

The Chinese as suku bangsa Indonesia: Reconstructing Chinese Identity in the Context of Indonesian Conceptualizations of Nationhood

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This paper deals with current processes of reconstructing Chinese identity in the context of Indonesian conceptualizations and practices of nationhood. The Chinese in Jakarta – and Indonesia generally – have suffered considerable discrimination particularly during the era of Suharto's rule (1967–1998) when they were considered a foreign threat that needed to be kept under state control. Since the end of Suharto's regime and as a result of liberalisasi, demokratisasi and desentralisasi a revival of Chinese identity has taken off in Jakarta, initiating a public discourse on the compatibility of Chinese and Indonesian identity. This discourse refers to different categories of identity which are connected with specific conceptualizations concerning the interrelatedness of indigeneity, ethnicity and nationalism in Indonesia and Jakarta in particular and which situate Chinese identity in a contested field of 'indigenous versus exogenous'. The widely spread suspicion that a revival of Chinese identity in Indonesia would strengthen national – and transnational – sentiments among the Indonesian Chinese, however, seems to be unjustified. Rather, it seems that reviving Chinese identity aims at establishing the Chinese as a suku bangsa Indonesia – an ethnic group situated in the context of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, the Indonesian concept of Unity-in-Diversity. Whereas formerly, indigenization had to be performed by denying and hiding one's Chinese identity, the latter is now being portrayed and represented as a dimension of Indonesian national identity.