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### ***Strangers at Home: History and Subjectivity among the Chinese Communities of West Kalimantan, Indonesia***

HUI YEW-FOONG

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Hui Yew-Foong has written a highly nuanced ethnographic monograph on how the Chinese of West Kalimantan, Indonesia, negotiate their stranger-subjectivity with their host locale. The author begins with a two-chapter section, “Looking for Home in a Foreign Land,” by performing a dual-task: reconstructing the history of the Chinese community in West Kalimantan during the Japanese Occupation (1942–45) and the Sukarno years (1945–65) in light of the emergence of post-Suharto era local Chinese historical narratives, while at the same time deconstructing the narrativity of these recent Chinese histories.

Chapter two reconstructs the history of a hitherto unnoticed (e.g. in Heidhues 2003) anti-Japanese underground organization, the West Borneo Anti-Japanese Alliance (西婆羅洲反日同盟), an organization that has a big place in the aforementioned post-Suharto historical narratives. The Alliance was organized by a group of progressive Chinese sojourners in the region, and they carried out low-level tactical resistance during the Occupation. The Alliance’s leaders were executed together with, according to one estimate, some 3,000 other community leaders, half of whom were Chinese, on trumped up charges of conspiring to overthrow the Japanese (p. 55). Hui argues that although their tactical resistance meant little to overall wartime strategy, and probably had no direct connection with the alleged plot leading to the Japanese massacre, “framing . . . [their resistance] in close proximity to the force of death during the Occupation dissimulates the helplessness of the Chinese communities” (p. 63). This serves as an “important signpost” for the narrators’ memory of subsequent events in the post-war years.

Chapter three examines the histories of the struggle between the pro-Guomindang (Republic of China, ROC) and pro-Chinese Communist (People’s Republic of China, PRC) factions of the

Chinese community between 1945 and 1965. As most ethnic Chinese remained Chinese citizens in the early Indonesian years, intra-communal politics continued to be divided along Chinese political lines. But what remains to be explained is the overwhelming support for the PRC during the 1950s and 1960s. According to an Indonesian survey in 1957, some 25,125 (72%) students went to pro-PRC schools while 9,792 (28%) attended Catholic or pro-ROC schools (p. 84). Hui argues that the memory of anti-Japanese resistance and the common experience of the massacre led the Chinese to shed their previous dialect-group divisions, and to throw in their lot with the newly established PRC. Examining the popular progressive plays and songs from the period, he finds that they have “no resonance with the everyday lives of the Chinese in West Kalimantan who sang them, but they nevertheless resonate within the imagination of the singers” (p. 97). This resonance, argues Hui, stems from the “convergence of two desires—identification with the idiom of origin, and identification with the force of history” (p. 105).

Chapter four, “The New (Dis)order: Making Strangers at Home” looks into the “Narratives of Violence” surrounding the memories of the Suharto regime’s mass expulsion of the Chinese from the West Kalimantan countryside in 1967. From October to December 1967, in a bid to flush out communist guerillas in the region, the military instigated local Dayaks to evict between 50,000 and 117,000 rural Chinese to the cities. Between a few hundred to two to three thousand were estimated to have been killed in the process (p. 131). Hui’s is the first academic account to critically examine the Chinese experience of the event (see also Davidson 2008). Corroborating Davidson’s findings that the Dayaks were instigated to issue eviction orders first, and kill where the Chinese failed to comply, Chapter four uses personal interviews and narratives published in the post-Suharto Chinese press to confirm that the Chinese were indeed given a day to a week’s notice to leave their homes before the massacring bands arrived. The chapter shows the various ways by which the state “de-subjectivized” the Chinese by means of extortionist objectification of them as mere “signifier of wealth,” or by classifying them as illegal foreigners. By recounting their stories in the press, Hui argues that “Chinese Indonesians are re-producing their subjectivity through the Chinese press” (p. 146).

Chapter five, the “Vicissitudes of the Communist Underground,” argues that for the hundreds of West Kalimantan Chinese who joined up with the Sarawak communists guerilla fighters to form the Mount Bara Force (1967–69), or the New-Style Partai Kommunis Indonesia (PKI) force led by the regional PKI chief Sofyan Said Achmad (up to 1974), their act of taking up arms to defend themselves against the injustices of state violence and their post-Suharto era attempts to record their histories for posterity constituted exceptional “moments of sovereignty.” Unlike the subjects in Chapter three who longed for China as an ancestral homeland, or those in Chapter four who yearned to defend their physical homes from state destruction, these voluntary fighters were able, Hui argues, to transcend the “master-guest dialectic,” and to “speak not as strangers, but as settlers who have a right to the land” (p. 172).

Taking a detour beyond the political trajectory thus far charted, Chapter six surveys the major forms of contemporary localized popular Chinese deities and spirit-mediums—the *Dabogong* (大伯公) and *Datuk Gong*; and the religious practices which help the local Chinese to “negotiate estrangement.” On the perennial debate over whether the *Dabogong* serves as the localized *Tudigong* (土地公, the common Chinese tutelary deity) of the Southeast Asian Chinese, Hui finds that the *Dabogong* in West Kalimantan takes on the names of local legendary Chinese pioneers, and are known more generally as *kaishan dizhu* (开山地主)—literally, a pioneering landlord (pp. 197–198). Hui makes a more original contribution to the study of Chinese popular religions by arguing that the Chinese fetish of conversing with the Other through an ethnic-Other spirit-medium (the *Datuk*), mediates the foreign-ness and “reflect(s) a primordial sense of ‘not-being-at-home.’” The “haunting force” of the “foreign,” is externalized and “(mis)recognized” as antagonistic spirits (pp. 217–218).

Chapter seven and the epilogue summarize new developments for the community constituted within the New Order from 1965 to the regional elections of 2007. After 1965, funeral associations became the only bodies the state could tolerate to serve the Chinese. But with time, they too acquired quasi-representative functions when the state used these funeral associations to help register the stateless Chinese in the 1980s and to canvass the community for support in the highly manipulated elections of the 1980s and 1990s. In spite of this, the West Kalimantan Chinese found other means of evolving a more meaningful social existence: providing private voluntary fire-fighting services in cities across the region, an effort that has persisted to this day. After the fall of Suharto, the revival of Chinese language education through private tuition classes was facilitated by the West Kalimantan Chinese’s homecoming exile network in Jakarta and Hong Kong. Non-governmental organizations emerged to champion the rights of the Chinese as a minority group within a multicultural vision of Indonesia. Even as the Chinese made significant political gains in the 2007 regional elections, the recurring pattern of inter-ethnic violence (most recently targeting the Madurese migrants) in this region continues to weigh heavily in the minds of the observer and his subjects.

This is an ambitious project that aims to analyze the subjectivity (desires, fetishes, and memories) of the West Kalimantan Chinese, all of which, as the author argues, fell short of any meaningful identity with their host nation. Hui engages mainly with Georg Simmel’s sociology of the stranger and Derrida’s deconstruction of the estranged subject’s desire for primordial origins in thinking through the problem of foreign subjectivity in a given locale. The wide range of topics covered under the umbrella term “subjectivity” is breathtaking, but it is at times also limiting in terms of how it helps readers achieve a more objective knowledge of the condition of the Chinese in West Kalimantan against what we already know through scholarship on Indonesia and Overseas Chinese. Some potentially critical themes—the relationship between history, memory, subjectivity, and contemporary society; the objectification of a group as mere “signi-

fiers of wealth” under the New Order; and the Derridian trope of an impossible longing for an originary home, could have been developed further if there had been a tighter focus. The book deals exclusively with the subjectivity of the stranger guest. More engagement with the objectifying forces of the host would help to clarify how and why identity was truncated, but will perhaps also show how, glimpses of which we caught in Chapter seven, some form of accommodative identity was achieved under the New Order regime. All in all, its theoretically novel ethnographic approach, and pioneering research on the Chinese in West Kalimantan make this a key reference work for future scholarship in the fields of the Overseas Chinese and Indonesian regional studies.

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### *The Family in Flux in Southeast Asia: Institution, Ideology, Practice*

YOKO HAYAMI, JUNKO KOIZUMI, CHALIDAPORN SONGSAMPHAN, and RATANA TOSAKUL, eds.  
Kyoto: Kyoto University Press and Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2012, ix+546p.

*The Family in Flux in Southeast Asia: Institution, Ideology, Practice* is a long-awaited addition to family studies in Southeast Asia. It is edited by a multidisciplinary team of leading scholars on Thailand and Myanmar, Yoko Hayami and Ratana Tosakul (anthropology), Junko Koizumi (history), and Chalidaporn Songsamphan (political science). Presently, both Hayami and Koizumi are professors at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University, and Songsamphan and Tosakul are associate professor and senior lecturer, respectively, at Thammasat University. The volume consists of an introduction (by Hayami) and 23 chapters, and examines wide-ranging aspects of family change and continuity in modern Southeast Asia that loosely spans from the nineteenth century to the present. While the book primarily focuses on Thailand, it also features comparable cases from Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Taiwan. The present volume is a product of a three-year research program entitled “Changing ‘Families’” in which Thammasat University and CSEAS at Kyoto University served as home institutes between 2006 and 2009. The contributors are the former participants in this research initiative and come