



INVISIBLE PEOPLE

POVERTY AND EMPOWERMENT
IN INDONESIA

presented by PNPM Mandiri —
Indonesia's National Program for Community Empowerment

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with an introduction by Scott Guggenheim

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Tangerang, Banten

BENTENG CHINESE: CONSIDERED DIFFERENT

The Tegal Alur district is on the edge of Jakarta, where the city's suburbs merge with the surrounding satellite towns and industrial zones of Banten. A generation ago, market gardens and small farms predominated. Many of the people who used to farm the land there have been pushed aside to make way for the development of huge factories, housing estates, and infrastructure projects.

With the toll roads bringing these areas within reach of middle class commuters, there are huge numbers of newcomers in the area. Descendants of the original inhabitants of the district work on the industrial estates as laborers. Many more scratch out a living as scavengers, rooting through the piles of discarded rubbish created by the factories, working as motorbike couriers, or running food stalls. Further away from town, people survive by fishing and working as agricultural laborers. Unemployment levels are high. Gambling, alcoholism, and drug use are common.

The original inhabitants of Tegal Alur and surrounding areas consist of at least two main ethnic groups, including the Malay-speaking, mainly Muslim Betawi and the Cina Benteng. The latter group claim descent from Chinese immigrants from the fourteenth century.

To a large degree, members of this group have been assimilated by the culture of the surrounding area. Like their neighbors, they speak Betawi Malay. They also engage in similar kinds of work and trade. Like other people in the area, many of them are very poor. Unlike most of their neighbors, many of them identify as Christian or Buddhist. While they do not speak Chinese languages, they retain some elements of Chinese culture, including the veneration of ancestors and certain wedding customs. They continue to identify and be identified as Chinese.

The Cina Benteng are descended from immigrants who arrived in Indonesia from China generations ago. Many are very poor. Often they do not have identity cards, birth certificates, or other official documents.





Living and working mostly outside the formal economy, many people from the Cina Benteng community do not have complete documentation of their civil status, citizenship, and other matters. Often births and marriages are not registered. Thus many members of the community are not in possession of birth certificates, marriage licenses, or identity cards.

The same holds true for many in the Betawi community in the area. However, members of the Cina Benteng community often claim that because they continue to be seen as Chinese, the barriers in their path to acquire this documentation are formidable.

There are approximately 7,000,000 Chinese-Indonesian people, about 3% of the total population of Indonesia. Particularly in the past, there has been institutionalized discrimination against Indonesians of Chinese descent. During the Soeharto period, Indonesians of Chinese descent were forbidden to celebrate the Lunar New Year. Their access to government schools and universities was limited. They were very rarely employed as civil servants and never held senior government positions. The use of Chinese languages and writing and the teaching of these languages at schools were prohibited or strongly discouraged. Most discriminatory legislation has been formally repealed since the passing of the New Order government. However, many Indonesians of Chinese descent claim that discriminatory practices continue.

Members of the Cina Benteng community say that they are discriminated against in a number of ways. For example, they claim that are not usually included in food assistance programs and do not receive other benefits intended for poor members the community. Government officials dispute these claims, stating that benefits are provided strictly according to need.





Theng Soen Nio

My family has lived in Indonesia for more than nine generations. Our ancestors came from China, but we're Indonesians. We were born here and we've lived here all our lives. But we're outcasts. The indigenous Indonesians, the *pribumi*, hate us for being Chinese. The Chinese despise us for our dark skin. They say we've gone native. We aren't welcome in Indonesia and we can't go back to China.

My family comes from Balaraja. My father had a patch of land. It was big enough to grow rice, corn, and vegetables for the whole family. My father was quite well off, but he had eight children. My brother still lives on the land there, in an old wooden house. It's a traditional Cina Benteng-style house. It hasn't been repaired or looked after for years. My brother isn't as smart as my father was. He sells land and then just spends the money. It all goes up in cigarette smoke.

There is a lot of social jealousy against the Chinese who own land. In the area my family lived, we always got on well with our neighbors. The indigenous Indonesians used to protect us from outsiders. In some other areas, it was quite dangerous. During the Communist coup attempt in 1965 a lot of the indigenous Indonesians accused the Chinese landowners of being Communists. A lot of Chinese were killed. My uncle was killed. He was a martial artist. He was famous. People were scared of him. The neighbors accused him of being a Communist. He disappeared and we never heard from him again.

My husband was taken away for a few days. A lot of Chinese were taken away on suspicion of being Communists. My husband was only held for three days, then he was released. He said the Army officials inspected his hands to see whether he was a farmer or a Communist spy. They saw he had rough, callused hands, so they let him go.

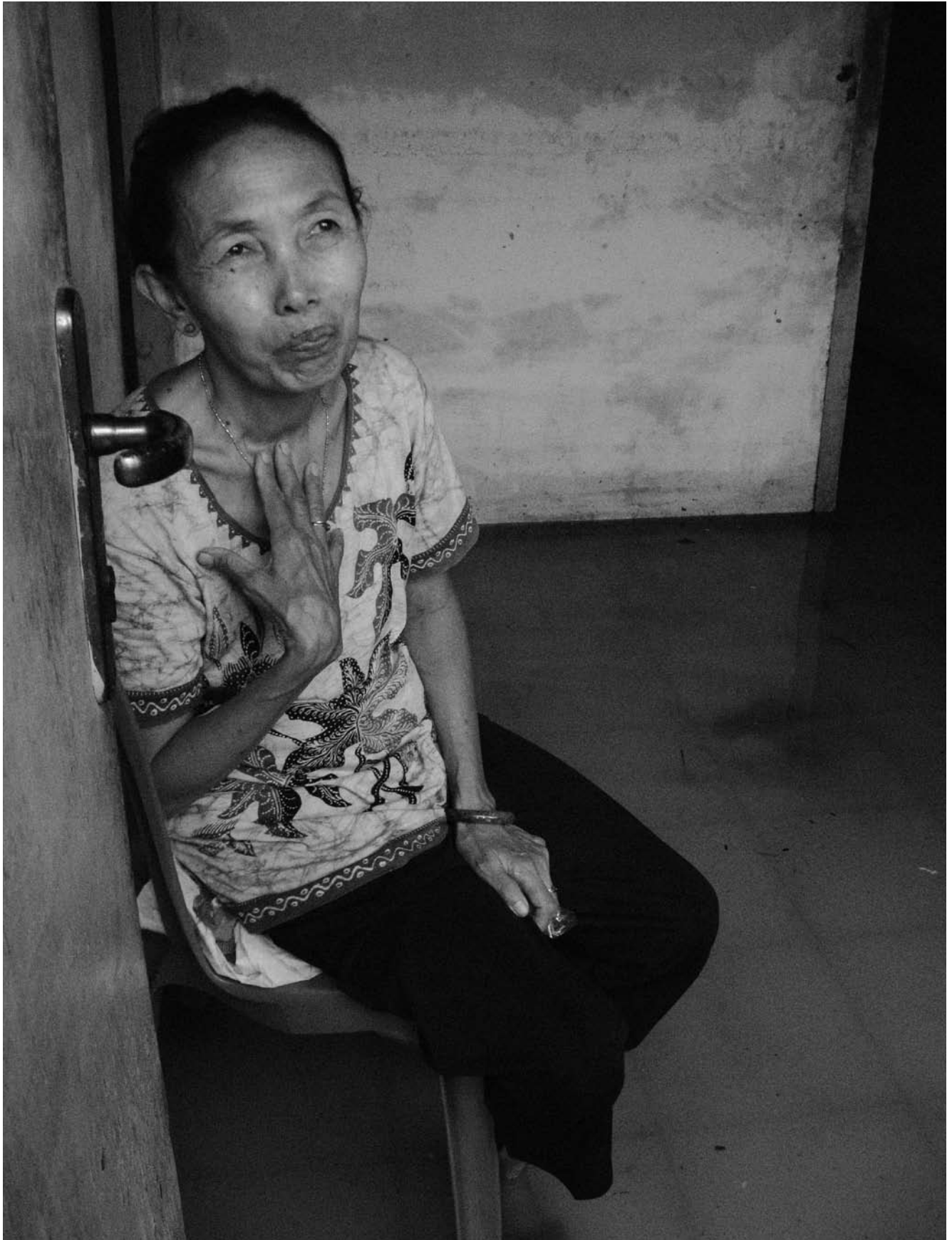
I've lived in Jagal Babi for more than twenty years, since I married my husband. The rich Chinese from Jakarta raise pigs in huge farms here. The rich Chinese don't have anything to do with us. The river used to stink of pig shit all year round. It still floods every year. The water comes into the houses along the canal. It usually comes up to your knees. It's not as bad as it used to be. We used to have to walk along a bamboo platform. People used to slip on the bamboo and fall into the river all the time. Now there's a concrete path. It was built by the local authorities when Megawati was president.

We own the house we live in, but we don't own the land. That belongs to the government. It's a small block, about five meters by seven. A couple of years ago, the people in the kampung tried to start paying land taxes, but the district

"The indigenous Indonesians, the *pribumi*, hate us for being Chinese. The Chinese despise us for our black skins. They say we've gone native. We aren't welcome in Indonesia and we can't go back to China."



Theng Soen Nio at her home in the Jagal Babi district. Next to a canal, homes in this district are subject to frequent floods.



officials wouldn't let us. If you start paying taxes, then they can't kick you out later. If you pay taxes, it means you have a right to stay here. We've got electricity. Each house has its own meter.

I'm 67. My husband died ten years ago. I still remember him. I still light incense and pray for him. I was married more than fifty years ago. I was married when I was seventeen. When we got married, we had a party for three days. There was a feast for all our family, and dancing. We didn't register our marriage with the authorities. No one did back then. On their birth certificates, my children are listed as illegitimate.

Things are different now. It's important to have your documents in order. I made sure my children's births are registered. I gave them Chinese names, not indigenous names. I'm proud of my culture. I like the idea of a festival to celebrate Cina Benteng culture, with a mass wedding for couples who don't have marriage papers. Nobody wants to live in sin. Nobody wants their children to be considered illegitimate. If we had a mass wedding with a festival, people might realize that we're Chinese, but we are Indonesian too.

We have our own culture. It's a mixture of indigenous and Chinese. We have our own wedding costumes and ceremonies. We have our own architecture. People don't know that. Even our food is different. It's Chinese food, but it's different from the food in the restaurants. My son and I make Cina Benteng-style pork satay and sell it through small food stalls near here.

Theng Soen Nio kneels before an image of her deceased husband. While most Cina Benteng are Buddhist or Christian, a Confucian respect for dead family members is almost universal.



Sa Nio

“The district office doesn’t give free medical care to Chinese families. The government always treats the Chinese differently from the Betawi.”

My boy is sick. He has a bad lung infection. He was in the hospital for five days. The doctor said he needed to take medicine for six months. My husband works as a laborer on building sites. He earns Rp 50,000 per day when he’s working. Sometimes I sell rice at a stall on the main road, but I can’t work while my boy is sick. At most, the whole monthly household income is Rp 1.5 million. We have three children. So far, it’s cost Rp 3 million for my boy’s hospital stay and the medicine.

To get free health care, you have to have a Poor Family Card. But we don’t have a card. It’s very hard to get the card. The district office doesn’t give free medical care to Chinese families. When the district office had a food program, we didn’t get any rice, either. We had to borrow from a money lender. She’s not Chinese, she’s Batak. The interest rate is 25% per month. That means we have to pay back Rp 750,000 each month. That’s just the interest, the minimum payment. There’s no alternative if you need a loan.

I got married when I was thirteen. Lots of girls married at that age. We had a party for our family and neighbors, but we didn’t register our marriage. Back then, no one around here registered their marriage. When I was married, I didn’t have any documents: no birth certificate, no identity card, and no SKBRI, the proof of Indonesian citizenship. I had my first child when I was fourteen. I wanted her to go to school. I only went to school for two years.



As in many other households in the district, in Sa Nio’s house three generations share a single sleeping space.

We needed a proper identity card to enroll her, so I went to the RT, the local community subdivision head. I took my mother's family card and all the bits of paper we had in the house. The RT wouldn't let me use my real name, Sa Nio. Without even telling me, he changed it to "Sani." He said that Sani sounded more Indonesian. Sa Nio sounded too Chinese. I remember someone tried to deliver a letter to me here. The boy delivering it asked everyone where "Ibu Sani" lived. No one knew who he was talking about. Everyone here knows me as Sa Nio. The RT listed my religion as Muslim. I've always been Christian, but he said that if I put "Christian" on my identity card, it would cost more. If I got a card that said I was Muslim, the administration fee would only be Rp 5,000. If it said I was Christian, it would be Rp 350,000. So I just said I was Muslim.

The most important document is the citizenship paper. If you have one, it's much easier to get an identity card or to register a birth or marriage. Getting the citizenship paper is very expensive. You have to go to the district office first, and then the police. Every time you go, you have to pay. A lot of people use agents to get documents if they need them. If you don't use an agent, you have to go to the office yourself. But it's hard to find an agent you can trust. Sometimes they take your money and never give you your documents.

In 2004 a group of us tried to get birth certificates for our children. Ibu Rebeka Harsono, of LADI, the Anti-Discrimination League of Indonesia, helped us. There were more than sixty of us who didn't have any documents. It was hard





Sa Nio (third from the right) with a group of women from the Cina Benteng community, holding their hard-won birth certificates for their children. While many Indonesians lack official documents, those of Chinese descent often contend that there are additional barriers for them.

getting people to work together. People didn't know each other. Even in the same neighborhood division, people didn't know each other. People weren't used to coming to meetings together.

Li Chung Mei and I visited the neighbors we knew. Ibu Rebeka saw the neighborhood head. He gave her lists of everyone who didn't have birth certificates and identity cards. That made it easier. We organized a group to go to the district office together. When people heard that some of us got birth certificates for the children, they came to meetings. We met in small groups to organize and share information. Sixty women went to the district office to push to get the certificates there. When we still couldn't get them, we organized a demonstration at the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle in central Jakarta.

Because my children are registered as Muslim, the school says they have to take part in Islamic religious education. I don't want them to do that. I went to the school to talk to their teacher. He agreed that they didn't have to do Islamic religious education. When they had a new teacher, I had to go to talk to him too. My children's birth certificates say that they were born out of wedlock. According to the government, my children are bastards. There have never been any special programs to recognize the traditional weddings of the Chinese here. The government always treats the Chinese differently from the Betawi.

Lie Am Yo

Only the Cina Benteng still wear the traditional Chinese-style wedding dress. The rich Chinese in the city wear white gowns, like westerners. Our wedding costumes are the same as people wore in China in the Ming dynasty. They are mixed a bit with traditional Betawi costume, too. We rented the dress from a salon in Bekasi.

When Sintia was married, we held the party in a wedding hall. The party lasted for three days. It cost Rp 4.5 million just to rent the hall. The food cost more than Rp 10 million. We served rice, chicken, rendang, gado gado, and kerupuk. More than 1500 guests came to the party. There was a lot of dancing and the men played cards.

In the old days, Cina Benteng weddings were held at home. People used to live in the country. They had big houses with large yards. These days, you have to rent a wedding hall if you haven't got a big house. The groom's family is responsible for renting the hall and paying for the catering. A lot of families can't afford a big party like that anymore.

It's important to get the proper marriage certificate. It makes it easier to register the births of children. Sintia got hers when she got married.

We aren't rich. I work in a warehouse recycling waste. I sort out pieces of plastic, paper, and other waste that can be recycled. If I work really hard, I'm lucky to make Rp 20,000 per day. Sintia's father is dead and her mother works. But we sent her to school. She finished high school. Now she works in a warehouse.

A traditional wedding is very expensive. A communal wedding with a group of couples getting married at the same time would be cheaper. It's still important for us to have a proper party when our daughters get married.

"The girl in that photo is my granddaughter. She's dressed for her wedding. Her name is Sintia. She's wearing the traditional Cina Benteng wedding dress. It's still very important for us to put on a proper party when our daughters are married."

Sintia on her wedding day. Cina Benteng wedding costumes are based on Chinese costumes dating from the Ming dynasty and are extant nowhere else in the world. While the majority of Cina Benteng live in modest circumstances, they are prepared to spend small fortunes on wedding ceremonies.





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This book was sponsored by the PNPM Mandiri program. The goal of PNPM Mandiri, Indonesia's National Program for Community Empowerment, is to reduce poverty. PNPM Mandiri was established by the Indonesian government in 2007 to act as an umbrella for a number of pre-existing community-driven development programs, including the Urban Poverty Program and the Kecamatan Development Program, as well as a number of other community-based programs that were managed by nineteen technical ministries. By 2009, PNPM Mandiri was operating in every subdistrict in Indonesia.

PNPM Mandiri is committed to increasing the participation of all community members in the development process, including the poor, women's groups, indigenous communities, and other groups that have not been fully involved in the development process. *Invisible People* is one way that PNPM Mandiri can reflect on ways to better include marginalized and excluded groups in development.

Bilateral and multilateral assistance for the PNPM Mandiri program has been forthcoming from a number of donor agencies. The PNPM Support Facility (PSF) was established by the Indonesian government as a means of facilitating the contributions of international donors that support PNPM Mandiri. Contributors to the PSF currently include Australia, Denmark, the European Community, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. PSF provided financial and other support for the publication of *Invisible People*, in order to raise awareness of the special needs and aspirations of marginalized and excluded groups.

We would like to thank the people who sat down to tell their stories and put their lives on public display for the publication of this book. Across the country, the people who were approached were amazingly open about the most personal details of their lives, their problems, their hopes, and their aspirations.

When they collected these stories, Irfan Kortschak and Poriaman Sitanggang explained the purpose of the project and sought the consent of all subjects. The subjects told their stories, often over several days and during several meetings, after which Irfan attempted to recreate their words in a first-person account that conveyed the individual's ideas, feelings, and voice. In a few cases, subjects wrote their own stories in their own words, which were then edited with the subject and translated. When possible, Irfan provided a written account to the subject so that he or she could check and reconfirm that the account was an accurate representation. Otherwise, he discussed it with them. Subjects were reminded that their accounts would be published and asked to be certain that they had no objection to this. Irfan apologizes if despite this process, inaccuracies or misrepresentations have slipped into the text.

A vast array of people helped facilitate interviews and

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and *Picturing Indonesia, Village Views of Development* (2005).

All the photographs in this book were taken by Poriaman, with the exception of those taken by Irfan on the following pages: female students (p. 37); Ai Anti Srimayanti (p. 43); Heri Ridwani (p. 45, p. 47); Pak Inceu (p. 51); Laminah (p. 70); women's literacy group (p. 72, p. 74); Musinah (p. 73); Kolok Getar (p. 81); Kolok Subentar (p. 83); Erni Bajo (p. 113); Mading (p. 129); harm reduction meeting (p. 131); Benk Benk (p. 133); Apay and Harry (p. 134); Megi Budi (p. 137, p. 139); Rifky (p. 138); and Reza (p. 148, p. 149).

Irfan Kortschak studied Indonesian Area Studies at the University of Melbourne, and International and Community Development at Deakin University in Australia. He is a writer, translator, photographer, and long-term resident of Jakarta. His previous publications include *Nineteen: The Lives of Jakarta Street Vendors* (2008) and *In a Jakarta Prison: Life Stories of Women Inmates* (2000). He is currently engaged in writing assignments and consultancy work for NGO's and development agencies in Indonesia.

Poriaman Sitanggang has worked as a freelance photographer since 1985. He has held a number of photo exhibits, including *Indonesia - Famous People* (1993), *Batak Faces* (1994), *Dani: The Forgotten People* (1997), *Manila: The City of Contrasts* (1999), *The Song of Arini: The Eastern Indonesia People* (2001), and *Burning Borneo* (1998-1999). His work has appeared in a number of magazines and books, including *Kain untuk Suami* (A Cloth for My Husband) (2004),

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