated. For Indonesia, it will be difficult. We should negotiate with the Freeport [US-based copper and goldmining venture in Papua] in the same way in which China has negotiated with Google. China can pressure Google to comply with its demands. We have a law on pornography, but we can’t pressure Google. China can do it. Isn’t it amazing?
What does that mean? It is not about political will. It is about political capacity. China has a political capacity that is much more effective than Indonesia. (Interview with Joko Susanto, Surabaya, 29 July 2009)

Joko’s appreciation of China’s ability to pressure google to comply with its demands constitutes an example of how an Indonesian admires China’s political capacity. But it also informs us of how such an appreciation is frequently expressed concurrently with a critique of Indonesia.

**International Relations**

In the latter quote we see the emergence of a third theme, namely the appreciation of China’s relatively powerful position on the international stage. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the idea that China may become a counterweight to the US is widely appreciated in Indonesia today. For example, Mr. Mulyo Guntoro, a businessman and politician in Surabaya, predicts that China will become a stumbling block for the US. He also thinks that the US will not have the courage or the capacity to launch a military attack against China. Similarly, Mr Dhimam Abror, a senior journalist and former editor of a leading newspaper in
Surabaya expresses his view that only China’s power could become a counterweight to US power.

As a Moslem, I would be happy if Islamic countries could rise and compete with the United States, but today, that kind of hope is not realistic. It is more realistic to expect China to become a counterweight against the US. If China, Japan, and [South] Korea are combined, they may become a formidable counterweight to the US. (Interview with Dhimam Abror, Surabaya, 20 March 2009)

A more detailed statement that provides us with another clear example of the way in which China’s international position is understood by Indonesians today comes from an interview I held with Prof. Kacung Marijan, an academic affiliated with Airlangga University:

Actually, China has not only emerged as an economic power, but also as a political power. It has become a counterbalance to American and European power. It has changed the power relations in the international stage. In the past, we saw a Soviet camp on one side, and the American camp on the other. ... But since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, the
US became the only major power in the world, even though in economic terms we might also see European countries competing with the US. Today, we see how China, combined with India, has emerged as economic powers. It certainly has an impact on politics, because political and economic power is mutually related. Thus, these countries’ power bargains against the US and European countries are much higher. (Interview with Kacung Marijan, Surabaya, 27 July 2009)

**Good Governance and Leadership**

Each of the three themes discussed so far (independence, state sovereignty and global power) concern the ways people see how the Chinese state has dealt with forces coming from outside. A fourth theme, concerning the Chinese government’s effort to solve internal problems like corruption, poor governance and lack of good leaders is also often discussed. A particular image of the Chinese way of solving the problem of corruption is appreciated by many Indonesians, from the drivers of public transportations to university lecturers.
My conversation with a Jakarta taxi driver in October 2009 is a case in point. I decided not to take the toll road because we could see a long queue in the gate. This happened despite the fact that the toll fee had recently increased. The taxi driver supported my decision, saying that there was no point in paying toll when the toll road was heavily congested. He also complained that the toll money did not always go to the state. “Here, money will go to personal pockets. Indonesians are good at corruption. The upper middle class people are corrupt”, he said. After complaining about the problem of corruption in Indonesia, he talked about other countries which in his views have been successful in controlling corruption. He opined,

I think America and China are good at solving the problem of corruption. In China, the perpetrator will be shot to death. Even the president has prepared a coffin for himself and says, if I am corrupt, then I deserve the death sentence. But that would not happen in Indonesia. Here, if you are corrupt and get caught, you just need to give the money back. (Interview, 10 October 2009)

As we might have expected, the view expressed by the above taxi driver is often found among Indonesian academics and other educated Indonesians as well. For instance, when Professor Jainudin (a pseudonym), a
senior academic in Surabaya explained to me that China was now very disciplined in attempting to solve its social problems, he referred to a program on combating corruption as an example. He said,

In China today, surveillance against corruption is very strict, even though corruption may still take place. But I think, the most important thing is that they have started to set up a system to control the level of corruption. (Interview with Prof Jainudin, Surabaya, October 2008)

Professor Jainudin also compared China’s effort to curb corruption with the similar effort conducted by the Indonesian government. He concluded,

In Indonesia, (the government’s response) is very slow. Corruption has become a culture here. Dealing with bureaucracy in Indonesia is a source of headache. There should be money involved, or they won’t serve you. This is a problem. It has become a culture and a system here. In China it is not. Besides, the process to investigate (a corruption case) in China is fast. In Indonesia, it’s too long and complicated (bertele-tele).
(Interview with Prof Jainudin, Surabaya, October 2008)

A similar perception was also voiced by Ronny Agustino. Asked what he thought about the problem of corruption in Indonesia, he gave me the following answer:

Actually the KPK has been successful to a certain extent. It has retrieved a huge amount of state funds (that has been stolen by the corruptors). But the cost to run the KPK is high enough. It is much easier to threat corrupt officials with death punishment, as China does. Well, I actually don’t agree with death sentence, but we can do at least once. I know, even once is unacceptable. But it may have a tremendous impact. It may prevent people from being corrupt. We have a positive impression of the Chinese way of controlling corruption. The message that we get is that China is very strict against corruption. It’s true, if we observe carefully, we probably will find out that many of Chinese officials are corrupt as well. But (the implementation of the death punishment) tells us that Chinese government is not playing around with the problem of corruption. As we only have limited information of what is going
on in China, it is only that image that we can get. (Interview with Ronny Agustino, Jakarta, 29 August 2009).

The above statements reveal that an appreciation of Chinese government for their seriousness in solving their internal problems, especially the problem of corruption, may be found in the mind of educated Indonesians. However, they usually express that appreciation simultaneously with the expression of their concerns with the yet unsuccessful efforts made by the Indonesian government to deal with similar problems.

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The discussion of the four themes has so far emphasized the behaviour of the Chinese state and government, which according to many Indonesians deserves appreciation and should be emulated by Indonesia. However, the admiration of the Chinese state and government is often combined with an appreciation of the Chinese leaders. This may be observed, for example, when Rudy said that the administrators of that country did what was best for their people, not what was best for those international financial organizations.

Another view expressed by Ronny also illustrates his appreciation of the Chinese leaders. As mentioned earlier, Ronny likes the development model of the Chinese state because decisions were carefully planned,
measured, and have a clear direction. However, he also said that during the New Order period Indonesia has adopted a similar system as well. But he argued that it does not result in a similar achievement due to the difference in quality between the Indonesian and the Chinese leaders. “China has leaders who have a clear vision of what their country should be in the future”, he maintained.

What is it about the Chinese leadership that people appreciate? The simple answer for Ronny is because the Chinese style leadership is “like teamwork. They [the leaders] are unified, having one voice, one vision, and one step”. He also describes the Chinese leaders as more nationalistic, always makings their country as their priority. “They know that if they don’t think for the sake of their country, China will collapse,” Ronny said. Ronny regards China as a critical source of inspiration for Indonesia, especially in the field of leadership. “If we want to copy, copy that [Chinese leadership]”, he commented. However, while he appreciates all aspects of the Chinese leadership, he puts special emphasis on their possession of a vision of the country’s future. In Ronny’s view, it is the existence of this vision that makes the difference between Chinese and Indonesian leaders. And as Ronny plans to become a politician in the future, he considers it vital to have an adequate understanding of the way in which those Chinese leaders have built that vision.
It will equip me when I enter the political world. It is inspiring, especially in the process of building a vision for our nation. I think that if you want to build the vision of the nation, learn from China! For those who want to be politicians, they have to learn how to develop that vision from the Chinese leaders. I am planning to become a politician. But I think the most important ‘capital’ that I must have is a clear vision. I think China can be regarded as a model of how a country’s vision is made and actualized. (Interview with Ronny Agustino, Jakarta, 29 August 2009)

Appreciation of the Chinese leader’s possession of a clear vision of the future is apparent even among members of Indonesian elite groups. During a small seminar held in March 2013, Admiral Achmad Sutjipto, a former chief of staff of the Indonesian Navy, expressed his admiration of the people who have designed the modernization of China’s military. This was one of the monthly seminars organized by the Institut Peradaban (Institute of Civilization), an institution founded by several senior academics. It is probably worth noting that in October 2012, the same institution also held a seminar to discuss recent political activities of Chinese Indonesians. In that occasion, the majority of the participants voiced their negative comments against Chinese Indonesians notwithstanding the fact that quite
a few of Chinese Indonesian intellectuals and community leaders were present. Thus it is quite surprising to find out that despite its sensitive topic, that is, the territorial disputes in South China Sea, the March 2013 seminar was not dominated by the negative perception of China.

The admiral was one of the speakers in the above seminar. He began his speech by expressing his concerns on the defence strategy adopted by Indonesia. In his view, Indonesian defence strategy was designed by people with pessimistic attitude who regarded Indonesian military as inferior. As he argued in his paper,

Our defence strategy is still inward looking. [...] Some of the defence doctrines that we are familiar with [...] emphasize on a defensive defence strategy which is implemented through the so called people’s defence and security system (sistem pertahanan dan keamanan rakyat semesta), that is, when we are attacked, we should defend ourselves by waging a people war. [...] The operationalization of this system is a guerrilla war that involves the whole citizens to participate in the war. [This is] a minimalist strategy which is only adopted by a weaker party against a stronger opponent. (Sutjipto 2013:14)
In contrast to Indonesia, Chinese military, according to the admiral, is designed in such a way to enable China to participate in the games played by countries with a strong military power. He explained,

The Americans commented in 1980s that China was the home to the largest military museum in the world. This was because most of their military weapons and equipment were too old. Since then China has gradually developed its military. Today China’s military is one of the most powerful military in the region. Furthermore, China develops what is called as the asymmetric warfare strategy. They prepare themselves to attack the weakest part of their opponents. For the Americans, information technology and networks are as vital as their own brains. China knows that and has designed its military so that it has a capability to wage a cyber-warfare targeting American information technology and networks. (Achmad Sutjipto, Jakarta, 13 March 2013)

After making the above statement, Admiral Sutjipto expressed his view that China’s military could be that powerful because of the quality of its designers. He maintained, ‘the people who have designed China’s
military and defence system are the best of the best. I am sure that they themselves are not people in uniform. They are good thinkers and leaders’. However, the above statement should not lead us to believe that a former top ranked military commander like Admiral Sutjipto does not have any concern with China’s military development and its impact on Indonesia. In fact, despite believing that China would not initiate any military engagement, he warned the audience (one of whom was an active senior military officer) that a military conflict between China and the United States might take place in the South China Sea if the latter started any action to protect its interest. According to him, Indonesia should respond to the situation by developing its military capacity. And this can only be done if Indonesian leaders and thinkers have a good vision, as the Chinese leaders and thinkers do.

China as a New Model for Socialism

Another theme, which is significant despite its rare appearance, is the view of China as a new model for socialism. Because people typically relate China to socialism and realize that this has long been a taboo only very few of my interviewees refer to socialism. Only among those who declare themselves to be leftist activists socialism is mentioned and understood as a consequence of a socialist model. For them, the Chinese
model is a new model based on socialism. Or as China herself says, it is ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’.

In late 2008, I met with Sadrak Hutabarat (pseudonym), an academic and pro-democratic activist who clearly declared himself as ‘one who walks on the left side’. I have known him for over two decades, but only met him again when I visited a place where pro-democratic activists gathered for informal discussions. During that meeting, I told him that I am conducting research on the way China is perceived by Indonesians. He told me that the so-called Chinese model is now widely discussed in many forums. According to him, the main themes during those discussions are usually about the Chinese political and economic system, the Chinese success in overcoming the influence of the recent global crisis, and the Chinese triumph in organizing the 2008 Olympic games. “These have become a popular topic discussion, even among taxi drivers”, said Sadrak. He also said that while many Indonesians today admire Chinese success and the Chinese communist party, they still hate the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). However, as the conversation was brief, I did not have the opportunity to learn more about his view.

That opportunity finally came, when I met him again in April 2010. On that occasion, Sadrak revealed his perception about China.
I view China as a new model of socialism. After the demise of the Soviet Union, people turned to two socialist camps: Cuba and China. However, as we can see, China is much more independent [mandiri]. She is one of the permanent members of the United Nation Security Council. China is more capable in developing herself. The Chinese model of development may be seen as a new model of socialism, which has been developed by adapting itself to the capitalist world, and by learning from the mistakes made by the Soviet Union. (Interview with Sadrak Hutabarat, Jakarta, 30 April 2009)

Sadrak is aware that many consider China as a capitalist country due to its ostensibly liberal policy. But for him, it is a fallacy to regard China as ‘too capitalistic’.

Firstly, most of the companies in China are still owned by the state. Secondly, the state still controls economic policy. It has a major influence on the economy. Isn’t this something forbidden [diharamkan] in a capitalist system? Furthermore, the investors cannot do just whatever they want in China. They have to negotiate with the state, because the state’s power
is still so strong. (Interview with Sadrak Hutabarat, Jakarta, 30 April 2009)

These comments are very similar to those I discussed earlier. As we have heard, Angga, Ronny, Joko, and Rudy, all provided similar explanations in explaining their admiration of the Chinese state and government. The difference lies in the fact that Sadrakl overtly points out that these characteristics are socialist in nature. He even attempts to find a theoretical justification for the Chinese state’s policy that allows some parts of the system capitalism to be applied:

For me, what China has done is just a modification of socialist model. It is positive and not against the law of dialectical materialism. I think, Marx asked us to see the objective conditions of the society. This is what China has done. She observes the objective condition of her internal society as well as of the international society. Based on this observation, China has created a modification. However, there are several (socialist) principles that are maintained. An example of this is the one party system. (Interview with Sadrak Hutabarat, Jakarta, 2009)
However, he not only found a theoretical justification for China’s recent development, but also used this development as a justification for his opinion. With the rise of China as a developed country, he found a basis to continue his socialist way of thinking. “In the past, people said that socialism could only impoverish people. But now, who dares to say that again? See how rich the Chinese people are”, he said vehemently. He also claimed that for a leftist, the Chinese model is “a model worth emulating in the effort to oppose capitalism and globalisation”.

Critical Views of China

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the grounds on which an appreciation of China has become widespread within Indonesian society. The emergence of such an appreciation should however not lead us to conclude that only positive images of China exist. Negative perceptions of that country are, of course, present as well. While in the past, the negative perceptions of China were mostly based on its allegedly aggressive communism (which was also often associated with its underdevelopment), today they are mostly related to its rapid development. An example already alluded to came to the fore in my conversation with Hasiholan (Pseudonym), a TV producer in Jakarta.
Hasiholan said that he often heard negative perceptions of China at his work place. Interestingly, these perceptions often came from the Chinese who work for the TV station. According to Hasiholan these Chinese feel that China is not a good place. The reason why these Chinese have negative feelings about China is beyond the scope of this study. It suffices to show how their complaints may have an impact on their Indonesian colleagues, and how Indonesians respond to this negative information on China. Hasiholan:

It is interesting to observe how they have a very negative perception of China when they just came back from a visit to their home country. The information that they gave to me has a lot of influence on my negative perception [of China]. An example of this is the infrastructure construction in China. Today, China concentrates on building infrastructure. The highways that they are building now are probably the longest in the world. But their society has not been able to adapt to this developed infrastructure. For instance, drivers often drive on the wrong side of the highway. Besides that they now have constructed luxurious beautiful buildings, equipped with extra modern technology. But their culture is not in line with those physical developments.
According to my Chinese friends, people are so rude, even to other Chinese. This is why my Chinese friends when they go back to China, they feel so Indonesian. This is because in Indonesia they are warmly welcomed. (Interview with Hasiholan, Jakarta, 29 August 2009)

In Hasiholan’s eyes, China is a country with a modern technology and developing infrastructure. Nevertheless, this is disconnected from the culture of the people. Hasiholan sees this as useful for Indonesia; “It can be taken as a lesson”, he commented.

Indonesia is in the middle of constructing its infrastructure as well. I heard that we plan to build a Trans Java highway. The lesson that we can get from the Chinese experience is that besides constructing our infrastructure, we should introduce our society to the proper uses of that infrastructure in a good manner. In other words, we should learn from the Chinese mistake. (Interview with Hasiholan, Jakarta, 29 August 2009)

Negative views of some aspects of China’s development are also expressed by those who have a qualified appreciation of China. Joko Susanto is an example of this. Joko noted that
despite its rapid development, China is facing a set of problems that is not easy to solve. One of these problems relates to the distribution of wealth. “China is good in organising all of its resources to achieve its goal. It accumulates wealth in an excellent way. But it also has a gigantic problem of distribution” (Interview with Joko Susanto, Surabaya, 29 July 2009). Another problem concerns the growing involvement of ‘entrepreneurs’ in China’s development.

Unlike in Mao era, a partnership between businessmen and state bureaucrats is possible in China today. If such partnership is not carefully managed, it has the potential for collusion and corruption to take place. Without democracy, this kind of partnership would become a bug that makes China decay. (Interview with Joko Susanto, Surabaya, 29 July 2009)

Corruption is also a problem that in Joko’s view the Chinese government should tackle more seriously. Unlike Professor Jainudin and Ronny, Joko is rather pessimistic with the effort made by China in solving the problem of corruption. He contends,

In China, the problem of corruption is much bigger than we thought. But China
has a good ‘shock therapy’, that is, the implementation of death sentence. This may become a ‘political entertainment’ (‘hiburan politik’) that may console and calm Chinese people. But if we observe carefully, we will find out that there are lots of (corruption) cases that the government has not dealt with. (Interview with Joko Susanto, Surabaya, 29 July 2009).

According to Joko, the problem of corruption in China should be seen as a result of the absence of democracy in that country. Indeed, for Joko, the lack of democracy is one of the problems that the Chinese people are still facing. Despite agreeing that China’s ability to build a state with a strong political capacity needs to be emulated, Joko argues that civil liberty in China still lagged. “Instead of learning from China in this aspect (civil liberty), Indonesia should copy India, which has built a good democratic model”, he maintained. In his perspective, a combination of India’s democracy and China’s political capacity would help create a great Indonesia.
Conclusion

The contemporary Indonesian discourse on the rise of China should not explain the emergence of this understanding merely as a result of frequent consumption of certain ideas. On the contrary, the Indonesian enthusiasm for China should be seen as a result of citizens’ contemplation of the present condition of their own country. This is seen in the way that appreciation and admiration of China is nearly always expressed through contrasting conditions. Thus by expressing their appreciation and admiration of China, Indonesians are actually voicing their grievances at their own country, while at the same time constructing a dream of what might be its ideal picture.

The tendency of referring to a foreign country considered to be more successful is a not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. Back in 1950s, when educated Indonesians, who believed that their country’s independence would automatically lead to ‘a golden bridge to a just and prosperous society, realized that their high expectations could not immediately materialize, they suggested Indonesia make China as an example (Liu 2006:182-185). Today, educated Indonesians are aware that the demise of the extremely powerful New Order state did not automatically bring Indonesia to an ideal future. As we already discussed in Chapter One, the new governments are often seen as not capable enough to solve the problems that
Indonesia inherited from the past: violent conflicts, corruptions, and domination of foreign powers (manifest in the domination of Multinational Corporation). This is why in their critiques of Indonesia these educated Indonesians frequently refer to China, a country which in their view has proved to be successful in solving some similar problems. Alongside its economic development progress, China’s ways of eradicating corruption, maintaining internal social order, inculcating its people with nationalism, and dealing with foreign (especially ‘Western’) powers are seen as an ideal exemplar. It is apparent that these critics want the future Indonesian state to have the capacity currently possessed by the Chinese state today.

This focus on Indonesia’s future explains why issues concerning the lack of democracy and violation of human rights in China are not heavily discussed, although they are not totally absent. All of the educated Indonesians interviewed for this chapter are aware of these issues. Many of them express their view that if these problems are not carefully managed China may face a serious problem in the future. Yet despite this, most focus their discussion on the political capacity possessed by China’s state as well as its economic strategy, as these appear useful for improving conditions in Indonesia. This does not mean that they are not cautious about the danger of a state that is too strong. In fact, they worry about it. But they have a more relevant example of this: Indonesia’s New Order!
In short, those educated Indonesians want a powerful Indonesian state which possesses a political capacity to maintain internal social order and deal with foreign powers, but which at the same time retains its democratic credentials achieved since 1998. Ronny succinctly expressed this dream when he said, “I want China’s powerful state and economic miracle, but I also want democracy and freedom.” For him at least, this dream may come true if the Indonesian State regulates the ownership and distribution of resources needed by its people (and does not allow them to be controlled by foreign powers), while at the same time protecting the rights of individuals to express their identity, political views, religious beliefs, and personal life styles.
Chapter Five

Old Stereotypes, New Conclusions?

Appreciation of the Chinese Work ethic and Business Skills in Present-day Indonesia

In chapters Three and Four, I discussed ways in which people see why elements of China deserve emulation and how these ideas have become increasingly popular. The image of China comprises both an appreciation of recent developments in China as well as the suggestion for Indonesia (and Indonesians) to emulate certain characteristics. The narratives I focused on indicate growing admiration of the Chinese state, government, and leadership. Below, I will discuss the way in which this appreciation extends to the Chinese people, especially to their work ethic. What shapes does this appreciation take and how is it occurring? This is the question that we will try to answer in this chapter. I begin by focusing on the emergence of positive images about the work ethic of Chinese people. Subsequently, we will discuss the enthusiasm for Chinese business culture as well.
Tales of Industrious Chinese Character and Business Talent

The representation of the Chinese as an industrious people has existed in Indonesia for decades. Writing in 1963, Taylor revealed how this industrious character of the Chinese was appreciated. The *Ensiklopedi Umum dalam Bahasa Indonesia* (General Encyclopaedia in Indonesian Language), which was published in 1954, was reported as speaking of the ‘energy, bravery and steadfastness of the Chinese people in all their efforts during forty years of war’ (Taylor 1963: 170). Taylor also shows how an admiration of the Chinese work ethic also appeared in other publication.

A more recent book expresses admiration for the river control projects in Communist China: A dam which was the livelihood of a very wide agricultural area could not be repaired in two years, according to the plans of Western technicians; but then it was repaired in less than six months by the Gung-ho (cooperative) method. (Taylor 1963: 171)

Taylor informs us that the author of the book quoted above came to the conclusion that ‘the progress which China has achieved in these few years may be summed up in one word: inspiring’ (Taylor 1963: 171). Thus, in some places, Chinese were appreciated for their
industrious quality. However, it is this quality that also induced fear of the Chinese. ‘Indigenous’ Indonesians worried about Chinese commercial skills (Taylor 1963: 171).

As Taylor points out, the traditional negative attitudes of Indonesians toward China were constantly reinforced and sustained by their experiences with the Chinese in Indonesia itself (Taylor 1963: 171). As we have seen in chapter two, Chinese Indonesians were viewed as formidable business competitors in the beginning of the twentieth century. This view among other resulted in anti-Chinese riots in the first decade of that century, mostly conducted by groups of people under the auspice of Sarekat Islam. The same view also triggered a movement that demanded special protection for ‘Indigenous’ Indonesian businesses, launched by Mr. Asaat and his friends in the 1950s.

Indeed, Chinese Indonesian superiority in business, although acknowledged, was made into one of the constitutive elements of the general (negative) stereotypes of the Chinese Indonesians (see for example Coppel 1983: 18-24). They were seen as cunning and willing to use any means to maximize their profit. They only thought about money and worked hard all day to collect as much money as possible. More importantly, the Chinese superiority in business was seen as a result of the inherent racial business talent that they had.
Thus the fact that the Chinese work ethic and business acumen is widely discussed today to some extent may be seen as a form of reproduction of the above stereotype. However, the conclusion made on the grounds of this perception is new. Today, discussion of the Chinese work ethic and business talent often considers Chinese hard work, ‘professionalism’, and ability to maintain a useful network as positive. Furthermore, such recognition is often combined with a professed desire to learn the same skills from the Chinese. Thus the appreciation of the Chinese business culture today should not be equated with the similar image of the Chinese as people with inherent business talent, even though a clear resemblance to that belief may be clearly observed. Instead, it has contested the latter by constructing an understanding of Chinese business superiority to be the result of a learnable process worth appreciating and emulating.

Admiring the Chinese work ethic

In the past, every time we thought about China, all that came to our mind was communism and low quality products. But now, the image that we can see (from China) is of a society (which is) productive, open, and quick in absorbing modernity … As they are productive and
industrious, I have a wish to emulate them. (Interview with Dr. Rahmi, Surabaya, 13 February 2009)

The above statement was made by Dr. Rahmi (pseudonym), a Surabaya-based academic who is the director of a postgraduate program in management at a reputable university in Surabaya. The perception that Chinese people are productive and industrious is growing in popularity among educated Indonesians, especially those who study and practice business. Indeed, such a belief is widely circulated in Indonesian public forums today. It is also frequently mentioned in books and newspapers, either in news items or op-ed pieces. For example, a column article that appeared in an online magazine was titled as *Etos Kerja Meniru Cina* (‘The Work Ethic Copied from the Chinese’) (Dharmadiaksa 2010). Meanwhile, several Indonesian leaders, such as Din Syamsuddin, the chairperson of *Muhammadiyah*, (one of the biggest Islamic organizations in Indonesia) and Vice President Boediono have been reported as admiring the Chinese work ethic and as regarding it as worth emulating.

What does the term work ethic refer to? It alludes to the working habits of the Chinese in and from China as seen and interpreted by Indonesians. While the positive take of this work ethic is relatively new in Indonesia, it has evolved elsewhere roughly two decades ago. Narrative that considered these work ethics the key
to success has even been globally widespread much earlier. The narrative was apparent in what Aihwa Ong called as ‘the romanticisation of Chinese business empires’ (Ong 1997:187). It celebrated the economic success of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian tycoons – including Liem Sioe Liong, the most popular Chinese Indonesian big businessman in those days – and maintained that these successful entrepeneurs displayed strong self-reliance and the Confucian virtues of thrift, discipline, industriousness, family cohesion, and reverence for education (Ong 1997:188). The narrative has been echoed and manipulated by some Asian leaders – such as by Lee Kuan Yew in his attempt to build what he called as the ‘Singapore’s rugged society’ (Ong 1997:183) – and receives positive response in different parts of the World. In Thailand, behaviours of successful Sino-Thai business professionals have been seen as as symbol of modernity since 1990s (Blanc 1997:271). Meanwhile, in the United States, Asian managers are growingly seen as ideal citizens (Ong 2003:268)

The popularity of Chinese work ethic in Indonesian public culture today is to some extent related to the above phenomenon. But it is also a result of the emergence of China as an economic giant. A similar impact (of the rise of China) may also be seen in the United States, where Chinese (and East Asian) Americans have now become the new darlings in American professional circles, universities, and think
tanks (Ong 2003:268). In Indonesia, however, more frequent encounters between Chinese and Indonesian people also play a role. These have occurred more frequently in the post Suharto era. Unlike in the recent past, today Indonesians, both government officials as well as ordinary citizens are ‘free to travel to China, and Chinese officials and citizens who want to travel to Indonesia are no longer subject to various immigration restrictions’ (Sukma 2009:148) At the state level, mutual official visits between the two countries have become more intense, especially after President Wahid, who was elected in October 1999, ‘made China his first destination of his state visit abroad’ (Sukma 2009:146). In fact, every Indonesian president and vice president after Wahid has visited China. Vice President Boediono made the most recent visit in March 2010.

As well as mutual visitation at the state level, exchanges among non-government organizations also frequently take place. Among these are visits made by Chinese Muslims delegations to Indonesia. As an example, on 4th of March 2010, the China Islamic Association paid a visit to the headquarters of the Muhammadiyah. Similarly in 2008, a group of Muslims leaders from East Java made a visit to China, during which they visited several sites associated with Chinese Islam. The visit was organized and funded by a Chinese Indonesian Muslim organization that aimed to introduce these Muslim leaders to the Islamic ‘atmosphere’ that
might be found in China.\textsuperscript{21} However, as we shall see soon, it also increased Muslim leaders’ understanding of the Chinese working culture. A similar visit was organized in 2010 by a number of Surabaya-based Chinese Indonesian organizations, allowing a group of Indonesian Muslim leaders and academics to visit Shanghai and other cities in China (Suarasurebaya.net, 19 October 2010).

More frequent encounters between certain people of the two countries have also occurred as a result of Chinese involvement in Indonesian development projects. For example, the Chinese development assistance provided to assist the construction of the Suramadu Bridge, a bridge connecting Surabaya city and Madura Island, enabled the workers, engineers and managers of the two countries to learn from each other. This is because China not only funded the project, but also sent their own team of around 300 workers and 46 engineers to work together with the Indonesian team to construct the bridge.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} Interview with a Chinese Indonesian Muslim leader in Surabaya, 10 September 2008.

\textsuperscript{22} This estimation of the number of the Chinese workers and engineer is based on information given to me by Mr. Wicaksono (pseudonym), a project officer who participated in the project (Interview with Wicaksono, 6 March 2009).
Mutual interactions described above have further popularized positive attitudes about the Chinese work ethic among Indonesians because they are covered by the media. For example, Vice President Boediono’s visit to China was reported by *Kompas Daily* in an article headed *Boediono Kagumi Etos Kerja Bangsa China* (‘Boediono Admires the Work ethic of the Chinese Nation’) (*Kompas*, 21 October 2010). According to that report, Boediono was not only amazed by the work ethic in Chinese society, but he also understood that that work ethic applies also to education. Furthermore, he was reported as stating that Indonesia might learn from the way China had designed an education system on which such work ethic had been built (*Kompas*, 21 October 2010).

Meanwhile, the visit of Chinese Muslim delegates to the headquarter of the Muhammadiyah was reported by *Republika* in an article with the head *Din: Contoh Etos Kerja Cina* (‘Din: Emulate the Chinese Work ethic’) (*Republika*, 5 March 2010). (Din refers to the first name of the Chairperson of Muhammadiyah, Professor Din Syamsuddin). The report mentioned that Din Syamsuddin had commented on the Chinese work ethic in his official statement. Professor Syamsuddin was reported as wanting Muslim Indonesians to emulate Chinese Muslims as well as the Chinese in general. While he considered that many good things might be learned from the Chinese, the emphasis was given to their work ethic. “They have a high level of discipline. This may be
performed by the (Indonesian) Muslims”, he reportedly said.

But the Media do more than just report comments made by Indonesian leaders at events in which interaction between leaders of the two countries occur. The media also provides a space for op-ed articles by Indonesian columnists to transmit their appreciation of the Chinese working culture. The article titled *Etos Kerja Meniru Cina* (‘The work ethic copied from the Chinese’), which appeared in an online magazine, is an example of this (Dharmadiaksa 2010). The author begins this article by describing a situation that might result from a lack of work ethic among workers and professionals. The description is followed by the question as to whether it is possible change that situation. The author notes that it is quite difficult to develop a good work ethic, unless it is learned in the early years of someone’s life. He then begins to discuss how Chinese conduct such a process of building work ethic:

If we observe the work ethic of the Chinese people, we obtain a real picture of how a good work ethic has been practiced. Since they were kids, or during school ages, they have been involved in their parents’ business activities (household industries) outside the school hours. They were taught the meaning of
life’s struggle and how they must fight to earn money and make use of time in the best way. For them, the question of how much one can save is more important than how much one can earn. The household industries in China have developed so fast and have strengthened China’s economy. They appreciate time and money, and it can be reflected in their discipline, willingness to work totally, their effort to exploit their own potential to the maximum, their endurance, creativity, strong personality, and the way they work effectively and efficiently. (Dharmadiaksa 2010)

Of course, the appreciation of the Chinese work ethic is not only apparent in the media. As a result of the mutual interaction between Chinese and Indonesians, we now see a growing understanding of the work ethic of the Chinese people on the part of Indonesians. In the following discussion, I will attempt to sketch the kinds of understandings Indonesians are taking from their experiences based on the statements asserted by an individual during an interview.

In any discussion concerning the Chinese work ethic, a number of characteristics, especially discipline and hard working are mentioned. Appreciation of these characteristics often appears as an aspect of people’s
opinion regarding the recent development and progress that China has made. During my fieldwork in Surabaya, I encountered such an appreciation during my talks with Indonesian engineers and workers who participated in the Suramadu construction project. The following views, voiced by Mr. Wicaksono (pseudonym), an Indonesian engineer and Mr. Dayat, a worker, provide an example of these.

Pak Wicaksono, a Javanese in his late forties, studied civil engineering in a university in Malang. Since 2005 he had worked in a consultant company hired to supervise the construction process of the Suramadu Bridge. He was the coordinator of the technical consultants, a team consisting of several engineers and many other staffs. The job of his team was to ensure that the process of construction was carried out according to standards set by the Indonesian government. His work required him to consult with the Chinese engineers and workers who by then were constructing the main part of the Bridge. (This part of the bridge is located over the Madura strait). He frequently attended meetings with the Chinese managers and engineers. Thus he became well informed with the way the Chinese worked. But he also had to communicate with the Indonesian engineers and workers who were responsible for other parts of the bridge (parts that connect the main span of the bridge with the approaching roads). During this process of communication and observation Wicaksono began to
observe certain characteristics that according to him were peculiarly Chinese and particularly admirable.

In Wicaksono’s view, his Chinese counterparts have a high work ethic. “They are energetic and not weak (loyo)... they are so courageous to do the job even at a high place”, he commented. Wicaksono also regards the Chinese as disciplined workers. He explains his observation in the following assertion:

They have a good work ethic, they are so disciplined. They begin to work on time but begin to rest on time as well. When the time to sleep comes, they go to sleep. Or those who can’t sleep, they will do a hobby like fishing. So even though they work hard, they still take care of their own emotional health. (Interview with Wicaksono, Surabaya, 6 March 2009)

As a result of their discipline and assiduousness, the Chinese completed their work according to schedule. The time that they needed to finish the task given to them was shorter than the time allotted to their Indonesian counterparts. This amazed and impressed Wicaksono:

23 The height of the main span of the Suramadu bridge is about 35 meters above the sea, while the towers are about 140 meters high.
The construction of the Suramadu bridge is divided into three parts. The main span is in the middle of the Madura strait. It is connected to the two sides (Surabaya and Madura) by the approach bridges. Thus, there is one approach bridge from Surabaya side, while there is another approach bridge from Madura side. The Chinese are responsible for the construction of the main bridge. It is the most difficult part as it is located in the middle of the sea. Meanwhile Indonesian contractors build the two approach bridges. Since the beginning of the project, the Chinese have worked hard, and they continue to work hard. So they managed to finish their work on time. But the Indonesians worked slowly, so that when the Chinese completed their part, the Indonesians had only done twenty percent of their work. In order to complete the whole construction on time, the Chinese took over the approach bridge from Madura side. But this is not the end of the story. The Chinese continued to work hard and fast so that although they just started the Madura approach bridge later on, they could finish it earlier than the Indonesians (who by then were only responsible for the
construction of the approach bridge from Surabaya side). At the time the Chinese finished the approach bridge from Madura, the Indonesian only finished 50 percent of the work. Doesn’t this show that they [the Chinese] are incredibly disciplined and Indonesians are not? (Interview with Wicaksono, Surabaya, 6 March 2009)

The appreciation of the Chinese work ethic also came from Mr. Dayat, one of the Indonesian workers who participated in the Suramadu bridge construction project. I met Dayat when I took public transport from the location of the Suramadu Bridge construction to Gubeng train station. He is a worker for one of the Indonesian contractor companies hired for the Suramadu project. Dayat studied at a university for a couple of years but did not get a degree. He considers himself better educated than the other workers who according to him “have come from the villages and are mostly poorly educated.”

We continued our conversation in a coffee shop at Gubeng Station. Dayat had to wait for a train to Malang and while waiting he was happy to have a chat with me. It is during this chat that he expressed his appreciation of his Chinese counterparts. When I asked what he thought about the Chinese workers, he gave me the following reply.
Their work ethic is so good. I think, the yellow-skinned people, including Japanese and Koreans, have great endurance. They never give up. Indonesians can take that as an example. They come on time, start working on time, and leave the work site on time. Most of our [Indonesian] workers come from the village. They are mostly badly educated. I think they can learn something from observing their Chinese counterparts. Probably, in the future, they will work at other places and can apply [what they have learned]. Or maybe they will go back to their village and apply it there. (Interview with Dayat, 15 May 2009)

Dayat’s comments are significant. His understanding of the Chinese work ethic is clearly racially based. He sees it as a characteristic that belongs to ‘yellow-skinned people.’ This reminds us of the racialized worldview constructed by Chinese reformers in late nineteenth century (Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei) in which ‘yellows’ competed with ‘whites’ over degenerate breeds of ‘browns’, ‘blacks’ and ‘reds’ (Dikötter 2005:185). The influence of such view persists in contemporary China and is apparent in ‘China’s discourse of exporting development’ (Nyíri 2006). China has not only made a hard effort to become as modern as
the Western countries, but has also wished to play a significant role in the development of its neighbours and other developing countries. Such a wish is observable in the following (frequently repeated) phrase:

> Just as ... China must learn from the ‘advanced technology and management methods of developed Western countries’, it can, in turn, transmit its own ‘advanced experience’ to those less fortunate. (Nyiri 2006:94)

In her effort to actualize that wish, China encourages Chinese migrants to play an important role. Chinese government even constructed a discourse that introduces those migrants as pioneers of modernization both at home and abroad (Nyiri 2006:95).

That such racialized view might be easily accepted in Indonesia is understandable as among Indonesians themselves, the understanding that Chineseness is a biological construct is very common (Heryanto 2004). For example, in a conversation taking place in August 2012, a Chinese Indonesian woman informed me that in her view, the reason why Chinese were more industrious and discipline was because they already had those characters in their blood. But Dayat’s comment above differed from this common understanding as he also implies that he regards such characteristics as something achievable through a
process of learning and habituation, and hence as something not given. In fact, he even claims that he and some of his Indonesian colleagues have begun to learn it from their Chinese colleagues. Consider the following statement:

The Chinese spirit influences me myself. In my work place, we start working at 7 am. But at 6.15 we already gather and get ready to work. We also go home on time. This is probably because of the good organizing system applied by my company, but also because we are influenced by the spirit that the Chinese workers have. (Interview with Pak Dayat, Surabaya, 15 May 2009)

The admiration of the Chinese work ethic is also prevalent among people of Surabaya who have come to an understanding of the Chinese working culture through other processes. An example is Professor Jainudin, a senior academic who serves as the rector of an Islamic university located on the outskirts of Surabaya city. Jainudin is also one of the chairpersons of the East Java’s branch of the Muhammadiyah. As a Muslim leader and academic, he was among those who were invited by Chinese Muslim organizations to join a tour group to visit China in 2008, about a month before the Olympics were held in Beijing. During the visit, Jainudin encountered several phenomena that
impressed him. One of them is related to the Chinese work ethic:

I had already read about economic progress in China before I went there. So when I went there, I just needed to see the evidence [tinggal melihat buktinya saja]. But all of these [progress] actually is a result of the work ethic that exists in Chinese society, isn’t it? If we compare it with ours, then we’ll see how weak our work ethic is. For example, when I was there the person who stayed in the room next to my hotel room is a contractor. At that time, there was a constructing process in progress and I saw that people started working at 6 am. So I said to my Indonesian friend [who stayed in the next room], ‘See below through your hotel room’s window. Compare those Chinese workers with your workers in Indonesia. Aren’t they [Indonesian workers] usually coming at 8 am, and spending the first hours moving slowly [klewas-klewes] and smoking? It’s not clear when those people will start working. But see the Chinese workers below’, whether we like it or not, this is the picture that we got...

(Interview with Professor Jainudin, Surabaya, October 2008)
Besides the Chinese work ethic, which usually is exemplified by its discipline, willingness to work hard, and courage to do a dangerous job, the Chinese are also appreciated for their effectiveness and innovation. For example when Pak Wicaksono explained why the Chinese could complete work much earlier than the Indonesians this came to the fore. In his view, the Chinese “worked effectively and not sluggishly (In colloquial Indonesian: *klemar klemer*) like the Indonesian workers”. But on the other hand, this was also a result of the Chinese ability to find an innovative way to carry out the job. Below is one of the examples that he gave.

The Chinese are more innovative than us. For example, as the location of the construction is off shore, the Indonesians used big boats to ferry the materials to the location. This process of ferrying the material using boats is of course time consuming. The Chinese found a more efficient way. They constructed a temporary bridge that trucks could go on so that they can transport the materials with the trucks. So, as I said, the Chinese do not just have a good work ethic, they are superior to us in their working methods as well. (Interview with Wicaksono, Surabaya, 6 March 2009)
I encountered another example that reveals how Indonesians admire the innovativeness of the Chinese. This was during a conversation with Natalia (pseudonym), a professor of science in Jakarta. Natalia did her PhD in Germany and since then is teaching in the University of Indonesia. During Ramadan in 2009, I was asked by a professor of history to accompany him to a breakfast ceremony (buka puasa bersama) in the outskirt of Jakarta. Natalia, who was also invited to this event, went together with us. During our way to the venue Professor Natalia talked about her experience of visiting several universities in China. She also told us how this visit had impressed her with the innovativeness of the Chinese:

I was invited by Microsoft to go to Beijing. They brought me to visit the Chinese universities that had entered a joint venture with Microsoft. It was during this visit that I began to find out that there are hundreds of Microsoft products coming from China. Microsoft told us that in the future they sought to provide innovative products, thus they had to work together with the universities. The joint venture was not aimed to develop the technology that had already existed, but to develop a technology of the future. So it needs to be innovative. The Chinese can seize this
kind of opportunity. But our universities cannot. Our universities can only follow [hanya bisa mengikuti]... (Conversation with Professor Natalia, Jakarta, 4 September 2009)

Positive Attitude towards ‘Chinese Business Culture’

In April 2009, my wife visited me in Surabaya. During her visit, she suggested to have dinner at a certain warung sate (‘satay stall’) because Surabaya satay has a special reputation. Despite being located in the centre of the Surabaya city, this warung satay is a traditional warung built semi-permanently at the side of the road. Clients usually eat at a table put on the pedestrian path. My wife and I thought that it would be good to eat the satay as soon as it was ready, so we asked the stall attendant to put the satay on a plate. But as the stall attendant took a plate, I saw a large cockroach emerge from the stack of plates on the table. Interestingly, the stall attendant did not look surprised; she calmly drove the cockroach away and tried to clean the plate with a rag. I asked the stall attendant to put the satay on wrapping paper. The next day my wife told this experience to the taxi driver. The driver commented as follows:

That is our people. We don’t know how to do things in a professional way. We don’t
know how to maintain our customers. Once a food stall becomes popular, the owner doesn’t pay attention to the quality anymore. Besides, we don’t know how to develop business. That warung has been there for a long time. But it is still the same size. If Chinese owned it, she surely would develop it, opening new branches, while maintaining the quality.

This comment illustrates how an Indonesian perceives the superiority of Chinese Indonesians in doing business. Such acknowledgement appears to be more frequently encountered today. It becomes an example of a growing appreciation in Indonesia of Chinese business acumen. As we have discussed in the first section of this chapter, in the past an acknowledgment of Chinese ‘superiority’ in business often appeared paired with a negative attitudes toward it. Today a different picture has emerged. Acknowledging Chinese business culture does not only include an appreciation of its superiority, but also includes a criticism of Indonesian business practices and habits. An article entitled Belajar Etos Kerja dari Timur (‘Learning Work Ethics from the East’) provides an example of that criticism. It appears in Fokal, an online media founded to ‘develop the potency of young generation with various backgrounds’ (<http://www.fokal.info/fokal/redaksi.html>, my translation). The article suggests that the ethnic Chinese are successful in their business not only because they
have assiduity and capital, but also because they possess a resilient mentality to survive. According to the article, this kind of mentality is not found among ‘indigenous Indonesians.’ They ‘tend to choose to work for others and do not have enough audacity to become entrepreneurs (Fokal, 22 November 2010). Today, such criticism does not only take place in the form of auto-criticism but is also expressed by Chinese Indonesians.

Several accounts presented below may reveal the presence of the above points (appreciation and auto-criticism) in views expressed by Indonesians. The first account concerns Mr. Asdwin Noor, an Indonesian businessman and politician. Pak Asdwin did his undergraduate degree at the faculty of economics of the Surabaya based Airlangga University in the second half of the 1990s. When he was a student, he joined the Tarbiyah Movement. Upon finishing his study, he moved to Jakarta, where he began his food business as well as his political activities. In the beginning, he opened a restaurant and a bakery. However, he finally chose to concentrate on the bakery. He used a franchise system to develop his bakery and has nine outlets now. Despite his activity as a businessman, Asdwin also participates in party politics. In 2009, he was the chairperson of a branch of an Islamic political party, the Partai Keadilan dan Sejahtera (the Justice and Welfare Party).

Asdwin recognized that many Chinese Indonesians were good at business and so he was willing
to learn from them. When I visited him in September 2009, he told me how he learned business from his Chinese neighbour. “I think that if you want to learn how to do business, you should learn it from the Chinese, or from the Minangkabau people. These people have done business for generations,” he said.

Asdwin criticized his fellow Indonesians who in the past had been hostile to the Chinese instead of learning from them. This criticism was combined with an appreciation of the Chinese Indonesian’s business success:

I often ask this question to my friends, ‘why are we hostile to them [mengapa kita memusuhi mereka]? Is this because they are successful?’ This is really odd, isn’t it? We treat them with hostility due to their success, while their success is actually a result of intense effort to survive in a country where it was impossible for them to become bureaucrats. They had no other choice but to do business from zero. And the competition was often so fierce even among them. But they have been very disciplined and they know how to be economical [hemat]. (Interview with Asdwin Noor, Jakarta, October 10th 2009)
While Asdwin’s appreciation of the ‘Chinese way of doing business’ contains some characteristics that may also be found in the Indonesian admiration of the Chinese work ethic, it also mentions a quality that normally is associated with business or other activities related with money, that is ‘economical.’ It should be noted that in the past, the activity of hoarding money by the Chinese Indonesians was often referred to as ‘pelit’ (stingy), which has a negative meaning. But as we have found, Aswin chooses to use a different word that emphasizes the positive character of the activity, that is, *hemat* (thrifty). Furthermore, he also compared the tendency of the Chinese to do that activity with the opposite tendency shown by the non-Chinese, which he understood as a negative. Consider his following assertion:

> It’s different from us, the so called ‘Malay’. If we have money, what will we do? We will buy a car, won’t we? We will buy a mobile phone, won’t we? We will waste our money on things that may make us look cool. (Interview with Asdwin Noor, Jakarta, 10 October 2009)

However, Asdwin did not only regard the Chinese way of using money as only *hemat*. He also considers it as a wise way of spending. He said that in contrast to the non-Chinese Indonesians, who tended to buy luxury goods, the Chinese usually spent their money on things
that might benefit them in the future. So they tended to reinvest the money. “Unlike us, they usually buy property, sending their children to study in foreign country, and so on”, he explained. More than that, it is also worth noting that Asdwin also contests the previous stereotype of the Chinese as stingy and exclusive people.

Do you know Tung Dasem Waringin? He is a business trainer. He doesn’t discriminate [between Chinese and the non-Chinese] but shares his knowledge with us. Why is a Chinese willing to share with us? Another example is Hermawan Kertajaya, a Chinese business trainer and motivator, why is he willing to share with us? Don’t we usually think that they only share with their own group, and only enrich themselves? In fact they do not! (Interview with Asdwin Noor, Jakarta October 10th 2009)

Besides Asdwin’s views, the information given to me by a Dr. Masdar Hilmy, a Surabaya-based Muslim academic also tells us about the ways Chinese business culture is perceived. Masdar was born in 1971 in Central Java. After completing high school, he went to Surabaya to study at the State Institute of Islamic Religion (IAIN) Sunan Ampel. He started his academic career as a lecturer in the above institute in 1996. Masdar received his doctorate degree from the University of Melbourne.
Like Asdwin, Masdar also showed his recognition of Chinese Indonesians’ business ability, which he combined with an appreciation of Chinese work ethic. This recognition and appreciation is discernable in the following statement:

The mode of relation between the Javanese and the Chinese, to be honest, is based on the Javanese perception of the business access and privilege possessed by the Chinese. We must acknowledge that the economic skills of the Chinese are above average. This is because they are under pressure to survive. ... Besides, they also have a better work ethic. Why? Because they thought that if they did not do it on their own, nobody would do it for them. Thus the main issue is actually the economic and income differences. But this has been used as ammunition to develop prejudices that might be employed to attack the Chinese. Actually I think Chinese deserve (getting higher economic position). Why? Because they have a greater work ethic than the Pribumi. (Interview with Masdar Hilmy, Surabaya, March 19th 2009)

Masdar also criticized non-Chinese Indonesians for not “looking positively at what has been achieved by the
Chinese”. He expressed this criticism at another occasion during which we discussed the recent situation in China:

We are so quiet. Actually, we should have responded to the recent progress made in China. We should give a positive reaction. For example, we see so many Chinese [from China] selling in business centres in Indonesia. They don’t speak Indonesian. I wonder what they are doing. Are they supplying their goods or trading here? We actually should think, ‘what does the fact that the Chinese are trading here mean for us?’ We may think that this means that we are still dependent on the Chinese. Or we may observe how persistent they are [that they are willing to trade]. Whatever we may think, we should find a meaning in their activity. We should say, ‘there are some thing that we can learn from them, either it is their persistence or their honesty’. But we have not done that. Instead, we take it negatively. We often say, ‘don’t work as hard as the Chinese.’ Actually, we should take a positive aspect, such as, ‘you should be honest and win people’s trust [as the Chinese do], because once we are trusted, we will be trusted forever.’ So we
should look positively to what have been achieved by the Chinese. They have ethos and culture. (Interview with Masdar Hilmy, Surabaya, 19 March 2009)

As we have observed in the above statements, there are many similarities in the expressed views of Asdwin and Masdar. Both appreciate a superior Chinese business skill. Both also criticized non-Chinese Indonesians for not taking a lesson from the business practices of the Chinese. However, while Asdwin’s discussion concerning the business culture mainly concerns Chinese Indonesians, Masdar went back and forth between Chinese Indonesians and Chinese from China. This may illustrate how Chinese Indonesians and the Chinese people from China are perceived as people who share certain characters.

The perception that Chinese (from China) and Chinese Indonesians are essentially similar is held not only by non-Chinese Indonesians. Such an understanding is shared and reinforced by their Chinese Indonesian counterparts. For example, in November 2008, I listened to a public speech delivered by Hermawan Kertajaya, the Chinese management trainer and motivator mentioned earlier by Asdwin. During the speech he mentioned the Prophet Muhammad’s hadith (see Chapter 4 and 6). But he went further by telling a joke, saying that it is no insurmountable problem if Indonesians have no opportunity to go to China yet,
because they can learn from Chinese Indonesians anytime. This kind of statement, even if told as a joke, is often made by Chinese Indonesian public figures. I heard such remarks made often when I attended Muslim breakfast ceremonies (*buka puasa bersama*), especially when a Chinese Indonesian *ustadz* (Islamic religious teacher) was invited to give the speech. In addition, a fellow researcher working in Surabaya at the time I was carrying out my fieldwork told me how a Chinese Indonesian *ustadzah* (female Islamic religious teacher) also made the same joke in her religious sermon.  

Besides reinforcing the understanding that Chinese everywhere are the same, Chinese Indonesians also help to circulate narratives that promote the recognition of the Chinese business culture. Some of them even feel comfortable enough to compare the business related characteristics of the Chinese with those of the non-Chinese Indonesians. For instance, in the above public speech, Hermawan Kertajaya quoted Dahlan Iskan, a successful Javanese entrepreneur who recently was appointed by the government to Director of the Indonesian Power Company (PLN). According to Hermawan Kertajaya, *Pak* Dahlan once mentioned that he wanted to learn business from the Chinese uncles and aunties (*encek-encek dan encim encim*) who did business in JL Kembang Jepun (a Chinese business street in Surabaya) because “the more successful they were,

24 Personal conversation with Hai Waiweng.
the uglier their flip flops were.” In contrast, “once a non-Chinese Indonesian receives their salary, they would spend the money immediately.”

Conclusion

A growing appreciation of the Chinese work ethic and business acumen is emerging in Indonesian society today. Chinese are increasingly seen not just as industrious but also as having a good working spirit. In the process, Chinese Indonesians too are acknowledged for their business superiority, which includes their ability to working professionally and to expand their business networks. Some of these perceptions had existed in the past, but coupled with very negative conclusions and practices. Today, many of these negative attitudes have been replaced by a determination to learn from the Chinese.

The above development cannot be understood only as a result of freedom of expression in the Post New Order Indonesian society. Rather, it is the result of a number of interrelated developments. The rise of China as a powerful economy has had a major impact on the way its society and people are seen. Chinese work ethic and spirit are regarded as an important element in the rise of China. But they are often seen in two
contradictory ways: as characters inherited biologically and as some thing that may be learned.

The enthusiasm for the Chinese work ethics and business culture might also be seen as related to the globalizing discourse of the virtues of a free market (including the labour market) and of the neoliberal economic system. This system demands human beings to constantly improve their productivity in order to survive. Taking this into account, we may understand that some business people’s desire to learn from the Chinese work and business culture relates to their desire to improve their workforce’s competitiveness. Of course, this desire might be obscured by it being couched in the language of national development. Accordingly their appreciation of the Chinese work ethic and business culture does not mean that they ‘like’ the Chinese. They just wish to possess the qualities that Chinese have.

Finally, the above phenomenon might help us understand the position of Chinese Indonesians post-Suharto. As discussed in the last section of Chapter 2, in the aftermath of the 1998 pogrom, Chinese Indonesians began to demand better treatment and recognition, a demand supported by activists of the anti-racist movement. The appreciation of Chinese business culture described in this chapter might suggest that this demand has been fulfilled, at least to a certain extent.
In the forgoing three chapters, we have discussed the emergence of an enthusiasm for the Chinese state, governance and leadership, as well as an appreciation for Chinese working and business ethos among many Indonesians today. In this chapter, I show how along with this enthusiasm, a new set of narratives that emphasize the existence of an intimate relationship between China, Islam, and Indonesian Muslims is currently emerging. These narratives concern both historical and contemporary aspects of this relationship. While its historical dimensions are narrated in stories about Chinese Muslims’ role in the Islamization of Indonesia, its contemporary aspect is recounted by noting how Muhammad prophesied the rise of China some fourteen centuries ago. A fascinating new discourse argues that some aspects of Chinese culture
are basically Islamic, and further, that the Chinese state has treated Muslims with friendliness.

The emergence of these narratives is in conflict with the history of anti-Chinese Indonesian nationalism that has characterized both political policy and Islamic discourse for many decades. Then Indonesians perceived China as a country whose people’s religious convictions were different from the religions widely known in Indonesia. For example, articles published in the early 1960s show us that in Indonesian society between the late 1940s and the early 1960s China was perceived as a country ‘which has not one religion, or even several religions, but a bewildering muddle of many religions’ (Taylor 1963: 169). In the eyes of many Muslim Indonesians, China’s original, animist religion, which sometimes was referred to as Sinism, was ‘not really a religion at all, but more a collection of superstitions, mixed with philosophy’ (Taylor 1963: 169). In addition, Indonesian Muslims identified the Chinese in Indonesia as alien and as pork eating infidels (Coppel 1983: 28). Meanwhile, the many anti Chinese riots that took place throughout the twentieth century, even if they had economic or political motivations as many scholars have argued, were conducted in the name of Islam (Coppel 1983: 27-28, Mackie 1967: 79-82)

The contrast between this historical legacy and new narratives that emphasize the closeness of China and Islam has made the recent appearance of the latter
worth our attention. A number of questions may be raised in relation to this phenomenon. Among these questions are the following: why have these narratives emerged? How has the relationship between China and Islam been represented in these narratives? Who have been involved in the development of these narratives? It is the answers to these questions that this chapter explores.

To do so I will divide the chapter into four sections. The first section describes narratives that emphasize Chinese Muslims’ significant involvement in the development of Islam in Indonesia. The second section will put these into a context, exploring how these narratives have appeared in Indonesian society. The third section analyses the important parties or groups that have worked together to develop and circulate this new historiography. And the fourth section briefly demonstrates that the publicizing of these revisionist narratives does not occur without resistance.

Tales of Intimacy: Revising Chinese and Muslim Indonesians’ Historical Relations

In recent years narratives that claim that Muslim Chinese played a significant role in the history of Islam in Indonesia have appeared in Indonesian public discourse. These narratives can be found in many places,
particularly in work written or edited by Indonesian scholars within the last decade (for example Qurtuby 2003, Qurtuby 2007, Ambary 2007, Tanggok 2010, Wahid 2005) as well as in the Indonesian translation of books produced by foreign authors (for example, Tan 2010). They have also appeared in non-academic articles in the Indonesian mass media or in weblogs, some of which use the above scholarly works as their references. Finally, these narratives are also recounted in formal as well as in informal discussions among the interested middle class Indonesians, especially (but not limited to) of Muslims. In the course of my fieldwork I spoke with many people who referenced these narratives when talking about the history of Islam in this country.

The recent popularity of these historical narratives is a new phenomenon in contemporary Indonesia. Until quite recently, only the historical narratives that recognize Arab and Indian Muslim traders as the harbingers of Islam to the archipelago were accepted in Indonesian society. Thus the recent circulation of narratives that include the involvement of Muslim Chinese in the early development of Indonesian Islam deserves further investigation. The section begins with a description of these narratives in the scholarly works published in Indonesian in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This is followed by a discussion of how they have also reappeared in non-academic articles accessible in newspapers (including on-line versions) and weblogs. Finally, I investigate how this revisionist history

had been appropriated by Muslim Indonesians from different religious and occupational backgrounds, as well as by non-Muslim Indonesians.

**Scholarly Narratives on Chinese Islam**

The role of the Chinese in Islamizing the people of the Southeast Asian islands has not been widely discussed, either by Western scholars or by their Indonesian counterparts. Most Western scholars (such as Professor Keyzer, Pijnappel, Snouck Hurgronje, and Moquette) have argued and considered that Islam came to Indonesia either from Arab countries or from India (Meuleman 2005:24). The role of the Chinese Muslim traders was mentioned in some works, but its significance is not further elaborated (for example Ricklef 2001: 3). Probably, the first detailed discussion in the English language of the significant role of Chinese Muslims in introducing Islam to the region is argued in a book written by H.J de Graaf and Theodore G. Th Pigeaud in 1984. This work presents the original text, the English translation, and the authors’ annotation of what is called the ‘Malay Annals of Semarang and Cirebon’, which appeared earlier as an appendix to a book written by Parlindungan. According to Parlindungan, the text was discovered in two Chinese temples (klenteng) located in Semarang and Cirebon and had been written at least 400 years ago. As Ann Kumar points out,
if we accept the evidence of the material contained in this text, a number of the *wali* – the nine great apostles of Islam in Java – were Chinese, as were the first Sultans of Demak, the first significant Muslim principality in Java. (Kumar 1987: 606)25

Nevertheless, the text was considered as controversial and thus induced a lot of debates among scholars, including M.C. Rickefs, who edited de Graaf and Pigeaud’s book (See Ricklefs 1984: v, Kumar 1987, Jones 1987).

As well as Western scholars, Indonesian authors also emphasized the role of Arab and Indian Muslims in introducing Islam to Indonesia. For example, Mukti Ali, a former minister of religious affair, wrote that “it was due to the efforts of Muslim merchants – Arabs, Indians, or otherwise – that Islam took root in Indonesia from the early century of the Hijrah” (Ali 1970: 9). Meanwhile Indonesian scholars who attended the seminar of the history of the coming of Islam to Indonesia argued that the religion came to this country straight from Arabia in the first century of the Muslim Calender, that is, around the seventh century (Meuleman 2005:25, Suprayitno

25 The nine great apostles of Islam in Java, known as the *Wali Songo*, are believed to have introduced Islam to the Javanese people.
This argument allowed them to establish a certain level of purity of Indonesian Islam.

In addition, the version of the Arab and India history of the coming of Islam has also been officially accepted by the Indonesian government. It is taught in schools and proclaimed in Indonesian historical textbooks. This official acceptance by the government has also meant that narratives other than this version have not been able to be propagated. For example, in 1968 the Parlindungan’s text (which later on was annotated and translated into English by de Graaf and Pigeaud) was discussed in detail by Slamet Muljana in a book published in Indonesian (Muljana 1968, republished 2005). In this book, Muljana too emphasizes the crucial involvement of the Muslim Chinese in the Islamization process in Java. The publication of the book was strongly criticized by the Indonesian government and its claim that many of the nine wali were Chinese “led the Indonesian minister of religion to speak of an attempt to ‘Sinicize’ the history of Islam in Indonesia” (Kumar 1987: 606). The book was subsequently banned by the Indonesian attorney general for “having revealed things regarded as controversial” (Adam 2005: ix).

However, in the early years of this century, narratives that consider the role played by Muslim Chinese in Islamising Indonesia have suddenly found their way to the surface of Indonesian public discourse. Such narratives began to be discussed when former
President Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur), who claimed to be the descendent of the Sultan of Demak Sultanate, disclosed that his forefather was actually of Chinese descent (see Qurtuby 2004). Coincidentally, a book written by Kong Yuanzhi, an Indonesian expert affiliated with Beijing University, was published in Indonesian (Kong 2000). This book, titled *Muslim Tionghoa Cheng Ho: Misteri Perjalanan Muhibah di Nusantara* (Chinese Muslim Cheng Ho: the Mistery of His Journey in Nusantara), discussed Zheng He, the Muslim eunuch of the Ming Dynasty who was assigned by Emperor Yong Le to command the huge Chinese fleet in its voyages to visit many regions in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Zheng He, who in Indonesia today is known as Cheng Ho or *Sampo Taijin*, is believed to have visited Semarang during one of his voyages and spread Islam there.

However, a more systematic formulation of the discourse only began to be apparent a couple of years later, with the publication of a book authored by Sumanto Al Qurtuby (2003). Qurtuby is a young Muslim Indonesian scholar affiliated with NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama*, or ‘the Revival of Muslim Scholars’), one of ‘the two largest mass based Muslim organizations in the world’ (Bush 2009:1). Qurtuby repeats the claims of his predecessor, Slamet Muljana, by suggesting that it is not only Arab and Muslim Indian travellers who deserve the credit as the bearer of Islam to Indonesia in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, but also Muslim Chinese who had
already converted to Islam before they arrived in the archipelago. In his effort to make a historical reconstruction of the significant Chinese involvement in Indonesia’s Islamization process, Qurtuby made use of the Babad Tanah Jawi (‘History of Java Land’) and other traditional historical texts written by the Javanese, which apparently recite the life stories of several Muslim Chinese. He also made use of oral narratives alive in Javanese communities as one of his sources. In addition, he argued that the Chinese architectural influence that could be found in several mosques scattered in Java should be seen as a material proof of the involvement of the Chinese in the process of Islamization in Java (Qurtuby 2003: 39-41).

The publication of Qurtuby’s book was soon followed by the re-publication of Muljana’s book in 2005. As mentioned above, Muljana bases his analysis mainly on the Parlindungan text (which later was translated and annotated by de Graaf and Pigeaud). He compares the information contained in the text with the Babad Tanah Jawi and with another traditional popular histories of Java, ‘The Serat Kanda’. His analysis led him to support the conclusion implied in Parlindungan’s text, that is, that at least some of the Wali Songo were Chinese. It is important to note that the re-publication of this book attracted many Indonesian readers. By 2008, only three years after it was launched, the book has seen five reprints.
Soon after the publication of these two books, several other works on the same topic also appeared. One is an article titled *Orang China Menyebarkan Islam Sampai Ke Indonesia* (‘The Chinese Spread Islam as Far as Indonesia’) written by Ikhsan Tanggok, a professor of the anthropology of religion at the UIN (State Islamic University) in Jakarta (Tanggok 2010). The article was published as the opening chapter of a book titled *Menghidupkan Kembali Jalur Sutra Baru: Format Baru Hubungan Islam Indonesia Dan China* (Rebuilding a New Silk Road: New Format of the Relationship between Indonesian Islam and China), co-edited by Ikhsan Tanggok himself and several other prominent Muslim scholars. In this article, the argument that had been extensively discussed by Muljana and Qurtuby was reformulated in a briefer format. However, the article went beyond those two books by touching upon the difficult situation experienced by Muslim Chinese when the Dutch colonial government ruled over the Indonesian islands. The article pointed to the Dutch policy as the reason why more conversion to Islam among the Chinese did not take place and why even the Muslim Chinese were not assimilated into indigenous society (Tanggok 2010:45-46).

In 2007 another Indonesian scholar, Hasan Muarif Ambary, published an article entitled, *Laksamana Cheng Ho dan Peranannya dalam Penyebaran Islam di Nusantara* (‘Admiral Zheng He and His Role in the Spread of Islam in Nusantara’). The article is published in
a book titled *Laksamana Cheng Ho dan Asia Tenggara* (Admiral Zheng He and Southeast Asia), devoted to the history of the voyages made by Admiral Zheng He.\textsuperscript{26} However, while the title of this article implies that it would discuss the role of this Chinese eunuch in spreading Islam in Indonesia, it does not give much space to such discussion. There is a brief story about how Wang Jing Hong, Zheng He’s main assistant, had been sick during one of their voyages, and therefore had decided to stay in Semarang, which now is the capital of Central Java. The article also mentions that it was in this city that Wang Jing Hong, as a devout Muslim, had worked to spread Islam among the local people, some of whom were Chinese that had migrated to that city earlier (Ambary 2007: 82).

The publication of these books and articles coincide with the translation of works written by non-Indonesian scholars which reinforce the above narratives. (Those works were translated into Indonesian because Indonesian publishers felt that they

\textsuperscript{26} This collection was firstly published in English in 2005. However in this thesis I discuss its Indonesian version because it is this version that presumably plays a significant role in circulating the discourse on Admiral Zheng He and his role in spreading Islam to Indonesia. We may assume that the Indonesian version of the book potentially reaches a wider Indonesian audience not only because it is easier to read but also because it is affordable.
were now marketable).  

One example is the book written by Tan Ta Sen titled *Cheng Ho and Islam in Southeast Asia*, and published in Bahasa Indonesian by Kompas publisher. Its title in Indonesian, *Cheng Ho: Penyebar Islam dari China ke Nusantara* (‘Cheng Ho: the Harbinger of Islam from China to Nusantara’), much more explicitly emphasizes Cheng Ho’s role in spreading Islam. The aim of this book is to “examine the role played by the Ming China, and particularly Cheng Ho’s diplomatic missions, in the Islamization of insular Southeast Asia and its localization process in Java.” (Tan 2009: 3) The book argues that admiral Zheng He played a significant role in the Islamization process of the Southeast Asian region. More than that, the book also regards the Mongol invasion of Java in the late thirteenth century, one century before the arrival of Zheng He – as “a turning point in the Islamization of the Malay Archipelago.”

The argument is formulated in the following logic:

First, the Mongol forces led by the Hui Muslim commanders and made up of

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27 From my interview with staff of a big Indonesian publisher, 6 July 2010.

28 The Mongol invasion of Java took place in 1293. The then emperor of Yuan Dynasty, Kublai Khan, sent a force of twenty thousand soldiers to Java. According to Yuan dynastic history, the aim of the expedition was to punish King Kertanegara (of Singasari Kingdom) for his insolence. (Reid 1996:17)
largely Hui Muslim soldiers had weakened Majapahit as the last great Indianized kingdom in the region and effectively eliminated the state's patronage of Hinduism in Java. Secondly, in the aftermath of the invasion, a few hundreds remnants of the surviving Hui Muslim soldiers stayed put in Java. They were forefathers of the Chinese Muslim population in Java. (Tan 2009:187)

The Narratives on Chinese Islam in Media and Webpages

Narratives that recount the historical role of Muslim Chinese in the Islamization process in Indonesian are not only to be found in scholarly work. They are also present in many articles scattered in popular media including blogs. In some cases, articles that note approvingly this new historical claim may appear on several websites, when an article that has appeared in a certain website or blog is re-posted in another. There are also cases where an article published in the print media is republished in a weblog.

One of the examples of these is an article titled Jejak Islam Cina di Indonesia (‘The Trace of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia’). The information in the websites where it appeared mentioned that the article actually
appeared for the first time in Republika, an Indonesian daily known to be affiliated with Muslim groups. On 24 June 2008, the article appeared in a blog identifying itself as Bayt al-Hikmah Institute which claims to be a “research development centre for Islamic Philosophy, Mysticism, Science, and Civilization” (<http://ahmadsamantho.wordpress.com>). But on the same day, the article appeared in a different website as well, that is, the website calling itself as the Taghib li al-Wahdah al-Ummah (<http://taghibliaiwahdahalummah.blogspot.com>). Now the article is combined with another article titled Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433), which was written in English and contains a brief explanation of the life history of this Ming dynasty eunuch.

The article starts by stating “so far, it was believed that Islam spread in Indonesia due to the dakwah and tabligh conducted by the people who came from the countries of the Arabs and Persians” (http://ahmadsamantho.wordpress.com/2008/06/24/jejak-islam-cina-di-indonesia/). It next challenges that belief by noting that other people had also left Islamic traces in the archipelago, that is, the Chinese. The article then continues to argue that while Indonesians usually regard the Wali Sanga as those who introduced Islam to the Indonesians, Islam actually has existed in the archipelago before the age of the Wali Sanga. The article then mentions Zheng He’s name and provides a brief explanation about him. He is described as a ‘great
Muslim sailor from China.” The article also mentions that Zheng He visited the Indonesian islands seven times during his expeditions. “However”, says the article, “Cheng He was not the first Muslim who spread Islam and left Islamic traces in Indonesia” (http://ahmadsamantho.wordpress.com/2008/06/24/jejak-islam-cina-di-indonesia/). Based on an interview with Ikhsan Tanggok, the article maintains that there had been Muslim Chinese communities in Indonesia before Zheng He came. The article concludes that Muslim Chinese in the past had a big influence over the development of Islam in Indonesia.

Another article that deserves our attention is one that appeared in Suara Warga (Citizen’s Voice), a weblog designed by the Semarang based Suara Merdeka daily to provide a space for its readers to express their opinions. The article is entitled Walisanga dari China? (‘Did the ‘Wali Sanga ’ Come from China?’), and written by a person named Wal Suparmo (Suara Warga, 28 February 2008). It basically recounts Slamet Muljana’s version of the history of the Wali Sanga, that is, it maintains that (some of) those Javanese Saints were actually Chinese. In fact, any reader who has read Muljana’s book would sense that this article was a sort of short introduction or abstract of it. The article was apparently successful. It attracted readers’ attention because it elicited quite a few comments. Another article that was posted in the same weblog two weeks
later refutes the above conclusions and received a lot of comments from readers.

Apart from these two articles, several other articles contributing directly or indirectly to the circulation of the Chinese-influence in Indonesia’s Islamization thesis were also published in Indonesian newspapers or on websites. Among them is a report written by Yusuf Pratama published in the *Jurnal Perempuan* (‘*Woman Journal*’) website. It gives an excerpt from a lecture by Dr Soe Tjen, an Indonesian scholar who grew up in Surabaya, presented in several universities in Germany. The report describes how Soe Tjen conveyed to her readers the role of the Chinese Muslims in the history of Islam in Indonesia (as based on Muljana’s book). In addition, she also explains why during the Dutch colonial era the Chinese communities who live in these Southeast Asia islands were segregated from the native Indonesian people, pointing to the colonial government’s policy as the reason. Other examples are an article entitled *Jejak sang Admiral* (‘The trace of the Admiral’) (*Republika*, 6 June 2008, a journalistic article titled *Akulturasi Islam, Jawa dan Tionghoa* (‘The Acculturation of Islam, Javanese, and Chinese’) (*Suara Merdeka*, 15 September 2008); an op-ed written by Rukardi, titled *Peran China dalam Islamisasi di Jawa, antara Mitos dan Fakta* (‘The Role of China in the Islamization of Java, between the Myth and the Fact’) (*Suara Merdeka*, 4 September 2008), and an op-ed piece entitled *Dampak Pengakuan Keislaman*
Cheng Ho (‘The Impact of the Recognition of the Islamicness of Zheng He’), written by a Chinese Muslim named AM Adhy Trisnanto (Suara Merdeka, 2 August 2005). All of these articles basically stress the role of Chinese Muslims in the history of Islamization in Indonesia.

**Chinese Islam in a School’s Textbook**

The narrative that acknowledges the role of Chinese in bringing Islam to Indonesia is not only transmitted to the wider public through scholarly works and media articles, but at present also through the education system. For example, a recent textbook of history for Year Seven students explains that Islam was brought to Indonesia by Chinese Muslims. According to the author of this text, in the ninth century, many Chinese Muslims from Canton and other places in South Chinese migrated to Java. It is these people who brought Islam to the region. The author also points to the discovery of Chinese ceramics in Islamic tombs as evidence that supports this view (Prawoto 2006: 78).

Another textbook, which is also intended to be used by Year Seven students, specifically mentions Zheng He as the person who played a role in introducing Islam to Indonesia. This is narrated in the beginning of a chapter that discusses ‘the development, culture, politics, and governance of the Islamic kingdoms and its heritage’.
Do you know that the greatest exploration ever made in the world is the exploration made by Cheng Ho, an admiral from China who sailed to various countries? Besides exploring the world, he also spread the religion that he followed, that is, Islam. He also visited Indonesia. The evidence of his arrival is abundant and may be found in some places in Indonesia. (Supriatna, Ruhimat, and Kosim 2006: 233, my translation)

The argument that Zheng He was among those who spread Islam to Indonesia is also present in a textbook written for Year Eleven high school students:

Islam is brought by the troops of Admiral Cheng Ho from China. This hypothesis is based on the Chinese news discovered in the Sam Po Kong temple at Batu, Semarang, a temple in Talang, Cirebon, the Malay Chronicle, the Malay Annals, and the Chinese Ming Dynasty’s record. This hypothesis is supported by Denys Lombard, Antony Reid, H.J de Graff, T.H Pigeaud, Slamet Mulyana, dan Sumanto Al-Qurtuby. (Supriatna 2007: 21, my translation)
Reception of the Narratives

Besides circulating as published material these ideas are also apparent in the views expressed by Muslim Indonesians whom I met during my fieldwork. In conversations with my research participants, especially in Surabaya, similar claims were made. In some cases, an informant spontaneously pointed to these narratives in response to my general question regarding the relationship between Indonesian and China today. The way people discuss this new information show how the narratives are understood and are considered meaningful, at least by some Muslim Indonesians.

An informal conversation with Mr Azari, an architect who works for a consulting company hired to supervise the construction process of the Suramadu bridge may illustrate the way some understand the narrative on Islam from China. On 25 February 2009, I visited Azari at his office. Azari had asked me to come to his office on that day because he wanted to bring me to the location of the construction of the main span of the bridge, that is, in the middle of the Madura strait, to observe the Chinese workers working there. But while we were waiting to go to the site, I spoke with him in his office room. It was during this conversation that I mentioned to him how perplexed I was by the recent public discourse that claims that Islam came to Indonesia through China. “But that is actually true, pak! Islam came to Indonesia from China. There is even a
hadith uttered by the Prophet, saying, *seek for knowledge as far as China*.

The response by Azari surprised me. Until that time, even though I already collected some data that revealed how Indonesians were increasingly developing positive attitudes toward China and the Chinese, I still could not shake the thought that non-Chinese Indonesians, especially Muslims, might still be suspicious of the Chinese. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the topic is still rather sensitive as it argues that some Javanese *wali* were Chinese. I had imagined that Azari would view the claims with suspicion. Azari is a Javanese. He was born in 1974 and studied architecture in the 1990s at a reputable public higher education institution in Surabaya. He is also a devout Muslim. I witnessed his discipline to pray later on that day, after we came back from the construction site. After this meeting, he said that he would be glad if I could visit him at his house. We made an appointment for on the weekend, but we had to cancel it as he was very busy with another activity. Again I witnessed his piousness as a Muslim. ‘I had to bring my wife and daughter to see my parents, and after that I had to go to the *pengajian* (a prayer meeting)’, he explained to me.

Finally, when I visited his house about two weeks later to talk in his study room, I saw how he equipped his study room with a special carpet to pray, with a sign (*kiblat*) pointing to the direction of Mecca on the ceiling.
Besides, when I met with his wife, a lady of his age, she wore a Muslim veil. From our conversation it transpired that he tends to align himself with modernist Islam. For instance, he showed his disagreement with the traditionalist Muslims, which according to him, ‘...always listen to their *kiais* (traditional Islamic clergy), while actually what the *kiais* say is not always correct’. He also told me that he supported the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, *Partai Keadilan dan Sejahtera*). This party was established in 1998 by the activists of Jemaah Tarbiyah, an informal religious movement who during Suharto era was able to to revive Islamic activities on many university campuses (Machmudi 2008:1-2). ‘I gave my vote to this party, but I am not a member of them’, he told me during my visit to his house.

Not long after I talked with Azari in his office, I went to an Islamic University in the outskirts of Surabaya to meet with its rector, Professor Muhammad Jainudin (pseudonym), who outside his work as an academic and university administrator is also the chairpersons of the East Java branch of Muhammadiyah. The participation of a Muhammadiyah leader like him in Indonesia’s academic world is a well known phenomenon as this organization has made education as one of its focus since it was established in 1912 (Hefner 2000:40). I visited *Pak* Jainudin in order to find out how he perceived developments taking place in China. As if inescapable we began talking about Admiral Zheng He. When I asked for his comments about this history,
Jainudin gave me an explanation that also touched upon the history of the coming of Islam to this region:

Actually the relation from its cultural and religious aspects existed since a long time ago. We recognize [kita mengakui] that a part of those who played a role in spreading Islam to this place were actually the Chinese communities, wasn’t it? The other people were from Gujarat.

This Cheng Ho actually was among them, like the Klenteng Sampokong (the Sampokong temple) and so on, and then, there are several sources that mentioned that several Walis actually were descendents from there [keturunan dari sana]. So from cultural aspect, we have been formed [sudah terbentuk], [we] have the same cultural ties. (Interview with Prof Jainudin, Surabaya, October 2008)

Both the assertion made by Azari as well as that by Jainudin reveal to us how different Indonesian Muslims accept the claim that Chinese Muslims played a significant role in the Islamization of Indonesia. Although a devout Muslim, Azari is not a Muslim leader. He is well-educated but is not an academic. On the other hand, Jainudin is not only more than twenty years older
than Azari (he was born in 1951 while Azari was born in the 1970s) but he is educated in the West - he did an MA and PhD at a university in Canada. In addition, he is a leader of East Java’s Muhammadiyah and besides his work as rector, he also works as a professor at the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN, State Institute of Islamic Religion) Sunan Ampel, in Surabaya. Despite these differences both share the idea about Chinese bringing Islam to Indonesia. Jainudin still acknowledges the role of Indian Muslim traders, but he does not reject the claim that the Chinese Muslims were important in bringing Islam to Indonesia.

The acceptance of this position is also observable among so called ‘traditionalist Muslims’. This is interesting because in the past the traditionalist Muslims, especially those congregating under the canopy of NU rejected narratives that emphasized that Islam came to Indonesia by way of India, and argued that Islam came directly from the Middle East (Bush 2009: 25). However, when I went to the office of East Java’s NU to pay a visit to a senior and highly respected Kiai who was among NU leaders in the province, I found that he was appreciative of the narrative. I introduced myself as a researcher conducting a study on the way Indonesians perceive China in the recent years. Upon listening to my explanation about my research, the Kiai said to me, ‘It was all related to history. We have
historical ties\textsuperscript{29} with the Chinese people. It was them who brought Islam here, wasn’t it?’ When I mentioned Slamet Muljana’s book, the \textit{kiai} said that he had never heard of it.

Several months before I met the \textit{kiai}, I visited the same NU office to meet with \textit{Mr} Machmud Abadi (Pseudonym), a Muslim scholar known as one of the younger generation of the NU. \textit{Cak} Abadi\textsuperscript{30} was one of the committee members of the East Java Branch of NU. He was born in the early 1970s in Central Java, but later moved to Surabaya. After he finished his undergraduate program at the IAIN Sunan Ampel he began to teach there. He received his master degree from the same institution and he wrote a thesis on the history of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia. By the time I met him, he was pursuing a doctorate on the same subject. During a conversation at his office, \textit{Cak} Abadi asked Hew Waiweng (a PhD student from Australian National University) and me whether we had come across the book written by De Graaf. He praised it as a reliable source. When Waiweng asked him what he thought about the story that said that some of the \textit{Wali Sanga} were Chinese, \textit{Cak} Abadi said:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{29} The term that the \textit{kiai} used in Indonesian was ‘\textit{keterikatan sejarah}’.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Cak} is a term used by Surabaya people to refer to a young man.
\end{quote}
According to De Graaf, after he investigated the *Babad Tanah Melayu*, most of the *Walis* were Chinese. All of those Walis were Chinese weren’t they? From the Sunan Ampel to Sunan Kudus, and Sunan Giri, most of them (were Chinese). But especially Sunan Kalijaga. This is very different from public opinion, especially on Java. In Javanese Mythology, Sunan Kalijaga is regarded as the only representative of ethnic Javanese (among the Wali Sanga), but if we go to that story, it is so contradictory, it says that Sunan Kalijaga was a son of the regent of Tuban, who was actually a member of the armada of Admiral Cheng Ho, who had stayed in Tuban for a long time.

I think that in academic research there will always be two different theories come up at the same time. In relation to the Islamization in Indonesia: the Arab theory, and the China theory. If you ask me which one is correct, I think, both are correct, because they complement each other don’t they? (Interview with Mr Abadi, Surabaya, 15 November 2008)
Another example is my interview with Pak Dhimam Abror, a forty three year old Muslim Javanese who is an editor in chief at a well-known daily in Surabaya. Dhimam is an example of a Muslim Javanese who does not want to be classified either as modernist or traditional. Although he grew up in a family that has a Muhammadiyah background he prefers to identify himself as a moderate Muslim who shares many of the views of traditional Islam. But when it comes to the narrative about the role of Chinese in spreading Islam, his opinion appears similar to others. When I visited him in his office to ask him what kind of response Indonesia should make to the rise of China, he said,

Don’t forget, who was Admiral Zheng He. He was a Muslim! He was the one who brought Islam here. And now Indonesians want to be hostile against China? What kind of story is it? Those who brought Islam to Indonesia were businessmen from Gujarat and China. That means Islam in Indonesia is younger (than Islam in China). (Interview with Dhimam Abror, Surabaya, 20 March 2009)\(^{31}\)

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\(^{31}\) The Indonesian term he used for the word ‘younger’ is ‘*kalah tua*’, which literally means ‘less old’.
There are also Chinese Indonesians who are keen to talk about the Muslim Chinese involvement in the arrival and development of Islam in Indonesia. Mr. Robby Pang (Pseudonym), who is in his sixties, wishes that this history is better known in Indonesian society. I knew Pak Robby in Jakarta before I began to conduct this study. During fieldwork I visited him at his house which located in the back of his jewellery shop, in a small city outside Surabaya. Among the many issues that we talked about was his idea to publish a book on the discussion over the Chinese among the ‘Wali Sanga’.

Another example is Bambang Suyanto, a Chinese Indonesian Muslim from the same generation as Robby, who explained to me his view of Admiral Zheng He. He said, ‘Zheng He was a Muslim. He was an expert on trading, a skilled navigator, lover of peace, but an expert on the strategy of wars’. His emphasis on Zheng He was understandable as he is also the chair of the ‘Yayasan Cheng Ho’ (Zheng He Foundation). Moreover, Suyanto wants to build a Chinese style mosque, which by now has become famous as the ‘Masjid Cheng Ho’ (the Zheng He Mosque). The mosque is located in Surabaya. He also told me that he and other colleagues organized a seminar on Zheng He in 2008, Cheng Ho, Walisongo, dan Muslim Tionghoa Indonesia di Masa Lalu, Kini dan Esok (‘Zheng He, the Wali Sanga, and Chinese Indonesian Muslims in the Past, Today, and Tomorrow’). Suyanto told me that the purpose of organizing this seminar was to publicize certain claims, so that ‘scholars would say
and the *kiayis* would say, that Islam in Indonesia has a relationship with China.’

But Muslim Chinese are not the only Chinese who accept the narrative of the Chinese involvement in the development of Islam. For example during my visit to his house, Dr Hendy Tedjonegoro, a Chinese Indonesian academic, told me a story about an old mosque with Chinese inscription located in Sumenep, a city in Madura island. ‘The mosque is decorated with Chinese characters’, he said. Later on during our discussion, he mentioned that the mosque had Chinese and Arabic inscription because ‘it was built together’. He also mentioned to me that at least ‘three of the *sunans* (the title used to refer to the Wali Sanga) were Chinese’ (interview with Hendy Tedjonegoro, Surabaya, 3 September 2008).

To summarize, a revisionist history granting a key role to Muslim Chinese in spreading Islam in Indonesia has become well-known in Indonesian public discourse. Prohibited and censored during the New Order period, these claims now seem to be relatively well-known and accepted. Published in the form of scholarly works in Indonesian in the 2000s, they have also been reprinted and popularized in many articles scattered in the newspapers and on the Internet. Their reception is surprisingly good and those who appreciate is come from many different backgrounds, but most of them can be classified as members of Indonesian’s middle class.
Imagining the Intimacy between Contemporary China and Islam

I would like to tell all of you an interesting fact about People Republic of China. After this journey (to China) I better understand why Rasulullah SAW (Prophet Muhammad) suggested us to seek the knowledge even if we have to go China. (Muzadi 2007, my translation)

The above statement was made by Hasyim Muzadi, a former chairperson of Nahdlatul Ulama, in the aftermath of his visit to China in June 2007. After making the above statement, Muzadi talked about positive characteristics that China has demonstrated, especially its people’s working ethic. In Muzadi’s view, when Prophet Muhammad urged Muslims to seek the knowledge as far as China, he was actually asking them to combine their religiosity with positive working ethics (Muzadi 2007, my translation).

Hasyim Muzadi’s statement above is a good example of how many Indonesian Muslims begin to imagine a close connection between China and Islam.

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32 Rasulullah means the Apostle of Allah, while the word SAW is the acronym of Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam, which means ‘Allah’s Praise and Peace be Upon Him. This acronym is often added after mentioning the name of Prophet Muhammad (<http://www.islamic-dictionary.com/index.php?word=sallalahu+alayhi+wa+salam>).
They frequently cite the *hadith* that recommends Muslims to seek the knowledge as far as China and interpret it literally. The *hadith* is combined with a proliferation of stories that reflect a new closeness between China and Islam. This phenomenon is interesting because it is at odds with the way Muslim Indonesians were taught to perceive China and the Chinese in the past. How have these new stories been narrated? Who have been involved in narrating them? In which context have they been narrated? It is these questions that will be explored in this section.

While the popularity of the *hadith* is apparent in Indonesian public, I had to wait several months during my fieldwork in order to see how Muslim Indonesians today might utilize their understanding of China to internalize the *hadith*. I began to see it during my conversation with Azari and Pak Wicaksono, the Indonesian engineer that we have discussed in the previous chapter. He told me how he was impressed by the performance of his Chinese counterparts. And in his explanation of how he had been fascinated with them, he cited the *hadith*. ‘Now, this teaching has been proven. Why do I say that it has been proven? Let me give you an example...’ Following this assertion, Pak Wicaksono explained that his Chinese counterparts were superior to the Indonesian team in many different aspects. Some of these aspects were their work ethic, their mastery of technology, and their management system. For Pak Wicaksono, this superiority provided a
compelling evidence of the *infallibility* of the teaching of Islam. As he said again at the end of our meeting on that day, ‘It [the *hadith*] is now proven. Those who did not believe, now will have to believe.’

This way of viewing the relationship between the *hadith* and China is also shared by Azari. As described in the previous section, when I mentioned to him that many Indonesians claim that Islam arrived from China, he responded by saying, ‘But that is actually true, *pak!* Islam came to Indonesia from China.’. He continued with a longer story of how he finally gained an understanding of the *hadith* after observing what is taking place in China at present. He explained that before China developed, he could not grasp the meaning of the *hadith*. ‘Why did we need to study China? China was not a developed country was it?’ But as China developed and became more modern, he has found no difficulty in understanding.

With China’s economic development, it has become modern and can ‘beat’ other countries. So now I understand. Oh, this is actually the meaning of ‘seeking the knowledge as far as China’. Thus, I even think now that our Prophet can be regarded as a ‘futurologist.’. He knew what would happen in the future. He made a prophecy about it. (Interview with
Thus, like Pak Wicaksono, Pak Azari also employs his knowledge about China to strengthen his religious belief.

The hadith also surfaced during my conversation with Pak Mulyo Guntoro, a businessman and politician in Surabaya. Pak Mulyo is a former student activist who studied at the ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology) in the early 1970s. During those years he also lay the foundation for his later political activities. When I met him in 2009, he was already 60 years old but still active in politics, despite his heavy workload as a middle level businessman. His son once told me, ‘Before the general election, Bapak [Father] was busier in politics than in business’. The first time I met him he was a candidate for PAN (the National Mandate Party), an open political party founded by former Muhammadiyah chairman Dr. Amien Rais, and supported by many members of Muhammadiyah. I next visited him in his house several months after the election, and he told me that he was happy not to be elected as an MP, because the political condition of the country was so bad. During this visit, he told me his belief that many foreigners had been involved as consultants for MPs as they were producing policy advice. He sees this as an indication that Indonesia is controlled by foreign powers, and he
believes that the United States (US) is among those countries that seek to gain control over Indonesia.

I am scared that if everyone is controlled, it is true, then the US will attempt to be ‘the world’, like the song ‘we are the world. It’s actually their mission. Do you believe it is a mission? It is not just a song. It has a deep philosophy. (Interview with Mulyo Guntoro, Surabaya, 4 June 2009)

He believes that the US will not easily get what it wants – ‘China will be a stumbling stone for them,’ he explained. And when I asked him whether in his view China would have enough power to do that, he immediately replied, ‘Not only enough, China has an ability that could not be expected by all the intellectuals in the World. And that has been written in the Koran, oh no, in the hadith’.

Chinese Indonesians have also made clear efforts to popularize the hadith. During the Muslim Fasting Month in 2009, I attended a Buka Puasa Bersama (‘Breaking the Fast Together’) organized by a company that is owned by a Muslim Chinese Indonesian businessman in Jakarta. Before the breakfast took place, a Chinese Indonesian Ustadz (Islamic religious teacher) delivered a tausyiah (‘religious lecture’). The Ustadz criticized the negative attitude of many Muslim Indonesians toward the Chinese. He suggested that
instead of treating them negatively, Muslims should thank the Chinese.

Don’t only be brave enough to say to the Chinese ‘you Cina’. In fact, you have to be grateful with the presence of the Chinese (Indonesians) in this company as this made you get a job, didn’t it? In fact, the hadith of the Prophet said, ‘seek knowledge as far as China’. So, it’s fortunate that there are Chinese here. Thus you have two benefits: On the one hand, you already received this tausyiah from me, and on the other hand, you don’t need to go to China to fulfil what the Prophet had said, because the Chinese have come here. Think, if you have to go to China, how much money the country should pay for the tax, ticket, and so on. (Fieldnote, Jakarta, 4 September 2009)

Similar statements come from Chinese Indonesian Muslim religious clerics. Hew Waiweng, a colleague who did his fieldwork at about the same time as me explained that he once heard a Chinese Indonesian ustazah (female religious teacher) saying something similar in one of her tausyiah. But in addition to the Muslim Chinese, Non-Muslim Chinese too have also been involved in popularizing this hadith. For example,
in a public lecture that I attended in November 2009, Hermawan Kartajaya also reminded his audience of this hadith. In fact, he made his audiences laugh by saying, “If [you] have not had the chance to go to China yet, then you had better learn it from the Indonesian Chinese.”

The growing popularity of this hadith concurs with the proliferation of other stories that illustrate how China is actually close to Islam. Each relate to China’s recent economic development or to the proto-Muslimness of Chinese culture. I had one conversation with Dina Amirah (pseudonym), a former student of a private Islamic University in Indonesia. Dina was born in Palembang, the capital city of South Sumatra Province in the early 1980s. She did her bachelor degree in Chinese studies at an Islamic university in Jakarta. She presented herself as a devout Muslim and wears a jilbab to cover her head every time she left her house. She is interested in Chinese culture. She practices Taichi and joins a Taichi association in Jakarta. Through her interaction with other members of the association, Dina began to juxtapose this martial art with Islamic principles. ‘The opening movement of the Taichi’, she said while lifting both of her hands to the front as high as her face, “is similar with the movement during takbiratul ihram, the opening prayer of salaat. Besides, practicing Taichi needs patience, a principle taught by Islam.” She also regards Taichi as reflecting Islamic principles because it does not teach a person to attack his/her opponent.
“The principle of the Taichi is to concede the attack, to receive the energy, but not to batter the opponent with a deadly attack. Islam also does not teach us to attack our opponent.” Once they became aware that there were a lot of similarities between the principles in Taichi and in Islam, many Muslim Indonesians in her Taichi association also began to respect Chinese culture. But for Dina, these similarities are understandable because “Islam is a religion that complements earlier religions (Islam agama yang menyempurnakan).”\(^{33}\) Dina also considers that the behaviours of Chinese people reflect Islamic values (mencirikan Islam). ‘They respect to each other, are loyal to their country, and have a strong nationalist feeling. Islam teaches these kinds of things doesn’t it?’, she maintained. We see how a Muslim Indonesian imagines a close relation between what she perceives as Chinese social values/practices and Islam. And her understanding of Chinese society and culture has helped her internalize her religion. In her own words, “observing China makes me more appreciative of my own religion”.

The words ‘Islam is just a religion to complement other religions’ appeared in another conversation with a

\(^{33}\) It is apparent that she refers to an understanding of Islam espoused by moderate (Inclusive) Muslims. According to this kind of understanding, Islam came to the world not to erase other existing religions, but instead to make them perfect. (see for example Zada 2003:76, Munawar-Rachman 2010:24)
Muslim Indonesian in Jakarta. Pak Anwar is the personal assistant of a Chinese Muslim businessman in Jakarta. He is about fifty years old, and comes from Western Sumatra, one of the enclaves of the devout Muslims in Indonesia. During our conversation, Pak Anwar’s boss argued that Islam existed in China even before the era of Prophet Muhammad. In response to his boss, Pak Anwar explained, saying

The Prophet Muhammad himself said that his role was like a brick in a building, and that there had been other bricks laid before he came. So his role was to accomplish or bring to fulfilment (menyempurnakan). Thus, it is not wrong to say that Islam had existed in China earlier. (Interview with Anwar and his boss, Jakarta, 15 January 2009)

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Before fieldwork I could not imagine that a statement above might come from an Indonesian Muslim. But because this was said in front of his Chinese Indonesian boss, I assumed that it was said only in order to please him. But after we left and spoke privately while walking to the main gate of the office, Pak Anwar said,

I know what has made China successful like now. It’s their tolerance. And it is the
kind of tolerance taught in Islam. The Han is the Majority ethnic, they constitute 90 per cent, but they are tolerant to the Minorities. (Interview with Anwar, Jakarta 15 January 2009)

Thus, once again, a view that emphasizes the closeness between the behaviour or practices of the Chinese State and Islam appeared.

During my conversation with Asdwin Noor, a young Indonesian businessman and politician (see Chapter 5), a similar view came to the fore. Even though he had never been to China, Pak Asdwin appreciated China and Chinese society. He said he was informed about China from the information and stories told by his colleagues and friends:

When I went to Malaysia, a Malaysian there told me that, in China, the level of culture and civilization is so high, the way they teach idealism in a school, perhaps, is the best in the world. As an example, see how they maintain the cleanness of a place, say, if someone littered a road side, and there are several cars, say, 5 cars, if the [person in] the first car sees there is rubbish thrown on the road side, and he stopped, the [people in] the next 5 cars would know what this person would do,
they would not toot him or complain, as the person goes out of the car, take the rubbish, and put it in the proper place. They already have this kind of behaviour. And always, if a Muslim hears of it, (he will say), it’s very Islamic. For a Muslim, that is very Islamic. We need to see that. We [need to] emulate that. ... So finally, Muslims also should learn from that, so far, we only learn the theory, but how should it be applied? How should our religious life be? We have to see things more broadly. We need to learn more, because our Prophet said, ‘you must continue to learn. (Interview with Asdwin, Jakarta 10 October 2009)

These kinds of stories about the closeness between Chinese practices and Islam also relate to the friendly attitude of the Chinese government toward the Muslims. For example, Cak Abadi, the young NU leader told me his experience of visiting China together with other East Java’s Muslim leaders. He proudly described how the Chinese government had welcomed the Indonesian delegation when they arrived in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan Province. He was surprised to know that not only was Miss China present in the welcome ceremony, but so was the general secretary of the communist party, who on that occasion delivered a welcoming speech. But he was more amazed as on the
next day the general secretary went to visit the grave of Cheng Ho and made a statement at a journalism conference that this Muslim admiral was a symbol of the Chinese culture that represents Chinese Multiculturalism. Recalling what he felt, he told me, “I was amazed. How can the Chinese State, which is a communist state, respect Cheng Ho, a Muslim, so highly and make him as a symbol?” After telling what he had observed during his visit to China, he mentioned to me that such things not only positively influence Chinese and Indonesian relations in general, but also specifically the relationship between Islam and China. He also told me how he was fascinated by the way China treated her Muslim minorities today. He said that when he was in China he visited a large Islamic centre to be told that it was built with funding provided by the government. He was also informed that all activities of Muslims in China were fully funded by the government:

I was surprised when I was there and saw how the government funded Muslim community activities. Chinese government today is different from what it was before. Before, I only heard people’s story about the Chinese government that showed how it discredited religion, including Christianity. But now I have seen how they respect religion. (Interview with Machmud Abadi, Surabaya, 15 November 2009)
Because Cak Abadi often told his experience to his colleagues — a fact that I knew from some members of the NU youth in Surabaya — and given that he was in the leadership of East Java’s NU, it is creditable to presume that his version of China was circulated among other Muslim Indonesians.

In sum, the intimate relation between China and Islam is a discourse that has used the *hadith* urging Muslims to seek knowledge as far as China. It is widely cited in Indonesian public talk and is often interpreted literally. The discourse has also appeared in an argument that suggests that at least some aspects of Chinese society and culture is imbued with the values taught by Islam. And finally, the discourse appears in Indonesians’ considering that China, including its communist government, is well disposed to Islam. These narratives exist among people of different backgrounds, including both ‘indigenous’ as well as Chinese Indonesians. In nearly all cases, these statements occurred during my conversation or discussion regarding the present conditions of China. Clearly then there is a relationship between Indonesians’ understandings of socio-political conditions in China, including her position on the international stage, and their belief in the intimate historic relations between China and Islam.
A Holy Alliance? Muslim Indonesians, Chinese Communities, and China

One of the characteristics of the history and theories described above is that people from different backgrounds narrate them. In addition, as one would probably expect, China is involved in propagating such narratives. There is an alliance between at least three different parties in the construction of the imagination of the intimate relationship between China and Islam. Why have these people in particular been involved in its construction? In which ways have they been involved?

Chinese Indonesians provide funding for the development of the scholarly historical works that help to construct and circulate these narratives. An example is Sumanto Al Qurtuby’s book, which was published by Inspeal Press with the aid of the Perhimpunan Inti (Chinese Indonesian Association). During my conversation with Al Qurtuby, he mentioned that while conducting his research, he received funding from several institutions. Besides an institution in the Netherlands, Qurtuby’s research was also funded by the Perhimpunan Inti and a company producing food owned by a Chinese Indonesian businessman. In the foreword to his book, Qurtuby also wrote how the then chairman of the Perhimpunan Inti, Eddy Lembong, encouraged him to publish his master thesis as a book. And Pak Eddy Lembong wrote a foreword in the book, in which he expressed the hope that the publication of the book
might lead to a better mutual understanding between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians.

Besides the sponsoring or publishing of books, Chinese Indonesians have also been involved in spreading this revisionist history by organizing seminars on the topic, or enabling scholars working on the topic to attend a certain seminar to present their works. The organization of the international seminar with the title *Cheng Ho, Walisongo, dan Muslim Tionghoa Indonesia di Masa Lalu, Kini dan Esok* (‘Zheng He, the Wali Sanga, and Chinese Indonesian Muslims in the Past, Present, and Future’) in Surabaya on the 26th and 27th of April 2008. The seminar was organized by the Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo (Zheng He Institute), founded by members of the Muslim Chinese community in Surabaya. The report of the conference, including many ‘*kata sambutan*’ (speeches) of several Indonesian leaders including from the former President Abdurrahman Wahid, was published in a special edition of a bulletin named *Komunitas* which belongs to the PITI (the Association of the Chinese Muslims in Indonesia). Another example is the experience of a young Surabaya academic who went to Malaysia to present a paper on how Indonesians should learn from Zheng He. As the seminar organizer only agreed to give him partial funding that did not include the air ticket, he was not able to travel. But the East Java Branch of INTI agreed to give him a return airfare, which enabled him to go.
Chinese Indonesians’ involvement is not limited to assisting academics to disseminate their work. They also made an effort to stimulate Indonesian Muslim leaders to belief in the narratives. For example, the Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo organized a trip for Muslim leaders in East Java to visit China, particularly Yunnan province, to see the village and tomb of Admiral Zheng He. As one of the leader of the Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo said, ‘some Indonesian Muslims did not believe that Zheng He was Muslim, that is why I organized a trip to China, to his village and tomb, so that they saw for themselves and believed’. The funding for this trip not only came from the Chinese Muslim organization but also from non-Muslim Chinese businessmen. However they channelled their funding through the Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Ho and/or PITI.

In addition to providing funding for the discourse to develop, Chinese Indonesians have also been involved in mediating Muslim Indonesians’ opinions and relations with China. For example, in response to the Xinjiang affair in 2009, in which Chinese authorities were reported to have closed the mosques there, Muslim Indonesians protested. A demonstration was launched in July 14 in front of the Chinese consulate in Surabaya. Muslims in Jakarta planned the same demonstration on the 17th of July. However, the demonstration in Jakarta was cancelled as the JW Marriot Hotel and Ritz Carlton Hotel which are located close to the Chinese Embassy in
Indonesia were bombed, thus the area was cordoned off by the police. The bombing seemed to have no connection with the demonstration; instead it was part of a series of terrorist attacks that have frequently occurred in Indonesia since 2002. But in Surabaya, a day after the demonstration was launched, the Chinese General Consul in Surabaya visited the leaders of NU and Muhammadiyah in East Java and asked their help to explain to the Indonesian public that instead of closing the mosques, what the Chinese government was actually doing was guarding the mosques in order for them not to be destroyed by ‘irresponsible parties’. It is important to note that during this visit, Chinese Muslim leaders accompanied the Chinese general consul.

In pursuing these activities Chinese Indonesians seem to hope that the narratives of the intimate relation between China and Islam will develop and continue to circulate and that this will bring them closer to their Indonesian counterparts. Nevertheless, the deep structure of Indonesian anti-Chinese nationalism means in doing so they risk reproduction of the stereotype of the Chinese as rich (developed) people who can be exploited. In addition, positioning themselves as mediators between Muslim Indonesians and China might also reinforce the stereotype that Chinese Indonesians remain loyal to China, and thus their Indonesian nationalism might again be questioned by Indonesians.
But Chinese Indonesian Muslims apparently see these risks. Thus while their counterparts in Surabaya accompanied the Chinese general consulate to meet with Indonesian Muslim leaders, the PITI in Jakarta released a condemnation of the brutality of the Chinese government and of the Han majority. They also publicly regret the silence of Muslim communities who have ignored the misery, persecution, and discrimination experienced by Uighur Muslims. This response worked well perfectly. A historian in Jakarta told me that the Chinese associations in Indonesian should learn from the PITI. He said that they knew how it felt to be discriminated against, so they should not be silent when other people experienced the same thing. The professor then told me that the PITI was even better than the Muslim Indonesians, who often chose to remain silent. ‘They all have been bought by China’, said the professor.

Chinese Indonesians were not the only group of people making effort to spread this counter history. Indigenous Muslim Indonesians have also pursued activities that, wittingly or unwittingly, have significantly helped the circulation of the discourse. For example, the PBNU (the executive board of NU), in a cooperation with the IMA (The Indonesian Management Association) organized a seminar entitled ‘Seminar Internasional Budaya Islam-Tiongkok’ (International Seminar of the Islamic-Chinese Culture’ in May 2008. In this seminar, the then general chairman of the PBNU, Kiai Haji Hasyim Muzadi told the audience that Islam in Indonesia came
through the Chinese (and others). According to him this could be seen in the ability of the daís (the Islamic preachers) to acculturate with the local culture. Another example was the ‘Exhibition of the Muslim Culture of Indonesia and China’, which was held in July 2010, prior to the 8th Munas (national meeting) of the MUI (the Assembly of Indonesian Clergies). The event was jointly organized by the MUI and the CIA (China Islamic Association). Besides Jakarta, the exhibition was toured to other Indonesian cities, such as Surabaya and Yogyakarta, and also to Bali.

Besides organizing ‘media events’, Muslim Indonesians also helped circulate the narratives by mentioning it in their daily activities. It was usually mentioned during the religious meetings, delivered in a ceramah (lecture) by the religious teacher. For example, Prof Jainudin, the Surabaya-based Muslim Academic explained how some of the Javanese Muslims encountered the claim that a number some of the Wali Sanga were Chinese. He said,

It was conveyed during the ceramah, and in a getok tular (spread from person to person) way, that means, some of the religious society know the story about Walisongo, know that they still had relationship with China, and we understood it as something common.
Like their Chinese counterparts, Indigenous Indonesians also considered the narratives beneficial for them. As in the case of Pak Nurdin and Pak Wicaksono, the presence of those narratives has been taken as a confirmation of the truth of Islam. A comment written by a reader of Wal Supomo’s article entitled ‘Walisanga dari China?’ is an example of this:

Islam is for all. The walisongo, some came from China, some from Arabia, some others were Indonesian. The fact that Islam was accepted in the Nusantara signified that Islam was a good thought. ... The coming of Walisongo, some from China, Arabia, and so on, was a sign that Islam did not differentiate between races ... Islam is one for all. (Suara Warga, 28 February 2008)

But for others, narratives that emphasize the closeness between China and Islam are beneficial because they can strengthen the relationship between the two societies. Thus as Pak Jainudin told me, based on the historical relationship between Chinese and Indonesian Muslims in the past, Indonesian should develop close ties between it and Chinese societies in the present. Pak Jainudin mentioned this in the context of the rapid
development of China and of the fact that China is now “using their money to develop friendship with their neighbours”. But the closeness that they envisioned was not just between Indonesia and China, but also between indigenous Indonesians with the Chinese communities in this country. Cak Abadi was among those who were aware of it. He told me that the story about Chinese involvement in Indonesia’s Islamization should be further disseminated. ‘Imagine if Indonesian Muslims know that among the Chinese there is a sacred person, like Zheng He, who played a role in spreading Islam to Indonesia – they would treat the Chinese communities in the same way that they treat the Arabs.’ True, Arab Indonesians are not always fully welcome by their ‘pribumi’ counterparts. In the beginning of the twentieth century, they were excluded from the Indonesian nationalist movement just as the Chinese were. A certain degree of negative attitude toward Arab countries may be found in Indonesian society today, partly due to treatments received by Indonesian female workers in Arab (some of whom allegedly murdered their employer and were sentenced to death). But unlike stereotypes of the Chinese, negative attitude toward Arabs and Arab countries is not publicly articulated from time to time. Finally, some Muslim Indonesians liked to discuss China and its ‘Islamic characteristic’ embedded in its society because it could be used as a source of learning. Dina, for instance, felt that Indonesian Muslims should learn to achieve the success that China did. In her view, ‘if the Chinese, most of whom are not Muslims,
could do that, then we, the Muslim communities should also be able to do that also’.

Chinese government is aware that winning the hearts of Muslim Indonesians is an important diplomatic effort. Thus it also partakes in the activities that may promote the narrative of China-Islam relation. Prof Syafiq Mughni, the Chairperson of Muhammadiyah in East Java told me that the General Consul of the Chinese consulate in Surabaya visited his office one day. During that visit, the General Consul asked his advice regarding Muslim communities in Indonesia. The Chinese embassy or its consulate have also appeared during events in which the intimate relation between Islam and China is discussed. For example, during the seminar on Zheng He and the Wali Sanga organized by the Yayasan Haji Muhammad Cheng Hoo in Surabaya, the Chinese general consulate in Surabaya was among those who delivered a *kata sambutan* (opening speech). During the opening of the Exhibition of the Muslim Culture of Indonesia and China the Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Indonesia delivered a speech which further supported narratives that emphasize the intimate relation between China and Indonesia:

The friendship between China and Indonesia is rooted in a long history. 600 years ago, Admiral Zheng He, the Great Sailor of China, sailed to the eastern ocean several times, and visited the
beautiful Indonesian archipelago. This event has become a legend in the cultural exchange of both countries. Within this long history, China and Indonesia have weaved a strong friendship through the exchange of culture and religion, and together have made an important contribution to the development of the civilization of human beings. (<http://id.china-embassy.org/indo/sgdt/t719430.htm>)

Here the Ambassador reminds her audience not only of the peaceful visit of Zheng He, but also of the exchange of culture and religion, of which the coming of Islam is seen to be the most important.

In addition to these official involvements, Muslim groups in China have also been involved in spreading this discourse by cooperating with Indonesian Muslims for organizing events. An example of this is the Chinese Islamic Association’s involvement in the exhibition of Muslim culture of Indonesia and China. In fact, a delegation consisting of the leaders of this association, together with several Chinese official not only visited Jakarta, but also several other cities in Indonesia during their expedition.

Off course, Chinese scholars are also participating in the promotion of this narrative of China-
Islam relation. In fact, they have begun to be involved in expanding the ‘Chinese theory’ of the coming of Islam in Southeast Asia since the mid of 1990s (Chiou 2010:341-347). Today, Chinese Muslim scholars are also involved in further circulating the narrative. They usually came to attend the events held to discuss the close relations between Islam and China.

A Different Attitude Toward the Narratives

In the beginning of July 2010, during a brief discussion I had about Zheng He with several Indonesian students in Sydney, someone mentioned the possibility that the narrative describing him as a devout Muslim could have been a myth produced by the Chinese communities in Indonesia in order to be accepted by Indonesian indigenous (who are of course mostly Muslim). The comment demonstrates that although the revisionist history of the intimate relation between China and Islam have been well-circulated, it has not been accepted without resistance. In a nationalistic society in which anti-Chinese attitudes have been propagated for decades, wide acceptance of such a relationship would be too good to be true.

A good example of unconvinced people is seen in the disagreement with the story regarding the Chinese origin of the Wali Sanga. For example, the article written
by Wal Suparmo ‘Walisanga dari China’ (Nine Saints are from China), has been derided by several critics. Some claimed that the narratives were made up by Chinese Indonesians in order to gain a better position in the Indonesian society. Thus accused the writer of

This person has spoken well enough..! I have come so far from China to sell opium, so that Indonesians love to be stoned, and I can control them. That is why I chose the smart people to make propaganda, in order to get the sympathy from the Muslims. If not now, when will I be able to deceive the Javanese? (Suara Warga, 28 February 2008).

Clearly many of the stereotypes regarding Chinese Indonesians have been reactivated here. Among these are the claims that the Chinese mistakenly pronounce the alphabet R with L, that the Chinese speaks poor Indonesian mixed with several Chinese (Fujianese) words, and that the Chinese love to exploit Indonesian people to achieve their goal.

A Muslim woman who had a close acquaintance with Chinese Indonesian Muslims expressed a similar attitude to me. Ms Erna (Pseudonym), who originally comes from a city in East Java, works in Surabaya for a Chinese Muslim businessman. After I met her several times, we became closer, so that she felt confident to
complain about the behaviour of Chinese Muslims. She complained about the way they dress when they visit her boss. ‘They do not dress like Muslims should’, said Ms Erna. She also criticized the many bad things that happened in China. Finally, she commented about the *hadith*:

The Kiayi said, ‘seek knowledge as far as China’, but what should we learn? It’s true, the Prophet once said that, but maybe it was because you can find every (bad) thing there, from the mafia, etc, so maybe we should learn from the bad example they provided to us (we can learn not to do the same thing). (Interview with Erna, 15 September 2009)

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the complexities of narratives that describe a new imagined relation between China and Islam. Those convinced by such new stories repeated to me the significant role of the Chinese Muslims in Indonesian Islamization history. They even regard the economic development of China and its demonstrated values as a fulfilment of a prophecy. In all of this, the Chinese state is considered to be friendly to Muslims.
These convictions are shared by different groups of people, each characterized by different purposes and interests. Chinese Indonesians have cultivated this history-making to provide a defensive space for an identity construction of their own. Being a marginal group in nationalist narratives during most of the period of independent Indonesia, Chinese Indonesians seek not only to be treated equally before the law, but also to be recognized as a group of people who have made a contribution to Indonesian society. This is why they like the story of Muslim Chinese involvement in Indonesia’s Islamization history and made an effort to circulate it. Besides, as an ethnic group who have been ‘othered’ by nationalist Indonesian ‘indigenous’ society, it is understandable that Chinese Indonesians have a grave concern to be culturally accepted in Indonesia.

For many indigenous Indonesian Muslims, these narratives have been meaningful in helping them to internalize or confirm their religious beliefs. In a post-9/11 world, Islam has been growingly portrayed and stigmatized as a religion of violence and even terror. This kind of portrayal and stigma has become a nuisance for the majority of Muslim Indonesians who have learned to be tolerant and willing to accommodate many different ideas from time to time. As Professor Hefner put it,

In the first decades of twentieth century Muslims listened to the words of the nationalist anthem and made much of it
their own. In the independence era they learned the language of democracy and constitutionality, and took enthusiastically to its forms. (Hefner 2000:217)

Today, NU, biggest traditional Muslim organization in Indonesia, not only has a political culture of mutual respect and voluntarism, but also “has been surprisingly successful in articulating the values of pluralism and religious tolerance beyond its own confines ‘to a broader public sphere’” (Bush 2009:191). Thus it is understandable if Muslim Indonesians feel uneasy with the recent tendency to associate their religion with violence.

The discourse on Islam from China, which has usually been narrated concurrently with the discourse of Admiral Zheng He as peaceful ambassador of the Ming Dynasty, has created a space for a construction of an alternative picture of Islam (and the Muslims) in Indonesia. Besides, such a history is strong evidence for the idea that Islam is Rahmatan Alamin, a religion for all.

It is also significant to note how Muslim Indonesians have interpreted the hadith literally. In doing so they can regard the hadith as fulfilled, particularly in the light of China’s rapid development today. In fact, the development progress in China, and the amazement among Indonesian of the Chinese work
ethic, have made Muslim Indonesians themselves make an association between Islam and China. It is as if that by pointing out that ‘modern’ Chinese society is Islamic, they are also able to say what kind of characteristics that a Muslim society should have. Thus they are dreaming about their own reformed character. Finally, many Muslims also imagine a close relation between China and the Muslim world because they consider China to be a rising power capable of competing (or challenging) the United States. Most Muslim Indonesians whom I met during my fieldwork period explained how they were disappointed with the US and its attack on Islam. Thus the presence of a less hostile power that can challenge the supremacy of the US makes them proud and hopeful, especially as this power is regionally and culturally close to Indonesia.

It is hardly surprising that China too is involved in propagating this new history. This country has now a massive investment in Indonesia, particularly in mining and power plants. China has also provided development assistance to Indonesia. Hence, China seeks to ensure that Indonesian people notice this engagement in their country in a positive way. Anything that can draw her closer culturally with Indonesian people is beneficial. Together these groups and interests make a ‘holy alliance’ to promote the narrative of China-Islam relation possible.
Chapter Seven
The Rise of China and Chinese Indonesian’s Search for Identity after Reformasi

In the previous chapters, we have discussed the way in which narratives about China’s recent development, the Chinese work ethic, Chinese Muslims and Chinese Indonesian business culture have appeared as vital subjects of public discourse in Indonesia in recent years. The emergence of these narratives, while showing how Indonesians have become enthusiasts for China, should also be understood as expressions of resentment about the state of the nation and economy, the Indonesian State’s weakness or corruption and a dissatisfaction with the quality and productivity of the Indonesian workforce. In this chapter, we will explore the way in which Chinese Indonesians themselves have contributed to these proliferating narratives. In what ways do they understand the recent developments taking place in their ‘ancestral country’? Do they regard this emerging discourse as advantageous, both for themselves (Chinese Indonesians) as well as for Indonesia in general? Do they seek to add their voices to the China
appreciation club, transmitting their convictions about China to their non-Chinese counterparts?

We will begin this chapter with an overview of Chinese Indonesian situation post Suharto. Subsequently, we will discuss the way in which Chinese Indonesians have encountered the discourse on the rise of China. The third section will be devoted to various narratives about China that have been constructed and disseminated by Chinese Indonesians themselves. Here we will see how Chinese Indonesians too (like everybody else) view China as providing an example of a strong state and of ‘good governance’, that might provide a counterbalance to the United States. Similarly Chinese Indonesians also appreciate the Chinese for their work ethic, nationalism, and even their religiosity. These views of China replicate the views presented by non-Chinese Indonesians. Finally, in the last section, we will explore the broader context and significance of this understanding for Chinese Indonesians

**Post Suharto Indonesia and the Search for Chinese Indonesian Identity**

In May 1998, after launching massive demonstrations in response to the worsening economic crisis that hit this country, Indonesian university students and those who supported their so-called demand for reform (*reformasi*)
were finally successful in ousting President Suharto from office. The price paid for their victory was high. Four students (one of them a Chinese Indonesian) were killed when security forces shot upon demonstrators during a protest in front of Trisakti University in Jakarta. Meanwhile, anti-Chinese pogroms (popularly known as the ‘May 1998 Riots’) killed thousands of Chinese Indonesians, as well as destroyed hundreds of buildings and houses owned by ‘Chinese.’ (Pattiradjawane 2000: 225, 230-238). A week later, on 21 May, President Suharto announced his resignation. His departure from presidential office marked the end of the authoritarian New Order government that had ruled the country for 32 years and heralded a new era that quickly came to be labelled reformasi.

Both the aftermath of the ‘May 1998 Pogrom and the emergence of a more democratic atmosphere during the reformasi era allowed Chinese Indonesians to involve themselves in activities aimed at changing their political and social fate. As indicated in Chapter Two, throughout the New Order period the regime viewed the presence of Chinese Indonesians in Indonesian society as problematic. It sought a ‘solution’ in policies and laws designed to limit their social, cultural and political life. Chinese schools, Chinese organizations and the Chinese media, which were regarded as the ‘three pillars’ of Chinese society and identity, were not allowed to continue their activities (Suryadinata 1997: 12). Chinese language courses were banned and could only
be legally undertaken at two universities under strict government control. Already existing negative stereotypes of the Chinese Indonesians were circulated more intensively. These included the images of the Chinese Indonesians as conservative, secretive, and economically devious people whose loyalty to Indonesia was at best doubtful (Coppel 1983: 5-27)

Furthermore, Chinese Indonesians also often became the target of anti-Chinese riots and pogroms. The pogrom of 1998 was the most violent in Indonesian history. It has been considered to be the climax of regular violence against Chinese in the period between 1996 and 1999 (Purdey 2006: xi). The pogrom caught many by surprise. In the first half of the 1990s, political and public expression of anti-Chinese sentiments appeared to decline with Chinese Indonesians enjoying “a steady increase in respect and legitimacy in public culture” (Heryanto 1998: 96, 104-110). But toward the end of that decade, a series of anti-Chinese pogroms occurred. In the ‘May 1998’ event, not only were Chinese homes and shops ransacked, destroyed, or burned, but Chinese bodies became a target of violence as well. The gang raping of Chinese Indonesian women took place at an unprecedented level.\textsuperscript{34} These rapes

\textsuperscript{34} The rape accounts began to appear in June 1998 (Friend 2003:330). However, the rumour of the sexual harassment of Chinese Indonesian women spread as early as May 14\textsuperscript{th} 1998. I heard the rumour for the first time on May 14\textsuperscript{th} afternoon when I was on my way home from the University of
resulted in a “permanent damage that cannot be erased, replaced (like commodities), or simply put out of mind” (Kusno 2003: 151). This damage was exacerbated by the absence of serious efforts by the security forces to control the situation at that time. Commanders were busy with their own ‘problems’ and ordered their troops to respond to the rioters with smiles only (Friend 2003: 331-332). All this left many Chinese Indonesians traumatized, angry and scared.\footnote{Several victims told to me their personal experiences during the events and the prolonged traumatic feeling caused by it. For example, several years after the riots, a Chinese Indonesian woman told me how her father’s \textit{ruko} (house and shops) was ransacked and seriously damaged, and her family (consisting of her father, mother, a sister, and two brothers) had to take refuge in a nearby ‘\textit{pribumi}’ (Indigenous Indonesians) settlement. She did not experience it herself as she was not in Jakarta when it happened, but she shared the anger and dread triggered by the riot that victimized her family. In 2008, a Chinese Indonesian man told me how he was attacked by the mob when he was riding his motorcycle, unaware that a pogrom was taking place. He and his family migrated to Australia. And in 2007, a young Chinese Indonesian woman told me that she did not feel safe in Indonesia anymore, even though she or her family has not been direct victims of the violence. She decided to migrate to}
In response, some Chinese Indonesians chose to leave the country for good. On the other hand, many were not in a position to migrate. Those who stayed saw that “they had to ‘look after themselves’ because there was nobody else who could protect them” (Giblin 2003: 354). The seeds were sown for the establishment of new organizations for Chinese Indonesians to defend themselves and to seek ways to change their fate during reformasi. The two most prominent Chinese organizations established for that reason are the Pehimpunan Indonesia Tionghoa (Chinese Indonesian Association, established in 1999 and popularly known as Perhimpunan Inti) and the Paguyuban Social Marga Tionghoa Indonesia (PSMTI, Social Association of Indonesian Chinese Surnames). Through these organizations, Chinese Indonesians began to conduct various activities to create better conditions for them to live in their country. They also began a ‘search’ for their Chinese Indonesian identity.

Certain Chinese Indonesian organizations sought to advocate the acceptance of Chinese Indonesians as normal citizens of Indonesia. To do so they challenged stereotypes about Chinese Indonesians by promoting the idea that they were not separate but ‘inclusive’, Australia soon after the pogrom. She was so traumatized by the event that once she was in Australia she preferred to be identified as Chinese Australian, rather than Chinese Indonesian.
caring for other Indonesians, and thus ‘truly Indonesians’ (Herlijanto 2002: 143). They also encouraged their fellow Chinese Indonesians to show (perform) their loyalty to Indonesia and to publicize their positive contributions to the country whenever possible. As an example, Perhimpunan Inti declared that one of its purposes was to make Chinese Indonesians “one of the components of the nation that can be accepted as serving the development of the Indonesian nation and islands” (Inti website). This organization also calls all Chinese Indonesians to participate in rebuilding a new Indonesia that would be superior and more competitive in the globalized world (Herlijanto 2002: 146). Chinese Indonesian organizations also want to see more Chinese Indonesians participating in politics. Before the 2004 Parliamentary Election (the second one held in the reformasi era), they organized a number of seminars in Jakarta to introduce candidates to the Chinese Indonesian community, to educate them about political elections and to encourage them to vote (Hoon 2006: 187-188). A similar phenomenon happened in Surabaya before the 2009 Parliamentary Election and the Presidential Election following it.\(^\text{36}\) As a result of such practices, many Chinese Indonesians today

\(^{36}\) The first direct presidential election in Indonesia was held in 2004. Before that, a president was elected by the people’s assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat or MPR), which consisted of the Indonesian parliament and other representatives.
enthusiastically participate in discussions about the social and political conditions of the country. They are no longer afraid to do so and their voices are accepted among the political elites and the general public.

**Chinese Indonesians’ encounter with ‘the rise of China’**

As we mentioned in the Introduction, the discourse sketching out China’s transformation into a country with a powerful economy and an influential political role in the international community has gone global. Chinese Indonesians too have learned about ‘the rise of China’, from those very same books proliferating in Indonesian public detailing China’s successful development. These writings are relatively easy to find and are often cross-posted, increasing their impact (See for example Sugiantoro 2007). In addition, these narratives appear in discussions (both formal and informal) among Indonesians. For example, one of my interviewees, an NGO activist in Jakarta, told me how issues regarding China’s model of development often appeared during forums discussions. Meanwhile, another informant, a young Indonesian social scientist, said that he often received information about developments taking place in China chatting with friends who were social scientists, NGO activists and journalists.
Among Chinese Indonesians themselves, especially older people who in the past had a chance to receive Chinese education (before the Chinese schools were closed down by the government in the second half of the 1960s) and who were therefore fluent in Chinese, the Chinese media had become one principal source of information. This includes not only the ‘local’ Chinese media that has flourished in the aftermath of the collapse of the New Order regime (See Hoon 2006: 210-254) – some of these are not only local\(^\text{37}\) – but also the Chinese media produced in China as well. Most significant is the Chinese Central Television (CCTV) whose programs are now accessible in Indonesia via satellite. By watching its broadcasts Chinese-speaking Chinese Indonesians have become familiar with the discourse promoted by China.

Mr. Bimo (Pseudonym) is a 60 year-old businessman who is a leader of both a religious and a secular Chinese organization. As an older generation

\(^{37}\) One example is the recent affiliation of the Indonesian Daily (Yinni Ribao), the only Chinese language newspaper allowed to exist during the New Order period, with the Malaysian Chinese Newspaper, Xinchew Ribao. As a result of this affiliation, the newspaper may sometimes represent Malaysian Chinese stances to a certain extent, for instance by detaching itself from China. One of the editors of the daily told me how the newspaper became the only Chinese newspaper to regularly cover the case of milk containing melamine that was widely reported in 2008.
Chinese Indonesian, he received his basic education (from elementary school to high school) at Chinese schools. As a result he is fluent in Mandarin. In one of our meetings, Pak Bimo told me that he prefers to watch programs broadcast by CCTV rather than those produced by local Indonesian TV channels. “Most Indonesian TV channels only provide boring movie serials,” he lamented. By contrast, the CCTV, according to Bimo, spoilt their audiences with a variety of fantastic programs on many different channels. “CCTV itself has 12 channels, not to mention many other Chinese local channels. They have movie serials, special channels for education, special channels for children, special channels for economic affairs, special channels for regional news, and even a special channel for music”, he explained further. He also argued that the movie serials were of a better quality compared to those on Indonesian TV. “Many of the stories of those movie serials are about heroic themes,” he maintained. Bimo also likes the Chinese family education programs.

CCTV programs have greatly contributed to the dissemination of the discourse on the rise of China to Chinese Indonesians. For example, in one of the programs that he viewed, Bimo followed preparations for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Peoples Republic of China. This gave him the impression that China’s progress and prosperity is wonderful:
They are fabulous. They demonstrate their progress in technology, information technology, military, all of them are broadcast. [I am wondering] how many billions have they spent for that? (Interview with Mr Bimo, Surabaya, 9 September 2009)

Mr Baladewa’s experience of viewing CCTV is a second good example of how the Chinese media has brought a familiarity with officially-represented China to the attention of Chinese Indonesians. This 60-year old Chinese Indonesian frequently views the CCTV channel. As in the case of Bimo, Baladewa (pseudonym) too is fluent in Mandarin. Among the many programs that he likes, the one that impressed him most was the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic. During our meetings, he often mentioned the segment in which the famous Chinese basketball player, Yao Ming, and one of his friends made a tug of war with kids from a region devastated by an earthquake just months before the games. By watching the program, he learnt the true spirit behind China’s success:

What we can learn from the Olympic is China’s spirit. In the end it is all about human beings. The action of Yao Ming in having a tug of war with a boy from the earthquake region is an example of this. In the beginning, the boy lost. And then, it
was suggested he call for help from his friends. Several other kids came to help him, but even at that time, the kids could not win. Finally, the boy called all of his friends, and they all had a tug of war with Yao Ming once again. This time, Yao Ming could not win. The kids finally won. But the boys knew that Yao Ming actually just pretended to lose. However, this is not the issue. The important message that this performance emphasized is ‘tuanjie jiushi liliang’, that is, if we are united, we will be powerful. (Interview with Mr Baladewa, Surabaya, November 13th 2009)

Besides media coverage, travel to China has also reinforced for Chinese Indonesians the meaningfulness of the discourse on the rise of China. In April 2010 Pak Handoko (pseudonym) had just returned from China. “I went there to find inspiration”, he told me. Handoko is in his late thirties, and did not receive any Chinese education. He went to Canada to study computer science in the 1990s. After completing his undergraduate diploma, he came back to Surabaya where he started a small company that provides IT services. He also taught in a private university in that city. In 2008, Handoko’s company was hired by the Indonesian government to build a network system for one of its ministries. “I made a lot of money”, he
declared as a summary. The project also consumed a lot of his energy, and he decided to take a rest for a couple of months. He used this time to make a trip to China, not just for a vacation, but also “to find out what can be learned from the progress that China had made, and to look for business opportunities.” This explanation indicates that he already possessed the idea that China offers something. He told me that the trip was just the beginning. Impressed with developments taking place in several Chinese cities that he visited, he was now preparing for another longer trip. “I plan to spend more time to visit more cities in China, from Beijing in the North to the cities in the Southern Part China”. His goal was to find inspiration in building his own business back home.

For those who have not had the opportunity to travel to China, visits by Chinese to Indonesia have also become a means of transmission of information about China. It seems that the most influential visits are those of Chinese engineers and workers to participate in Indonesian infrastructure projects, such as the Suramadu Bridge project (see Chapter Five). To many the mere presence of these people, along with the loan provided by the Chinese government to finance the projects, demonstrates China’s willingness to help Indonesia develop its infrastructure. And as these projects usually involve the use of high technology, the involvement of the Chinese experts and workers in those
projects shows people that China has mastered advanced technology.

A story told to me by a Chinese engineer several days after the bridge was opened may illustrate this. After the ceremony the engineer witnessed thousands of Indonesians excitedly preparing to travel on the bridge in any kind of way. He said that many of those people were Chinese Indonesians. He explained that he came to that conclusion not only because their physical appearance but also because they greeted him in Chinese when they saw him working on the road side. “Some of them put their thumbs up, and shouted ‘hao’ (good),” he explained further. Furthermore, Chinese Indonesians in Surabaya not only learned about Chinese technology through the construction of the bridge but also because many non-Chinese Indonesians also circulated the discourse on China by discussing it during various formal and informal forums. For instance, Bimo became aware of the work efficiency of Chinese workers who participated in the Suramadu Bridge construction when he attended a talk in a department in the November Tenth Institute of Technology (Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November, ITS) given by Chinese managers invited to speak about how they had built their workers’ hard work ethic. Meanwhile, Soko (pseudonym), a wealthy 29-year old Chinese Indonesian businessman received information about China’s involvement in the bridge construction project from ‘indigenous Indonesians’ he met in local restaurants.
Soko is one among young Chinese Indonesian businessmen who received high education. He holds a master in law but chose to become a businessman rather than practicing law. He supplies foods to restaurants. In relation to his business, he often has lunch and dinner in local restaurants and talks with people to find out what they think about the kind of the foods he supplies. It is in these occasions that he learned about China’s participation in the Suramadu project. Before being informed by those people, he had not heard anything about China’s role in the project. He reported, “I heard it in various warungs ... When I asked people to elaborate on their remarks about the Chinese they said, ‘OK, I admit, the Chinese work assiduously, if there were no Chinese, there was no Suramadu Bride.’... So, I began to hear about the Suramadu Bridge from those people ...”

In short, similar to other citizens, there were a number of ways in which Chinese Indonesians themselves came across the idea that China is a rising country. Books, newspaper articles, blogs, and TV programs have provided them with information, including those produced by China. Secondly, travel to China has given many an opportunity to witness its rapid development (in infrastructure, urban life and industry). Thirdly, official as well as unofficial visits from mainland Chinese, especially those whose purpose is to participate in various infrastructure development projects, have provided chances for those who have not
visited China to obtain first-hand stories pertinent to the discourse.

**Chinese Indonesians’ Images of Contemporary China**

The question that needs to be asked now is what kind of images of China have Chinese Indonesians appropriated or generated? In order to answer that question, this section will be devoted to the exemplary narratives of several people on their views about China.

In July 2009, I attended an informal ‘multicultural’ gathering in Surabaya. My friend who introduced me to the group called the event ‘multicultural’ as it brought together people from many different ethnic and religious backgrounds. They were united not by religion, ethnicity, or even nationalistic feeling, but rather by their enthusiasm for drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. In fact, every time this group met in a Chinese restaurant in the centre of the city, bottles of beers and packs of cigarettes would decorate the tables. They call themselves the ‘drinkers’ community’ (*komunitas peminum*).

During one informal gathering I mentioned to people that I was conducting research on how Indonesians view China. Edward (Pseudonym), a Chinese Indonesian, immediately commented. He told me that
he believed China would supersede the United States in becoming the most powerful country in the world. “Even the Americans agree that China would be the next country to dominate the world,” he said. “They revealed this when they were asked it in a poll,” he maintained. Others at the table supported his view. Another Chinese Indonesian, Andy (Pseudonym), opined that China was the only country that could keep up with the US today. He also contended that most Indonesians were happy with the fact that China had become the US’s main competitor. “In fact, any power that can compete with the US will be appreciated by Indonesians,” he explained. The reason is, according to him, because “there should not be only one single ‘agent of truth’ in this world... and the US has presented itself as the sole ‘agent of truth’, without any country in the world to rival it.”

Edward was born in the early 1970s. He received a bachelor degree in management in the mid-1990s, and currently works in a company owned by another Chinese Indonesian in Surabaya. Andy is in his fifties. He has run his own business for a number of years. Edward is an example of a generation of Chinese Indonesians who was born during New Order period, while Andy is among those who were born before Suharto came to power. However, despite this generational gap, their images of China were similar. Both portrayed China as a powerful country able to counterbalance the ideological and economic dominance of the United States.
This understanding of China as one of the most powerful countries in the world was one that I often observed among Chinese Indonesians during my research period. The image that circulates today usually combines information about China’s recent economic progress, infrastructure development and military ability. Soko, a Chinese Indonesian businessman argues that

China’s economy is so developed now. It even wants to slow down its economic growth. In the past, China was categorized as a third world country. But now, it is respected, anywhere. Yes, even by the US, I bet that even the US wouldn’t have enough courage to attack China. (Interview with Soko, Surabaya, 5 September 2009)

However, although China’s military power is acknowledged, there is a tendency among Chinese Indonesians to focus their discussion on China’s economic development rather than on its military strengths. This indicates that the previous image of China as a threat, combined with the New Order government’s suspicion that the Chinese Indonesians would be willing to serve as China’s ‘fifth column’ (Sukma 1999: 46-51), lies at the forefront of Chinese Indonesians’ concerns. It may also show that Chinese Indonesians regard economic power as more important
than military capacity. Edward, for example, points to China’s economic performance as the main reason why he perceives that China is powerful. In his view China is economically independent because the country can sustain itself. Thus, according to Edward, “even if China was under a trade embargo, it would still survive, because it can rely on its own products.” But for Edward, China’s power is not only based on its economic independence. It is also built upon China’s ‘economic invasion’ of other countries by massively distributing its products so that those countries become relatively dependent on it.

Perhaps, the age of wars with physical weapons has ended today. Nowadays, a country ‘kills’ other countries by conducting an ‘economic war’. Once a county is economically dominated, that country will automatically ‘die’. I think, this is why the US attempted to protect their territory when China’s products entered their country. If China’s products continue to inundate their market, those products will dominate their country. They don’t want this to happen. They worry. (Interview with Edward, Surabaya, July 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2009)

The emphasis on China’s superiority in an economic sense is also observable among Chinese Indonesians in
Jakarta. Frans, a Chinese Indonesian businessman informed me how he viewed China as a rapidly progressing country. Frans frequently conducted business trips to several cities in China. During these trips he witnessed the rapid development taking place in China. However, it was the data pertaining to the Chinese state’s financial wealth (which nowadays can easily be accessed in media) that he presented to substantiate his argument that China today is a developed country: “20 years ago, China was still less developed than Indonesia. But today, it is much more developed. Its foreign reserve now is 2 trillion US dollars.”

_Pak Arief_ (Pseduonym), a 60 year old Chinese Indonesian who was educated in a Chinese school is leader of the East Java’s branch of a Chinese Indonesian organization founded in the beginning of the _reformasi_ era. Arief’s response shows how he admires and at the same time is surprised about the progress taking place in China:

Previously, I always thought that I knew China. So when in 1993 I made my first visit to this country, I felt as if I would go to a jungle. But once I landed in China, I was surprised. How beautiful this country was! The situation was far from what I had imagined. I always thought that China was a backward country. Weren’t we
always informed that China was a communist country, a bamboo curtain state, and so on? But last year I made another trip to China, again I could see that a big change had taken place. In the year 2000, I went to Shenzhen, but I hardly saw any cars on its main roads. In that year, Shenzhen was almost abandoned by people. I heard that was because the city was considered too old fashioned. But today, skyscrapers are everywhere in Shenzhen. Sometimes I wondered whether there were people staying in those buildings or not. Later on I found out that they were fully occupied. I was amazed. How can a city progress that fast? Yes, previously I always thought that I understood China. But now I finally realized that I still can’t understand it.

(Interview with Arief, Surabaya, 21 October 2009)

Many Chinese Indonesians not only admire China in general, but have also specifically praised China’s government and people. For them, the progress that China has achieved is a logical result of ‘good governance.’ Soko for example thinks that China’s government looks after the nation’s citizens and is not only concerned with the welfare of the elites. In Soko’s view, recent developments in China attest to the
government’s using money that they receive from the tax payers for the sake of the people. Thus, according to him, there is a ‘give and take’ relationship between the Chinese people, who are willing to pay the tax, and their government:

People pay taxes, but they also enjoy the benefits as those taxes are used for providing services. Their government will probably say, ‘the money coming from tax payers will be used to develop the country, to construct roads, schools, dam, highways, and so on’, and these statements are carried out, thus the people feel that the money was used for something worthwhile, even though probably a percentage of it was corruptly stolen, but only a small percentage. (Interview with Soko, Surabaya, 5 September 2009)

In Soko’s view China’s government not only takes good care of the nation’s citizens, but also of what he called their ‘former’ citizens, that is, of the Chinese overseas (like himself). He relates this view with China’s financial assistances to other countries, including Indonesia. Thus in his view, the reason China has released a handsome amount of money to assist in Indonesia’s infrastructure projects is because this country is home to a large amount of ethnic Chinese.
Edward praised the way China’s government has dealt with the problem of corruption. In his understanding, the main reason behind China’s successful curtailing of corruption is consistency in law enforcement. He told me, “no matter who you are, even you are a government official or a businessman, if you are found doing corruption, you would be sentenced to death, you would be shot in public.” While Edward was aware that by implementing such punishment China might have violated human rights, he argued that each country had its own policy regarding human rights, and that if China had not implemented such punishment, they could not have resolved the problem of corruption. In this sense Edward sees China’s authoritarian government as an example of good governance. He also clearly sees the human rights problems in China. But instead of problematizing it, he prefers to discuss other issues.

We have seen how some Chinese Indonesians admire China’s government that in their view is practicing good governance. However, they also express a similar admiration, although based on different reasons, for the Chinese people (that is, for the citizens of China). Nationalism and work ethic are crucial reasons for this admiration. Nationalism among China’s peoples was one of the topics that we discussed during the multicultural gathering. Edward commented that even though the Chinese consist of people with many different ethnicities and religion, they are united and
have prioritized their national identity, as Chinese, over other identities. “When people in Xinjiang were asked to choose either their religion or country, they made their country the first priority.” Interestingly, the conversation during which he said this took place only several weeks after the violence in Xinjiang. The violent ethnic clashes between Uighurs and Han Chinese, took place in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Province on July 5th 2009, claiming 192 lives and injuring 1,721 people (Selden and Perry 2010:2). The event was covered by Indonesian media (such as Kompas) that it would be strange if Edward was unaware of its existence.

Similarly, Bimo informed me that two years earlier he took a Chinese Muslim leader from Beijing to visit several sacred mosques in Surabaya. At that time, the Muslim leader told him, “I am a Muslim, my forefathers were also Muslims, but in my view, the life of a Muslim (in China) today is much better than in my grandfather’s age. It is much better both in economic aspects and in the freedom to practice my religion.” At the end of their conversation, the Muslim leader maintained that he would not have a good life like today if his country was not as strong as today. In Bimo’s view, the attitude shown by the Muslim was an example of a Chinese nationalistic feeling by someone who was a member of a minority group. This religious leader was first of all loyal to his country and after that to his religion. This kind of attitude is normally praised by nationalist Indonesians who during the New Order
period were systematically taught to love their country and make it their first priority, an ideology that to a certain extent has been forgotten after the fall of Suharto.

Besides exemplifying how Muslim Chinese or ethnic minority Chinese ought to show their loyalty to the nation rather than to other entities, Chinese Indonesians also see that many Chinese are willing to do something for their country. This convinces them that all Chinese have a nationalistic feeling. For example, Edward praised the way a Chinese medical doctor or athlete considered loyalty to the country more important than the money that they earn. “Chinese doctors don’t mind even if they have to commute on a bicycle. Chinese athletes try to do their best even if their salaries are low”, he maintained.

The Chinese ‘work ethic is also a characteristic of the Chinese that looms large in the discourse developed by Chinese Indonesians. The portrayal of the Chinese as diligent people emerged some fifty years ago (Taylor 1963: 170-171). In the present however this portrayal is built upon new facts, in particular of recent achievements of China and the Chinese in the image of Indonesians. According to Chinese Indonesians China’s recent achievements are the results of the

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38 This ideology was introduced at all stages of education in a subject called ‘Pendidikan Moral Pancasila’ (‘Pancasila Moral Education’).
industriousness of its people. Some of them see that the work ethic in China is somehow embedded in ‘Chinese culture’ in which they include themselves. However, they see that their fellow Chinese demonstrate a higher work ethic due to their experience of a strict system of governance.

Mr Gunawan (Pseudonym), a rich Chinese Indonesian businessman in Surabaya, is among those who take such a view. In his understanding, China’s rapid development is a result of the combination of a culture of hard work and Chinese communism as well as China’s decision to liberalize the economy:

It was all because of Chinese culture, and then the communists came, creating a society that was ready to work hard, and even too hard! Then Deng Xiaoping came to the stage, launched the open door policy. By that time, the entire hard working environment which had been shaped before began to immediately show its result. For example, they can construct buildings really fast. (Interview with Gunawan, Surabaya, 7 November 2008)

Meanwhile, according to Soko, Chinese diligence is the result of the bitter conditions of China’s recent history.
As he explained “There (China), if you don’t work hard, then you did not eat.”

Do Chinese Indonesians think that the rise of China has a positive impact on Indonesia? The answer is invariably ‘yes.’ Chinese Indonesians view China as a generous friend. Many Chinese Indonesians whom I met in Surabaya are keen to remind people about China providing financial assistance to Indonesia. They often say that some of those funds were used to finance the construction of the Suramadu Bridge. In the process they praised the Chinese government’s attitude, which in their view was low profile and did not seek public recognition.

Bimo: “We are thankful that the extraordinary economic progress that China has achieved is not accompanied by expansionist behaviour but instead is followed by an effort to build prosperity for all and harmony in the region.” In his view, this ‘effort to build prosperity for all’ is implemented by making investment in foreign countries and assisting neighbouring countries so that they too can be prosperous. He believes that Indonesia would not be able to fully actualize development projects without help from China.

If I talk about Suramadu, one may think I am criticising my own country. Actually I do not mean to be critical of my own country. But the thing is if there was no
financial support from China, I don’t think we will have the bridge by now. (Interview with Bimo, Surabaya, 9 September 2009)

So far, all the images of China presented here are positive, often because they illustrate what Indonesia is doing is wrong. It does not mean however that Chinese Indonesians do not observe China critically. Some of them see that the behaviour of China or the Chinese is often not just.

Ms Irene (Pseudonym), a Chinese Indonesian lady born in the early years of the New Order period is one of those who are very critical of China. She works for a TV station that frequently broadcasts reports on China and Chinese Indonesian culture. She criticizes the Indonesian media for exaggerating the phenomenon of the rise of China:

Do not only cover Shanghai, and so on... The quality of infrastructure and human resources in China’s hinterland are still ten years behind the standard of a developed country. This is reality. Sometimes people are too intoxicated by [silence] probably that is the fault of the media [who frequently report], ‘wow, in ten or twenty years, China will become this and that’. Even an institution in
America made a statement that China would overtake the US in 2050, but that is (only) what people remember, ‘wow fantastic’, but the reality is different. (Interview with Irene, Jakarta, 19 April 2009)

Irene also informed me that there are many Chinese Indonesians who hold a negative image of China due to the fraudulent actions of Chinese businesses in Indonesia. According to Ms Irene, in the beginning Chinese Indonesians welcomed the Chinese from China. “They said, ‘oh they have the same ancestors as us’”. But as those Chinese penetrate Indonesian traditional markets, they often get involved in fraudulent activities (Indonesian: penipuan). “This may have reduced the positive image of China among Chinese Indonesians, because they have been deceived,” she explained.

Logically, ripped-off Chinese Indonesian businessmen/women may be amongst those who develop a negative attitude toward China. This is because to them the rise of China is also seen “as the rise of a competitor with positive and negative impacts.” (Efferin and Pontjoharyo 2006: 155). Arief is one of those who expresses a particularly critical voice on the rise of China. He warns Indonesians of the possible negative impacts that the arrival of Chinese products may pose to Indonesian business:
As an Indonesian, do you think that the development in China is a threat? Several big businessmen demanded government protection so that China is not completely free to export their products to this country. Among my generation, not too many people think as I do. Many of them are just happy because the land of their ancestors is developed. But (I think), if all of their goods enter (Indonesia), our textile industry will collapse. (Interview with Arief, Surabaya 21 October 2008)

In short, the cases presented above show how Chinese Indonesians have developed a wide variety of narratives about China. They portray China as an economic and military power, a country that is rapidly progressing, a country with a good government, and a neighbour that is good for Indonesia. Meanwhile, they regard the Chinese as people imbued with nationalistic feelings. And they work hard. These images of China are in fact implicit critiques of Indonesia. People see represented in China everything that they perceive is lacking in Indonesia. Obviously these narratives have only tangential relationship with the huge range of social processes and institutional action occurring in China. However, a minority of Chinese Indonesians argue that the popular perception of China as a developed society is based more on the media’s tendency to exaggerate that country’s ‘progress’ and ‘success’ than on an
adequate understanding of real conditions there. In addition, there is also concern about the negative impact that the rise of China may have on the Indonesian economy (and perhaps on their own businesses).

Finally, it is worth reiterating that the portrayal of China presented by Chinese Indonesians is similar to those presented by many non-Chinese Indonesians. Both the positive image of China and the concern about the negative impact that the rise of China may have on Indonesian economy are voiced by indigenous Indonesians as well (See chapter four). Does it mean that Chinese Indonesians only repeat all that has been said by their non-Chinese counterparts? Or do they have their own agenda in reiterating these images of China? We will discuss these questions in the next two sections.

The Meaning of the Discourse on the Rise of China

The previous two sections have discussed various narratives about China circulating amongst Chinese Indonesians. But the main question is yet to be explored. How do Chinese Indonesians connect these narratives to their own histories and experiences in Indonesia? How does their image of China facilitate and shape their contribution to current social and political conditions? In an attempt to answer these questions, I will relate a
number of interviews that illustrate how Chinese Indonesians insert narrations on China in discussing both the present as well as ideal conditions of Indonesia. In addition, I will discuss how the narratives disseminated by China have appeared in discourses of Indonesian development.

Before presenting individual views, it is important to note that Chinese organizations themselves tend to be careful in making any official response to the discourse on the rise of China. This carefulness is in a stark contrast with their active participation in promoting its revisionist history, especially the narratives on Zheng He’s voyages and its role in the spread of Islam in Indonesia. An article based on an interview with the founder and former chairperson of the *Perhimpunan Inti* constitutes an example of this. Published in the *Perhimpunan Inti*’s official website, the article reminds its readers that China suggested Chinese overseas become good citizens of each country, abiding by its laws, helping improve education, building its economy, increasing its social harmony, and becoming a bridge between China and each of those countries. (<http://id.inti.or.id/specialnews/10/tahun/2007/bulan/04/tanggal/21/id/247/>, my translation)
The article also warned Chinese Indonesians not to be too excited with the economic power that China possesses today. In the beginning of 2000s, Tedy Jusuf, the chairperson of the PSMTI, made a statement asking Chinese Indonesians ‘not to get too close to the Chinese embassy because after all, they are Indonesians’ (Herlijanto 2002: 141). This carefulness shows that the leaders of Chinese organizations are still worried about the possible negative response from so called Indigenous Indonesians if they are too enthusiastic with the phenomenon of the rise of China. But it can also be understood as an effort to show the Indonesian public that they (the Chinese Indonesians) first consider themselves Indonesians.

However, many of the individuals whom I interviewed did not demonstrate a similar caution. While most of them agreed that as Indonesians they have to make a contribution to the building of the nation, they did that by praising China and criticizing Indonesia. In their view, at least some of the problems faced by Indonesia might be solved if it was willing to learn from China.

*Pak* Har (pseudonym), an older generation Chinese Indonesian who owns an established radio station in Surabaya is a good example. Although Har is not involved in preparing the daily programs to broadcast anymore he still regularly provides what he sees as philosophical guidance to ensure that the radio
station stays on the right track. Most programs introduce Chinese culture to the Indonesian public. According to Har, the emphasis is on culture from China, as a country, not on Indonesian Chinese culture, although in some cases there are overlaps:

More time is given to China as a country, because its development will be reckoned as one of the fastest and one that influences the pattern of life in the country and in the region...so it is developments in China that we tend to present... Chinese Indonesian culture has become part of us, but China’s development is very special today. (Interview with Mr Har, Surabaya 2009).

Why does Har and his colleagues in the station consider it worthwhile to focus on news and stories about and from China? In Har’s view, the reason is because those stories may inspire Indonesians. He explained to me that Indonesian society today is lagging behind and that action is needed. “Sometimes, many wrong decisions are considered correct here, and that explains why the result is like this. There is an urgent need for change.” In Har’s view one of the ways to change current conditions in Indonesia is by introducing China and other societies with their more advanced values to Indonesian people so that they can learn from them.
We are thankful and respectful to China as it can compete with great countries and can speak with them, and shows its influence in the world economy or world politics. We admire and appreciate it. I hope it will inspire Indonesia so that we do not sink deeper in our own problems.

(Interview with Har, Surabaya 2009)

Mr Pramono (Pseudonym), a Chinese Indonesian who graduated in the US and currently heads the library of a private university in Surabaya, agrees that the recent development in China might be useful for Indonesia. When I met him, Pramono was 39 year old. He actively participates in a branch of a Chinese Indonesian organization which is dominated by young Chinese. Thus he might be regarded as representing that group of people. Pramono claims that:

Indonesia can become like that [China]. Thus it [China] becomes a kind of inspiration. It inspires us, makes us encouraged lah. If there is an example of those who have been successful, we might be more optimistic. And I think that Indonesia actually has a great potential.

(Interview with Pramono, Surabaya, 8 September 2009)
Pramono’s statement illustrates how Chinese Indonesians aspire for Indonesia to become like China. This can only happen if Indonesians are inspired by China. There are various phenomena in China that can become inspirational. But for some Chinese Indonesians, the prevalent spirit of nationalism and the policies of China’s government are the most important ones.

This view is expressed eloquently by Ms Grace Suryani, a Jakarta based high school teacher and author of a Christian book titled *Tuhan, Mengapa Aku Harus ke Cina?* (‘Lord, Why Should I go to China?’) Suryani learned about Chinese nationalism when interacting with her Chinese friends, viewing TV programs in China, and through reading books on Chinese history written by Chinese authors. Most of this learning process took place between 2004 and 2007, when she stayed in China as an undergraduate student majoring in Chinese literature. Impressed with the level of nationalism among Chinese, she developed the idea that Indonesians should learn from this Chinese nationalism:

The first thing that Indonesians should learn is how to instil nationalism in Indonesian people. This is the most important thing, especially during a crisis. China also experienced a big crisis, in the 1900s ... how deprived was the condition of Chinese society in that period? ... But what has made them survive until today
is the fact that they still love their nation. That is different from Indonesians who have an opportunistic mentality. And one of the failures of our education is the failure to inculcate nationalism. This is the one thing that should be changed. See the children today, do they still learn to sing their regional songs (lagu lagu daerah)? Do they still learn to sing the songs of liberation (lagu lagu perjuangan)? (Interview with Grace Suryani, Jakarta, May 1st 2009)

Bimo, the Chinese organization leader who spent a lot of time watching CCTV similarly complains about the withering of national sentiment among Indonesians today:

In Indonesia today, national songs are rarely heard. In China, they are sung frequently. There are even competitions for singing national songs (I am not talking about pop songs). It is true that pop songs are popular in China. But there people also organize competitions to sing the ‘red songs’, the national songs, those songs whose lyrics praise the nation, trigger nationalistic feelings, and make singers love the nation, the motherland ...
We do not have that here. (Interview with Bimo, Surabaya, 8 September 2009)

This contrast between the situation in China and in Indonesia has inspired Bimo to do something about it. He and the Chinese Indonesian organization of which he is a member have attempted to boost nationalistic feelings among Indonesian youths by organizing similar competitions:

Last year, in relation to the celebration of Youth Oath Day [the day in which the second Indonesian youth congress took place in 1928], we organized a competition to write essays and poem with the Youth Oath as the theme. ... We saw this event as an opportunity to revive the Indonesian spirit of Bhineka Tunggal Ika (unity in diversity). (Interview with Bimo, Surabaya, 8 September 2009)

Apparently, by making this attempt, Bimo and his Chinese organizations wished to inform Indonesian public that like minority groups in China (who according to Bimo are loyal to the Chinese nation), Chinese Indonesians are also in possession of (and even actively making contribution to develop) Indonesian nationalism. Furthermore, such an attempt was a useful way to remind Indonesians of the spirit of unity in diversity, with the hope that today they might be considered as
one of the diverse groups constituting an Indonesian nation.

This does not mean that the Chinese Indonesians are unaware of the existence of nationalistic feelings among Indonesians today. They witnessed the emergence of ‘popular nationalism’ that emerged in the form of anti-Malaysian sentiments in 2007. However, some Chinese Indonesians regarded this kind of nationalism as emotional and as not contributing to the betterment of the nation like in China.

In 2007 I went there [China] with several other heads of the library..., based on what we saw I can conclude that nationalism among the Chinese is high, especially among those who work in universities. Their salary is not too big, but they work hard to build their country. That is so clear. So, not only because (they) need the salary but there is another aspect, that is, contributing to the nation. In Indonesia ‘sudden nationalism’ appears when certain cases, such as the Pendet Dance case emerge, but that is still emotional in nature, not nationalism in the form of making a contribution to the nation. It is more of a reaction. (Pramono, Surabaya, 8 September 2009)
Clearly Chinese Indonesians use their knowledge – however distorted – about Chinese nationalism to construct their own critical discourse on Indonesian nationalism. Their narratives are informed by discourses about China’s nationalism and the new patriotism built and circulated by China’s government in the aftermath of the 1989 student demonstrations, seen by some as a response to the coming of the post-Cold War era that might cause various crises in China (See He and Guo 2000: 25-26, Chen 2005: 49). Attempting to influence the entire Chinese people with ‘patriotic ideas and spirit’, the Government of China has promoted nationalistic and patriotic discourses through newspapers, radio, TV, cinemas, theatres, publications, national day, anniversaries, and festivals (He and Guo 2000: 27). Apparently, this policy is used by some Chinese Indonesians as a source of inspiration.

Does this critical and reformist discourse on the Indonesia nation constitute a double-edged sword for Indonesian Chinese? Perhaps narratives about China’s nationalism by Chinese Indonesians may also force those arguing them to once again contemplate their position as a distinct group of people who perceive themselves (and are perceived by others) as ‘having a cultural connection’ with China. This is because those narratives sometimes recount the stories of successful overseas Chinese businessmen who use their money to build philanthropic foundation in China. For example, when exemplifying the nationalistic feeling of the Chinese, Ms
Suryani mentioned the story about Chen Jiageng (Tan Kah Kee), an overseas Chinese businessmen who set up a philanthropic model that became popular in China (see Wang 2001: 250). Such a story may lead others to question Indonesian Chinese’ position as loyal Indonesians. However, at present Chinese Indonesians are careful to avoid this by emphatically stressing their Indonesian-ness and their lack of attachment to China.

I don’t feel proud [about China], because we are Indonesians. But we should learn (from them) in order to develop (maju, progress). It is true we have Chinese ‘blood’, but we were born in Indonesia. As an Indonesians, we love our country, Indonesia. But we can see China as a source of learning for Indonesia to develop. (Grace Suryani, 1 May 2009)

On the other hand many Chinese Indonesians today do not feel uncomfortable to be seen as having a cultural connection with China. Some of them, especially the older generation, even “feel that the rise of China might bring them the respect that they, as Chinese Indonesians, rarely received from other Indonesians” (Koning and Susanto 2008: 21). Mr Pramono told me that this kind of feeling is not only in the minds of older generation Chinese Indonesians, but also very apparent among the younger ones. They are happy because there is a tendency among non-Chinese Indonesians to hope
their Chinese Indonesian counterparts might play a role in building relationships with China, due to the cultural connections that they apparently possess. Thus they feel that they are making a contribution to Indonesia.

One final interesting narrative told about China by Indonesian Chinese concerns religion. Some Chinese Indonesians have encouraged themselves and other Indonesians to learn from China’s religiosity. Suryani (2008: 80-87) wrote how Indonesian Christians should learn from their counterparts in China: “we need to learn much from the churches in China, of how they can survive, and not just survive, but end up as winners.” In an interview with me, she praised Chinese Christians’ faith, which she sees as more impressive than Indonesian Christians’ faith, even though Chinese Christians did not have much access to theological education.

They just receive the content of the bible. [They just accept] that the Bible is the Word of God, and hence people have to believe in it. Whenever any of them was sick, they prayed for that person. They did not know anything about the gift of healing, and so on. They only said that if they pray in the name of Lord Jesus, the Lord would heal that person. And they prayed ‘in the name of Jesus, I prayed’, and indeed that person was healed. So
their faith is not separated from their daily life. (Grace Suryani, Jakarta, 1 May 2009)

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored both how Chinese Indonesians have encountered the discourse on the rise of China and how they have interpreted it. As we have discussed, Chinese Indonesians appreciate the development taking place in China as well as certain qualities (i.e. nationalism and assiduity) of the Chinese. Some even show admiration toward the religiosity of Chinese Christians. We have also seen how Chinese Indonesians considered developments in China as inspiring, not only for them, but also for Indonesia in general.

Some Chinese Indonesians find the narrative of the rise of China useful for the affirmation of the identity of the ethnic Chinese as Indonesians. For many decades, especially in the New Order period, the Chinese were represented as outsiders and were said to have made little contribution to the nation. After the collapse of the New Order, Chinese Indonesians demanded to be fully recognized as Indonesian nationals while at the same time being allowed to retain their ethnic identity. It is in relation to this demand that the narratives of the rise of
China are useful. By circulating the discourse and by encouraging Indonesians to emulate China, they feel that they are making a contribution to Indonesia – even if ironically this contribution has been carried out by rigorously criticizing Indonesia. Furthermore, they also perceive that their cultural connection with China is favourable for Indonesia. In their view, it might be used to build and maintain a good relationship with China, which today is increasingly seen by Indonesians as one major source of development. In this way, they gain a space previously denied them in the Indonesian history of nationalism.

Yet a Chinese Indonesian might be enthusiastic with the discourse on the rise of China for a different reason. As in the case of the radio station’s owner mentioned in this chapter, a disappointment with the current condition of Indonesia in general also accounts for a Chinese Indonesian’s love for the narrative. Similarly, a concern with the post-Cold War world politics, in which the United States has become the only superpower, has also driven some Chinese Indonesians to admire China, which in their view has potentiality to equalise the United State’s power in the near future. This attention – to Indonesian general condition as well as to global politics – suggests that Chinese Indonesians are also concerned with political issues other than those related to their position as an ethnic group in Indonesian society. The presence of such concern enables us to see a different dimension of Chinese Indonesians post
Suharto, who so far were mostly studied in relation to their expression of identity, struggle to defend their rights, and their citizenship status (See for example Hoon 2006, Giblin 2003, Turner 2003).

In addition, Chinese Indonesians are also excited by the rise of China because they can manipulate it for their own individual purposes. Chinese Indonesian business owners may use the story of the Chinese work ethic to encourage (or force) their workers to improve their working performance. This finding is to some extent consistent with Efferin and Pontjoharyo’s research which concludes that Chinese Indonesian businessmen base their response to the phenomenon of the rise of China on rational business calculation (Efferin and Pontjoharyo 2006:157). Similarly, Christians may use the story regarding Christians in China to strengthen the religiosity and faith of their fellow Indonesian Christians. This demonstrates that for some of the people that we categorise as Chinese Indonesians, ethnicity is not the only identity marker. Other identity markers, such as religion, may some times be considered as equally (or even more) meaningful than Chineseness.
Conclusion

While historically the image of China in Indonesia was mostly negative, today China, the Chinese and even Chinese Indonesians are represented in a more positive manner. This inversion has happened quite suddenly at the end of the New Order period. Is it an effect of the emergence of a more democratic regime that has abolished restrictions on public expressions of Chinese culture and identity? Or is it the political and economic uncertainty that comes with democratization that makes people search for inspiration or direction from afar? Should we understand it as a result of China’s effort to invest its soft power in Indonesia?

The materials discussed in this thesis show that most importantly, the discourse on China is a critique of present-day Indonesia and should be seen as part of people’s efforts to build a new nation in uncertain times. The soft power policy of China articulates with this preoccupation of Indonesians, meaning that there is little need for China’s soft power politics to work hard to convince Indonesians of the exemplary nature of China and the Chinese.

The discussion has also demonstrated the variety of ways in which Indonesians perceive recent
developments in China. Depending on their vantage points and contexts, people view these developments in different ways and take out of it elements that relate to their concerns. So we see that some ignore news about China that is highly appreciated by others. In brief, instead of constituting a single reality, China, and the ‘rise of China’ are different realities for different groups of Indonesians.

For example, as discussed in Chapter Four, those who are critically concerned with the economic and development model that is currently dominant in Indonesia tend to emphasize the active involvement of the Chinese state in the economic domain. They praise the state’s role in guiding the economy and relate this to economic growth and China’s increasingly powerful position in the global economy. They also think that the Indonesian state should learn from this China and emulate its economic strategy.

Others see that the economic growth of China should indicate to Indonesians that they need to better equip themselves for effective participation in the global market. As indicated in Chapter Five, those who are concerned with the human resource of the Indonesian work force are buzzing about the need to emulate the Chinese work ethic, which in their view is the key to prosperity. The discourse on a Chinese work ethic has not only been promoted by businessmen, but also by Indonesian political leaders, including President Yudhoyono and Vice President Boediono. It is used to
make changes in work conditions and labour rights, and in Ong’s words functions as a new ‘technology of subjectivity’, a technology that relies on an array of knowledge and expert systems to induce self-animation and self-government so that citizens can optimize choices, efficiency, and competitiveness in turbulent market conditions. (Ong 2006: 6)

Perhaps most surprisingly, from a religious point of view, many Muslims in Indonesian regard the recent developments taking place in China as meaningful. As shown in Chapter Six, Muslim Indonesians see miraculous economic growth in China as a fulfilment of prophecy. They relate it to the belief that fifteen centuries ago Muhammad asked his followers to seek knowledge as far away as China. They also tend to see many characteristics in Chinese society as reflecting Islamic norms and values. On top of that, to authenticate the link between Islamic China and Indonesia, there is a growing tendency to belief that Islam actually came to Indonesia through Chinese Muslims. This contrasts with an older popular and official theory that sees ancient trade links with India and the Arab world as the arrival route of Islam.

Finally, as documented in Chapter Seven, Chinese Indonesians see the growing popularity of China among Indonesians as a resource they can tap into to elevate
their status in Indonesian society. Chinese Indonesians also think that the current success of China is worth emulating in Indonesia. They promote the discourse on the rise of China in the hope that it will improve their position in society. And ethnic Chinese regard the phenomenon of the rise of China as a source of pride.

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How should we understand the growing love for China and things Chinese? To answer this question, we need to take into account the fact that Indonesian representations of China have a long history. In Chapter Two I pointed out that positive and negative representations of China (and the Chinese) have existed throughout Indonesian history. The rise and fall of China in Indonesian popular culture is related to certain societal processes. Negative images of the Chinese developed in nineteenth century Indonesia in relation to their position as ‘middlemen minority’. It got worst alongside the Indonesian nationalism which rose at the time the Chinese nationalism spread to the region. On the contrary, an enthusiasm with China emerged in late 1950s, when educated Indonesians were frustrated because their dream of ‘a golden bridge to a just and prosperous society’ had not materialized many years after the country’s independence (Liu 2006:182-185). The latter example demonstrates that in periods of economic crisis and political uncertainty people begin to reflect on other countries that appear more successful. If seen from this perspective it will become clear that to
explain the present enthusiasm for China one has to look beyond the effects of soft power efforts by China.

Indonesian appreciation of China today is in many ways intimately linked to the Indonesian history of nationalism. We have discussed in Chapter One how the founders of the Indonesian nation imagined building a ‘Glorious Indonesia’ (Indonesia Raya). Since the birth of the nation in 1945, Indonesians have been made anxious about foreign intervention. Upon independence Indonesia swiftly turned inwards, to busy itself with the forging of Indonesian citizens out of an unruly mass of people of overwhelming cultural variety. Blame was often put on evil outside forces when something went wrong. During the Sukarno period, people were warned against neo-colonialism. Even in the period of Suharto, who had a close relation with Western countries, fears about and prejudices against foreign power were rampant. While apparently mimicking much of the outside world while being the recipient of vast amounts of aid monies and foreign investment, the ideology at home was that Indonesia is both independent (merdeka) and sovereign (mandiri) and that outside forces lurk just beneath the surface ever-ready to destroy Indonesia.

Such sentiments continued to emerge during the Suharto era. The most prominent anti-Indonesia force became communism from both the outside (including China) and the inside (including many Chinese Indonesians). Today, nationalist sentiments among Indonesians target mostly the United States on account
of its alleged disrespect for Islam and Muslims since the September 11 attacks. On top of that transnational financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank as well as multinational corporations are analysed as supporting neo-colonialist forces that economically marginalize Indonesia and assist the developed world to grab Indonesia’s natural resources (Freeport) and to profit from its cheap labor (Nike). Nationalist Indonesians wish the nation to be more confident when dealing with these institutions and corporations. They also want the Indonesian government to be capable of protecting its people, territory, and natural resources against powers from outside. It is in this context that representations of Chinese sovereignty – economic and political - become meaningful (regardless of their truth).

China has indeed played a certain role in improving its image in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries. It has made efforts to ensure that these countries think highly of China’s friendliness and peaceful approach. China’s leaders are systematically projecting a form of power which does not rely primarily upon material rewards or coercion but rather derives from the intellectual, cultural, spiritual, leadership and legitimacy resources (Lampton 2008:118, 152-153). In Indonesia, the projection of this kind of power is carried out not only by establishing several Confucius Institutes and providing scholarship for Indonesian students to study in China, but also by being involved in the construction of ‘Chinese theory’ in the history of Islam (Chiou 2010). China has also provided Indonesia with a
handsome amount of money to assist in Indonesia’s infrastructure project. Furthermore, by involving Chinese migrant workers in these projects, China is able to demonstrate the hard work ethic possessed by its people. To some extent this has affected a number of Indonesians and has partly evoked the production of the image of China as an ally that is apparent in Indonesian public discourse today. But Indonesians do not only love China because of its friendliness. They love China for its perceived ability to bring development to its own people while acquiring a powerful position in the world and retaining its sovereignty in relation to transnational institutions and others that seek to change national politics. In short, a growing number of Indonesians like China for things that in their view the Indonesian state fails to accomplish.

Here nationalist sentiments also manifest themselves in the form of self-critique. In the case of contemporary Indonesia, self-criticism does not only criticize and mock the post-Suharto Indonesian state as a weak state, but also the Indonesian people and their ethos. ‘The myth of the lazy native’ (Alatas 1977) is recounted again, as popular today as it was in the colonial period. But in the age of neo-liberalism, this myth is no longer interpreted as an aspect of an ideology for legitimizing colonial domination. Indeed, Indonesians now warn each other of the danger of being lazy and remind each other of the need to have a better work ethic if they want to achieve success and build a modern nation. The recent appreciation of the Chinese work
The history of Indonesia shows that Indonesian nationalism cannot be separated from the history of Islam in the archipelago (see, for example, Lane 2008:17). As Deliah Noer (1973:7) notes, in the colonial period being a Muslim meant being an Indonesian. Islam, the idea of an Islamic state and the position of Muslims in Indonesian society have always played a role in discussions about the direction of Indonesia and its nation building project. During its formation years, the founding fathers of the nation considered the establishment of an Islamic state but fear of excluding Hindu and Christians forced them to consider the adoption of more pluralist notions for the state’s constitution. During most of the New Order period Islam as a political force was suppressed but since the fall of Suharto, Muslims have regained much ground in all domains of Indonesian society. Around the same time, global political developments since 2001 related to the ‘war on terror’ are experienced as disturbing by Muslims in Indonesia. For roughly a decade now, international and also national media have overwhelmingly represented Islam in relation to terrorism, radicalism, and violence. Muslims in Indonesia generally link this pejorative discourse to US propaganda and arrogance.

Various groups of Muslim Indonesians, especially those affiliated with Muhammadiyah and NU have responded to this situation, many by promoting Islam
with a peaceful face. Not surprisingly, the words ‘Islam is a religion for all’ (*Rahmatan Lil Alamin*) have become strikingly popular today. Another striking response is the growing enthusiasm for China among Indonesian Muslims. For some, China’s rapid economic development confirms the validity of Islamic teachings. It is the fulfilment of prophecy. If what the Prophet mentioned finally came true, does not this mean that Islam is a true religion? This wishful thinking not only puts China on a pedestal but negates an older history that emphasizes the theological conjunction between Islam and the Middle East. It revises the officially endorsed and generally accepted history of the coming of Islam to Indonesia from the Arab world. As I discussed in Chapter Six, the new version stresses the role of Muslim Chinese in the spread of Islam in the archipelago. In the process the Muslim Chinese Zheng He acts as an icon for a revisionist Islamic history.

The fact that Chinese Indonesians believe and reproduce aspects of all of these narratives and convictions shows that their growing appreciation for and interest in China cannot be seen merely as a result of an ethnic affinity. On the contrary, this thesis shows that it is linked to their search for a ‘place’ in Indonesian nationalism. As I discussed in Chapter Two, not only were Chinese Indonesians located as outsiders by the discourse on the nation, they also become a powerful ‘black book’ in New Order Indonesia. During the three decades of Suharto’s rule, they were recognized only for their economic achievements even while being
frequently pictured as the source of economic crisis, irresponsible citizenship, hypocrisy, greediness, asocial behavior, and of the evils of communism.

In this context, the current emphasis on the wonders of China and the Chinese by Chinese Indonesians are part of an effort to gain recognition. Not surprisingly, Chinese Indonesians talk a lot about nationalism in China and suggest Indonesians ought to do more for their nation, like the Chinese do. They encourage Indonesians to be more nationalistic by illustrating for them the nationalist loyalties of the Chinese. By promoting this narrative, they try to be seen as making a contribution to the discourse of Indonesian nationalism. However, as documented in Chapter 7, Chinese Indonesians are also manipulating the discourse on the rise of China for other purposes. Chinese Indonesian businessmen regard the promotion of the discourse useful for their businesses. Chinese Indonesian Christians consider stories about Christians in China as an important tool to encourage Indonesian Christians to strengthen their faith. These clearly inform us that activities conducted by Chinese Indonesians should not exclusively be observed from a victim’s point of view, as if they are only busy expressing their ethnic identity and defending their cultural and political rights.

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The material presented in this thesis shows how the representation of China means different things for
different groups of Indonesians. People select certain elements from the larger picture about the rise of China according to their own concerns and the context in which this concern is expressed. Some use stories about China for two or more purposes at the same time. For example, a Muslim businessman may recount the narratives on Chinese work ethic to confirm the validity of Prophet Muhammad’s saying as well as to justify his own business orientation and gain glory for his hardworking habits.

Many social and political problems in China that might crush people’s perception that there all is wonderful remain un-narrativized. Recognizing that Indonesians only selectively represent China is important for understanding the recent emergence of the discourse of the rise of China in popular Indonesian culture. By recognizing this, we may argue that China’s effort to invest politically in soft power is only ‘successful’ if it fits the agenda of local Indonesian people. What these agendas are composed of have been identified in this thesis. How these different agendas articulate with Indonesia’s complex social, economic and cultural landscape warrants more research. This thesis has proven that observation and analysis of the ways in which Indonesians see China sheds a clarifying light on Indonesian societal dynamics.
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