Abstract

This dissertation attempts to explore the Indonesia government’s policies towards the local Chinese and the transformation of local Chinese communities since 1998. The fall of Soeharto in 1998 was the watershed of the transition from an authoritarian Indonesia to a gradually democratic Indonesia. Thus, it is interesting to see how the government’s policies have been changing and how the ethnic Chinese react to these changes under three successive regimes after Soeharto, namely B. J. Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati Soekarnoputri.

This thesis will first present a brief historical survey of the Indonesian Chinese prior to 1998. Following this is a brief description on the background of each government after Soeharto. It will then focus on the government’s policies towards the Chinese in economic, political, cultural and social aspects. Next, the emphasis will be on the reactions and transformation of the Chinese communities since 1998. It is meaningful to note that the interaction between the government’s policies and the Chinese communities has gradually replaced the domination of the government’s policies during Soeharto regime. In the meantime, my analysis of the inner structure of the Indonesian Chinese communities demonstrates that the Chinese themselves are not unified but diverse and complicated. The concluding chapter suggests that while the Chinese as a minority are not likely to undergo fundamental changes, their heightened consciousness and activism may present an important force for the government to rethink and tackle some of the discriminatory policies against the Chinese.

It is undeniable that the fate of the Indonesian Chinese has improved since 1998, due to not only the change of government’s policies, but also their self-consciousness towards the surroundings. But the Chinese in Indonesia have not been entirely free of discrimination; there are still a number of discriminatory regulations and practices against the ethnic Chinese. The future of Indonesian Chinese is unpredictable, but hopefully, the Chinese will find creative ways to confront the uncertain destiny.