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WASHED-AWAY MEMORIES

A name is a very personal form of identity. Personal means individual and private. However, personal identity becomes a collective problem when it is no longer felt only by individuals but is also shared by them as a group. The problem of personal identity becomes the identity problem of an ethnic group, and is very likely a global phenomenon.

A name points to a person's identity and is personal by its nature. Linguistically, the way a name is given, the grouping of names, all point to the identity of specific ethnic groups. Chinese names are different from Javanese and Dutch names. There are some who argue that naming is merely making a mark or sign. But there are also those who perceive a name as giving meaning to their life.

Every newborn receives a name from their parents. Such is the case with myself. I received a name according to the culture and lineage of my parents as Tionghoa or "Chinese Indonesians." I was named Oh Hong Bun. This was a name that was stuck to me until I was 18 years old.

"Oh Hong Bun," in the Hokian dialect, is also "Hu Feng Wen" in Mandarin. "Oh" or "Hu" is the family name, which has the connotation of a good luck charm believed to bring fortune to its bearer. "Hong" is harvest and "Bun" is literature or the arts. We may translate the name as someone who is prosperous artistically, abundant with beauty, or someone who harvests words and literature.

Since 1967, based on the "Presidential Cabinet Decision No 127/U/Kep/12/1966," I was made to give a testimony of my own will towards changing my Tionghoa name to an Indonesian one. According to this letter of mandate, every Indonesian citizen of Tionghoa descent is "advised" (read: forced) to change their original names to the names that an "authentic" Indonesian person should have.

My 18 year old self was subject to this new regulation. I was then named Franciscus Harsono. Franciscus was my baptized Catholic name, which was given by my mother. Harsono was a name that I found for myself.

Tionghoa names indicate that a group of people are not "real" Indonesians but are foreigners, bad, unnationalistic. To "appear authentic" these names must then be changed to Indonesian names. The term "authentic" was constructed as good, original, nationalistic and part of the majority.

At first when I thought about the issue of my name having been changed into an Indonesian name, I was only thinking about myself. By this I mean that the issue was focused on my self and thus very personal. It turns out that the issue is reflective of a greater problem, which is one of discrimination. At a glance, this shows how the state has issued laws and regulations that are discriminatory to certain ethnic groups that have become an integral part of the nation. Behind the dominance of the discriminating power, however, lies a fundamental problem: one regarding the confusion within the process of nationhood.

In the book *Etnis Tionghoa dan Nasionalisme Indonesia* (The Tionghoa Ethnic Group and Indonesian Nationalism), Leo Suryadinata explains how the Indonesian concept of nationhood is very rigid and based on the concept of indigeneity. This always creates great obstructions for the integration process of the Chinese, especially the *peranakan*, or the ones with the mixed heritage or parenthood, into the crucible of the Indonesian nation. As it is, the Indonesian concept of nationhood is not only rigid, but also ambiguous. The Indonesian nation consists not only of a wide variety of “indigenous” ethnic groups, but also various immigrant ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Indians, Arabs, and a few Indo-Europeans, Japanese, and Filipinos. The Indonesian concept of nationhood lies between that of the social nation—as it is multiracial or multi-ethnic—and, especially in the case of the Chinese-Indonesians, that of the ethno-nation (a nation based on a certain race or ethnic group), which lays the emphasis on indigeneity, thus obliging the Chinese to assimilate and become “indigenous” in order to become a part of the Indonesian nation.

There was a long history of the Chinese being a go-between, a mediating group or middlemen, used at first by the Dutch colonial government to mediate the trade with the natives and to collect tax from the natives. This gave rise to a feeling of animosity among the natives towards the Chinese in Indonesia. The Dutch colonial government also differentiated the laws and regulations between the natives and the Chinese, thus making the natives consider the Chinese as foreigners, despite the fact that a lot of the Chinese had resided in the Indonesian archipelago for more than three generations, or were born from parents who were not 100% Chinese themselves.

The political activities of the Chinese in Indonesia were split. Some supported the Dutch, some others supported the politics in China and Taiwan, and a few supported the Indonesian struggle for independence from the Dutch. The siding of the Chinese with the Indonesian struggle for independence was evident in the publication of *Sin Tit Po* newspaper in the twenties in Surabaya. The editor-in-chief and the one who was responsible for the publication was Liem Koen Hian, a *peranakan* Chinese who supported the Indonesian fight against the Dutch.

Afterwards the PTI (Persatuan Tenaga Indonesia; the United Indonesian Force) was born, founded by Liem Koen Hian and Thung Laing Lee to counter the pro-Dutch Chinese, who created a feeling of animosity among the nationalist Indonesians against the Chinese. As time went, PTI could not attract enough supporters from among the *peranakan* Chinese, who were more interested in the Persatuan Tionghoa (Tionghoa Association),

which was seen as being more modern.¹ The Tionghoa Association then changed its name into Partai Demokrat Tionghoa Indonesia (Indonesian Tionghoa Democratic Party).

The birth of the Republic of Indonesia did not diminish the racist stance as shown by the new government. Some of the regulations that had been issued were racist in nature. The internal political situation that marginalized the Chinese made them more interested in the political situation in the People's Republic of China. This situation further split the Chinese, with one side supporting Indonesian nationalism and the other the People's Republic of China. The Chinese who wished to integrate with Indonesia began consolidating by going into the Indonesian political arena and established Baperki (Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia; Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship), led by Siauw Giok Tjhan.

Under Siauw Giok Tjhan, Baperki developed the doctrine of nation building and integration. This was a doctrine about constructing a nation free from racial discrimination and upholding the equality of rights and obligations among its citizens, disregarding their origins. The doctrine also sought to integrate the Chinese ethnic group into the embrace of the Indonesian nation. The integration doctrine believed in the concept of pluralism of the Indonesian nation, as asserted by its founding fathers in the saying of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," a Sanskrit phrase taken from the tome written by *Empu Tantular*.² The phrase contains the meaning of "unity in diversity." What it means by "unity" is the unity of Indonesia, albeit consisting of different ethnic groups and races.

According to Siauw Giok Tjhan, the Chinese should be welcomed as they were; they would not have to discard all elements of identity, names, religion, and tradition. Neither did they have to assimilate themselves, even physically and biologically, to become like other ethnic groups in Indonesia. The integration group had a close relationship with the first president of the Republic of Indonesia, Soekarno.

Meanwhile, the Chinese who disagreed with the integration doctrine developed their own doctrine; that of total assimilation. In Jakarta on March 24, 1960, they made a statement called the "Statement of Assimilation." In this statement, they said that the issue of minorities could only be tackled through assimilation in all kinds of fields, in an active and free manner.³ Signatories to this statement were ten *peranakan* Chinese notables.

After the birth of the Assimilation Charter, institutions emerged to support the introduction of the assimilation doctrine. One of the most influential institution was LPKB (Lembaga Pembina Kesatuan Bangsa; Institution to Foster Nation's Unity), led by Ong Tjong Hai, SH, also known as Kristoforus Sindhunata, who was a lieutenant in the Marine Corps.

The contention between Baperki with its integration doctrine and the LPKB with its assimilation doctrine went

¹ Benny G. Setiono, *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik* (The Tionghoa in the Political Fortex), page 683.

² Ibid, page 763.

³ Yayasan Tunas Bangsa, *Lahirnya Konsep Asimilasi* (The Birth of the Assimilation Concept), fourth printing, Yayasan Tunas Bangsa, Jakarta, 1989, p. 19.

on, contending for influence and support, be it from the Chinese or the government and the political groups in Indonesia. LPKB then received the support from the Army as well as from political notables in the indigenous nationalist groups. After the fall of Soekarno and the start of the New Regime in 1965, LPKB forged a durable relationship with the Soeharto regime. After the 30 September incident (in which the Indonesian Communist Party took the blame for the coup), Baperki, who had a close relationship with the Indonesian Communist Party, was brought to an end and some of the leaders were jailed. Meanwhile, the LPKB, with the support from the military, played an important role in the making of government's policies regarding the Chinese in Indonesia.⁴

On 18 July 1967, LPKB was also brought to a close and its tasks were taken over by the Interior Ministry. In fact, in 1963, LPKB had become a government institution. The concept of assimilation became the policy of the New Order regime under Soeharto. On 6 December 1967, President Soeharto issued the Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 about the Chinese Religion, Beliefs, and Tradition. The instruction restricted the Chinese' religious practices in Indonesia, allowing them to take place only within the boundaries of their home, in the family's sitting room, and within closed doors. The objective of this was to limit the influence of the Chinese culture in order for the assimilation process to take place smoothly.

In the writing of this particular policy, Sindhunata and the leaders of LPKB played a significant role. In a discussion at the office of *GAMMA* magazine in September 1999, Sindhunata admitted that he was the one who proposed this policy to President Soeharto. Prior to the issuance of the Presidential Instruction in the year 1967, on 28 January 1967 the Advisory to the Decision of the Cabinet Presidium No. 127/U/Kep/12/1988 regarding name-change for the Chinese, obliging them to switch from their three-word-name tradition to Indonesian names. From that day onward, the measure was applied throughout Indonesia. Name-change became obligatory for Chinese who had become Indonesian citizens.

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Based on historical finds, it is presumed that the Chinese arrived in Indonesia around 1 – 6 BC. The arrival of the Chinese was initiated by sea trade. It wasn't until the Airlangga empire in Tuba, Gresik, Jepara, Lasem and Banten that there are proofs of the existence of Chinese colonies there.⁵

From this historical evidence, it is apparent that the Chinese have been in Indonesia for a long period of time. However, the lengthy relation does not necessarily imply that the relation between the Chinese and the Indonesians was a harmonious one. Political problems from the Dutch era also influenced the powerful discordances that permeate this relation.

I don't know exactly when my ancestors first set foot in Java. However, I can gauge that I may be a fourth or fifth generation. Even my grandmother from my father's side and great grandmother from my grandfather's

⁴ Ibid, page 745.

⁵ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Hoakiu di Indonesia*, 1960, reprint Garba Budaya, 1998, page 206-211.

side are Javanese. Yet this does not affect my position as an Indonesian who's still considered "inauthentic" for bearing a Chinese name.

Indonesia is made up of many different national tribes. However, in the case of the Chinese, there is an affinity of the idea of an "ethnonation" to the concept of nationhood, pivoting on the notion of the indigeneous. "Ethnonation" refers to the concept of being an Indonesian based on "race" or "ethnicity." Even though the Tionghoa have become Indonesian citizens, they still stand aside from the indigeneous and are considered strangers, even though elements of "the stranger" are only very faint in them. Citizenship is considered differently from nationhood, to include civil rights. The slogan *Bhinneka Tungga Ika* only applies to indigeneous Indonesia people, and not for the Tionghoa.⁶

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During the Soeharto era, my artworks were oriented towards social and political problems. I was also an active participant in an NGO that worked to defend the rights of people who were repressed by the Soeharto regime. However, when the era collapsed, I began to question my own identity as a Tionghoa person who continued to be discriminated against by the Soeharto government.

Since the fall of that government, reformations occurred in all aspects of life, especially in politics. In 2002, the then president, Abdulrahman Wahid, oversaw significant changes, not to mention the abolishment of the previously mentioned law and the implementation of the Presidential Decision Memo Number 6 Year 2000. With this new regulation, *Imlek-Capgome* was allowed to be celebrated openly, without the interference from the arms of the law.

Ever since then I continued to look back at my own history, my family's history and the history of the Tionghoa from my birth town, Blitar. The memory of my own Chinese name that hasn't been used since 1967 returned. I tried to remember and to scroll this name down. Remembering my ancestral history, remembering my own name was an effort to grapple with identity and to dig deep for cultural roots that have been yanked out for 35 years. This effort was the source of my inspiration in creating my work.

Although political changes for the better have occurred and there is now a greater sense of freedom than before, the attempt to search for identity and cultural roots remains a difficult task to do. Challenges and suspicions continue to be felt, from the indigenous Indonesian as well as the Tionghoa themselves. They doubt my nationalism by questioning my identity. Yet I continue to work and research into my own as well as my familial history and the Chinese Indonesians in the process of creating an Indonesian nationality. To acknowledge history does not imply defeat. Acknowledging and remembering do not imply that one has betrayed a sense of nationalism. Remembering puts identity as a link that connects past socio-cultural norms in supporting the future, for someone who accepts plurality as part of national wealth.

Mitha Budhyarto - Translation

⁶ Leo Suryadinata, *Etnis Tionghoa dan Nasionalisme Indonesia*, Penerbit Buku Kompas, Oktober 2010, page 188.