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Introduction

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Chinese people have lived in Southeast Asia for generations, ever since European colonial governments encouraged their large-scale migration there in the early nineteenth century. It is believed that the Southeast Asian Chinese are now one of the largest diaspora communities in the world. There have been many studies on the ethnic Chinese in this region, but most concentrate on the historical importance of the Chinese in regional economic development and the institutionalized discrimination they have faced in several past authoritarian regimes. However, relations between the Chinese and local populations vary significantly due to different degrees of integration and changing governmental attitudes toward their ethnic Chinese citizens. With the rise of the PRC and the arrival of new Chinese immigrants in recent years, the situation has become even more complicated. For these reasons, this special issue explores the evolution of Chinese cultural-political identity, economic and political activities, and the interaction between ethnic Chinese groups and different governments from the past to the present.

Nevertheless, the Chinese in Southeast Asia have not been a homogeneous group. They have been divided by class, nationality, culture, and political orientation. Their political divides in particular appear to be significant and profound. “Hybridity and Transformation: The Political Orientation of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies” by Ping LIN, Associate Professor of the Department and Graduate Institute of Political Science, National Chung-Cheng University (Taiwan), points out that in the mid-twentieth century, when Indonesia was seeking independence, the ethnic Chinese elite showed internal splits due to the differences of political orientation: pro-Dutch, pro-China, or pro-independence. Their choices were influenced by factors on three levels: international/regional politics, local politics during the Dutch colonial period, and personal experiences of the Dutch rule. Although this

article only covers the case of Indonesia during the last years of colonial rule, it represents the bigger idea: that the identity and political orientation of the Chinese in Southeast Asia was neither monolithic nor settled.

Before the 1970s, the Chinese were the largest ethnic minority in Vietnam, Cambodia, and the urban areas of Laos. Intermarriages were not uncommon, and relations between ethnic Chinese and the local peoples were basically not bad. However, as described in “Cambodia’s Policy towards the Cambodian-Chinese since World War II” by Wen-Pin LIN, Director and Associate Professor of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, in the mid-1970s, the anti-Chinese campaign and socialist transformation campaigns by the Hanoi government, and then the Pathet Lao in Laos and Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, resulted in most of the Hoa (ethnic Chinese in these three countries) fleeing or being expelled to other countries. In Cambodia’s case, the situation of ethnic Chinese did not improve until the 1990s, when the Hun Sen government abolished discriminatory policies against them and Chinese capital flooded into the country. By using their wealth to support politicians, the ethnic Chinese (particularly businessmen) thrived and further developed their enterprises. However, as the article also points out, the Cambodia-Chinese businessmen even today still face big dangers, because they network with Khmer politicians too much. Besides China’s deep involvement in Cambodia’s economy, the rise of issues such as land-grabbing, deforestation, natural resources extraction, and pollution may turn the ethnic Chinese in Cambodia into scapegoats if a political or economic crisis breaks out.

Unlike the Chinese in Cambodia and Indonesia who experienced political discrimination and exclusion in the past, the Chinese in Malaysia have been had chances to fight for equal opportunities in education, economy and politics for decades via the Chinese-based political parties. However, “Chinese Political Participation in Peninsula Malaysia: Under the Shadow of Malay Supremacy” by Samuel C. Y. KU, Professor of the Master Degree Program in Southeast Asian Studies, Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, and Wen-Hsuan HSIAO, Post-doctoral researcher of Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, argues that, despite sustained efforts by these parties, the ethnic Chinese continue to face difficulties in gaining equal access to political participation under the Malay dominance in politics. The gerrymandering, malapportionment, and constitutional changes by the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN) keep the Malays in power. Although the Chinese had good opportunities after the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) experienced several internal splits since the early 1990s, they have become increasingly frustrated because

the lack of mutual trust and understanding between the Malays and Chinese makes any change difficult.

In comparison with the above cases, the ethnic Chinese in Thailand have generally integrated well into the very fabric of the host society. This provides them a stable social-political environment in which they can further concentrate on their economic activities for decades. Based on five years of observations and interviews with executives of the Thai Charoen Pokphand (CP) group, "The Political Economy of *Guanxi* Networking in Thai-Chinese Enterprises: An Empirical Research" by Wan-Ping TAI, Professor of Cheng Shiu University, finds that due to the existence of such institutionalized *guanxi* networking, Thai-Chinese businessmen are much more willing to play long-term games and to establish relationships from different angles. Since the 1980s, the number of Thai-Chinese businessmen entering the parliament has been increasing gradually. Thai-Chinese enterprises have also become the primary sponsors of political parties. The rise of political alliances has transformed the client relations between Thai-Chinese enterprises and politicians into partnerships.

Although these four articles analyze the essence and transformation of Chinese identities as well as their economic and political activities from different perspectives and in four separate countries, taken as a whole, these articles show the continuing influence of the ethnic Chinese in the political and economic development of Southeast Asia. It is hoped that they will contribute to research into how the diaspora Chinese are affecting this region and will continue doing so in the near future.