

Chinese religion: Identification and Integration

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Multi-identities and integration into local society is the common reality faced by Chinese overseas in different historical periods all around the world. It is an important subject of inquiry in Chinese Overseas studies. This paper is based on recent field research on Confucianist, Sanjiao, Buddhist, Christian and other religions in Chinese Indonesian societies. It is an inquiry into multiple identities and integration of the Chinese Overseas.

Indonesian Confucianism, as one of the six religions recognized by the government, is a localized and institutionalized religion with most of the adherents being local-born Chinese who belong to middle to lower class and cannot speak Chinese. The Sanjiao religion in Indonesia refers to Sanjiao Temples, which is led by the Association of San Jiao temples in Indonesia. This association was founded after the events following September 30th 1965. It was not the Sam Kauw Hwee founded in 1934 in Batavia. Encapsulating the research of the last few years, we can observe that:

Chinese religion is an important means of expressing Chinese identity, and resisting forced cultural assimilation. In certain times and places, it might be the only option.

At the same time, Chinese religion is also an important mode for realizing and expressing national identity, especially through exercising their legal right to practice their religion as citizens.

Secondly, Chinese religion is an important means of integration into local society. Religion can be the means through which this integration is made possible and obtains legal recognition. Even during the period of forced assimilation, religion was an important means of expressing and securing Chinese rights and equality, and pressing the government to abandon discriminatory laws and practices against the Chinese.

Chinese religion can also constitute the means through which Chinese absorb local traditions and culture, and increase the spaces for cross-cultural interaction with local society. Chinese religion is an important channel for allowing Chinese culture and traditions to gain entry into and acceptance in local society.