

Combating Racism Against Chinese Indonesians: Historical Context and Contemporary Dilemma

IPS-MHA FORUM ON NON-VIOLENT ETHNIC HOSTILITIES

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Past governments have fostered ethnic stereotyping

- **Dutch era:** specific living quarters, restricted travel, encouraging racial division
- **Soekarno's era (1945-1965):** integrating Chinese, limit economic growth, measured discrimination
- **Soeharto's era (1966-1998):** extreme discrimination, Chinese voices completely muted

The Reform After 1998

- **Change of Regime:** Political freedom increased significantly.
- **Chinese Initiatives:** Formation of political parties and civil organisations to self-advocate.
- **Political Representation:** Increased numbers of Chinese Indonesians elected to regional and national parliaments.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Efforts to address and reform discriminatory policies through government engagement.

New Challenges:

Grassroots do not necessary welcome

- Chinese has increased visibility in all sectors from entertainment to politics.
- Chinese cultural presence is felt strongly: threat of overtaking indigenous culture
- Chinese roles in politics resurged: take away political seats or influence issues

New Challenges:

Growing Islamic conservatism

- Conservatism contributes to social tension
- Government has not been able to contain the spread
- Religious conservatism has used coated racism within religious narratives

Counter narratives

- Advance religious narrative that preach tolerance and endorse pluralism from within the Islamic community.
- Two main religious organisations have been working on the pluralist platform: NU and Muhammadiyah
- NU has been known to have stronger relations with the Chinese
- NU has significant involvement on issues affecting minority, Chinese included

Results not maximum

- Their efforts do not always result in completely reversing the unfortunate situations
- Symbolically important to prevent Islam from being hijacked by conservative forces that use religion to justify their racist actions.
- Helps change the perception of a binary opposition between Islam and the Chinese

New Challenges: Inconsistency

- Government has not been consistent in its approach
- Fail to uphold principles of non-discrimination and equality before law, often bow to the pressure of the mob
- Fail to completely remove problematic regulations

Thank you

- Will appreciate comments and questions