Abstract

In the post-World War II era, the subject of ethnic relations between the Chinese and the indigenous in Indonesia and the Malay peninsula has been studied by many scholars. No comparative studies of such relations in the immediate post-war years, however, has been made. This is an attempt to compare the causes and nature of the racial conflicts in Indonesia (focusing on Java and Sumatra) and Malaya in the post-war years.

The racial conflicts in both areas, which broke out soon after the Japanese had surrendered, may be seen as being triggered off by two entirely different political movements. In Indonesia it was the indigenous nationalist struggle against the Dutch colonial power, while in Malaya it was the socialist movement led mainly by members of the ethnic minority.

Indonesia saw a much longer history of ethnic conflicts which was associated with the beginning of indigenous nationalism early in the 20th century; business competition between Chinese and Indonesian businessmen was then a most important cause of conflict. On the other hand, it appears that in Malaya the more recent event of Japanese occupation played a crucial part in ethnic animosity. After the war, the MPAJA's attempt to punish Chinese and Malays who had collaborated with the Japanese army slid into an intense racial conflict well out of its control. Anti-Chinese activities during the Indonesian revolution was a much more complicated phenomenon; economic, political, religious, and cultural factors were deeply interwoven. The unfortunate incidents were also more wide-spread than those in Malaya. In Malaya, the religious factor stood out most prominently. The economic differences between the Chinese and Malays, probably less obvious than in Indonesia, might have been further defused by the socialist character of the MCP. The nature and causes of conflict as manifested in the conflict in Malaya were less complicated, partly due to the comparatively less advanced development of the Malay nationalist movement.