

Indonesia

Response to Information Request Number:	IDN99001.ZNY
Date:	23 July 1999
Subject:	Indonesia: Information on ethnic Chinese in Indonesia
From:	INS Resource Information Center
Keywords:	Indonesia / Christianity / Cultural assimilation / Ethnic minorities / Islam / Minority languages / Religious minorities / Right to a name / Social policy

Query:

- 1) Is it possible to tell ethnic Chinese Indonesians apart from indigenous Indonesians by physical appearance alone?
- 2) Do ethnic Chinese Indonesians have "Chinese" or "Chinese sounding" names?
- 3) Please provide guidance on how to authenticate applicants as genuine Chinese.

Response:

The Minority Rights Group's *World Directory of Minorities* states: "Identifying someone in modern-day Indonesia as ethnic Chinese is not easy, because the physical characteristics, language, name and lifestyle of Chinese Indonesians are not always distinct from those of the indigenous population" (MRG 1997, p.616). According to Human Rights Watch, ethnic Chinese Indonesians are physically easily distinguishable as Chinese by other Indonesians, though for non-Indonesians, the physical distinction can be difficult (HRW 9 June 1999).

Although the Chinese migrated to Indonesia as early as the 13th century, they did not enter the country in large numbers until the 1800s. This first large group of Chinese immigrants was mostly male and intermarried with the local populace, settling largely in eastern Java, West Sumatra, and West Kalimantan. The resultant Sino-Indonesian communities in these areas assumed "many local customs, ceremonies, manners and beliefs" (MRG 1997, p. 616).

The next significant wave of Chinese immigrants was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of these immigrants came from southern China and formed purely Chinese settlements in the Outer Islands of Indonesia. Unlike the previous wave of Chinese immigrants, they retained their languages (mostly Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese), religion and customs (MRG 1997, p. 616).

There are many in Indonesia today who identify themselves as ethnic Chinese but who do not speak a Chinese language or practice Christianity, the predominant religion of ethnic Chinese Indonesians. There are generally two groups of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, though they are not as easily distinguishable from each other as they once were (HRW 21 July 1999). The *peranakan*, or "local-born Chinese, usually with some Indonesian ancestry," speak predominantly Bahasa Indonesia and are mostly Christian though some are Muslim (MRG 1997, p. 616). The *peranakan* are less easily discernible as ethnic Chinese. The *totok*, or "full-blooded Chinese, usually born in China," consider themselves

true Chinese in comparison to *peranakan* Chinese, and "[keep] Chinese culture and traditions alive through household shrines, celebrating Chinese festivals and private Chinese language instruction for their children" (MRG 1997, p. 616).

The Indonesian government has long enforced an assimilation policy under which the use of Chinese names was banned (MRG 1997). In 1966/67 most ethnic Chinese Indonesians were forced to take Indonesian names, with very few Chinese Indonesians keeping their original Chinese surnames. Today, ethnic Chinese Indonesians often, but not always, "Christian" first names, such as Rudy or Mary, but then have long "elaborate-sounding Javanese" surnames. For instance, William Soeryadjaya, Leo Suryadinata, Franz Winarta, Harry Chan, and Mely Tan are actual names of prominent ethnic Chinese Indonesians (HRW 9 June 1999; HRW 13 July 1999).

Ethnic Chinese Indonesians are not marked as such on their passports, but at one time a numerical code was used on KTPs (Indonesian identity cards) to identify ethnic Chinese Indonesians. This code may not have been used nation-wide, however, and having a non-ethnic Chinese parent may explain the absence of the numerical code on an individual's KTP, even though the individual may have been targeted for violence or discriminated against for being ethnic Chinese. According to Human Rights Watch, "if your KTP had the code, it would certainly prove that you were ethnic Chinese, but not to have the code would not prove that you weren't" (HRW 13 July 1999).

In October 1998, President Habibie announced that numerical codes identifying Indonesians as ethnic Chinese would no longer be used on KTPs. Human Rights Watch indicates, however, that "enforcement [of the ban on numerical codes] has been sporadic, to say the least" (HRW 13 July 1999). Ostensibly, the codes will appear only on KTPs that were issued to ethnic Chinese Indonesians before the ban (in areas where the codes were used), and will not appear on KTPs issued to ethnic Chinese Indonesians after the ban (in areas where the ban is enforced) (HRW 13 July 1999).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

Human Rights Watch, Asia Director. 8 June 1999.

Human Rights Watch, Asia Director. 21 July 1999. Email sent to INS-RIC, Washington, D.C.

Human Rights Watch, Asia Director. 13 July 1999. Email sent to INS-RIC, Washington, D.C..

Minority Rights Group. 1997. "Indonesia." *World Directory of Minorities*.

Last Modified 06/14/2002