

Adaptation of the political economy of the grassroots Tionghoa ethnic in Bangka Island, Indonesia

Adaptasi ekonomi politik etnis Tionghoa akar rumput di Pulau Bangka, Indonesia

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Abstract

Since the 17th century, various Tionghoa ethnic groups migrated from mainland China to Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. These ethnic groups migrated in accordance with the power in government. In Bangka Island, the Tionghoa had become part of the tin exploitation process hundreds of years before colonization. When new policies and changes are made on tin mining by the government, it negatively affects the socioeconomic life of this ethnic group, which was initially known as tin laborers. This study aims to determine the adaptation of the Tionghoa political economy in Bangka Island. The research method used is qualitative with literature review, interview, and observation as the data collecting technique conducted from January to December 2021. The result showed that the government largely determined the rule of tin by the Tionghoa ethnics. They became partners, administrators, illegal and main players during the Palembang Sultanate, colonial period, Old and New Orders, and the post-1998 reform period. This study discovered that Tionghoa at the elite and grassroots levels are actually different. In general, this study concludes that the Chinese at the grassroots tend to be distant from the advantages of tin due to limited capital and access.

Keywords: Tionghoa ethnic; political economy; tin mining; Bangka Island

Abstrak

Sejak abad ke-17, berbagai kelompok etnis Tionghoa telah bermigrasi dari daratan Cina ke Asia Tenggara, termasuk Indonesia. Suku bangsa ini bermigrasi mengikuti perkembangan kekuasaan dalam pemerintahan. Di Pulau Bangka, orang Tionghoa telah menjadi bagian dari proses eksploitasi timah ratusan tahun sebelum para kolonial. Ketika kebijakan dan perubahan baru terhadap pertambangan timah dilakukan oleh rezim, hal itu berdampak negatif terhadap kehidupan sosial ekonomi kelompok etnis yang pada awalnya dikenal sebagai buruh timah ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana adaptasi ekonomi politik Tionghoa di Pulau Bangka. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode penelitian kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa kajian pustaka, wawancara, dan observasi yang dilakukan dari Januari sampai Desember 2021. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa corak pemerintahan sangat menentukan aturan kaitannya dengan etnis Tionghoa. Mereka menjadi mitra, pengurus, pemain ilegal, dan pemain utama pada masa Kesultanan Palembang, masa kolonial, Orde Lama dan Baru, dan masa reformasi pasca 1998. Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa etnis Tionghoa di tingkat elit dan akar rumput sebenarnya berbeda. Secara umum studi ini berkesimpulan bahwa, orang Tionghoa di akar rumput cenderung berjarak dengan keuntungan atas timah karena terbatasnya modal dan akses.

Kata kunci: etnis Tionghoa; ekonomi politik; penambangan timah; Pulau Bangka

Introduction

The Tionghoa are not homogeneous historically, economically, socially, and politically, even in the wider dimension of the local people's acceptability. During the changes in national politics in Bangka Island, this ethnic group remained comfortable and felt at home. Furthermore, this island was home to hundreds of Tionghoa during the 1998 anti-China riots. Moreover, the first news about the restoration of Tionghoa dignity in the world of politics emerged from Belitung Island when Ahok, former governor of Jakarta and currently commissioner of PT Pertamina, was elected, indicating that this area is the main home for this minority ethnic group.

Therefore, this study differs from studies on Indonesian Tionghoa which analyzes Tionghoa from Jakarta's perspective, such as the anti-China riots. On Bangka Island, the Tionghoa are ordinary citizens with past interesting experiences on the strategies used to carry out their various activities. Based on its history, the Bangka Tionghoa are indeed an ethnic group with an extensive history of migration with their culture similar to Tionghoa in Southeast Asia and Indonesia. According to Freedman (2000), economic and political factors led to the migration of Tionghoa to various countries overseas to improve their standard of living. In Indonesia, the history of their arrival is connected to work, generally as plantation, and mining laborers, or traders (Gungwu 1996, Nugroho 2013). The arrival of the Tionghoa on the Bangka Island was related to tin exploitation during the Palembang Sultanate.

This study specifically investigates the grassroots Tionghoa political economy metamorphosis in Bangka Island. Metamorphosis in this context is understood as a change in orientation from one important chapter to another in the history of contemporary Tionghoa existence in Bangka Island. Political economy is a perspective that sees if economic structure is determined the power structure (Yustika 2009), a condition in which economic policies are determined by political decisions (Lane & Ersson 1994) so that the regime of power then greatly determines the order of the world (Caporaso & Levine 2008).

The main theme of this study is centered on determining the strategies used to migrate, settled, and survive on this Island through tin extraction. Presently, they have been able to penetrate various sectors, especially in the fields of trade, plantations, transportation, etc. Thus, the economic condition of Tionghoa Ethnic and its dynamics is largely determined by how the power structure is run at that time. This study investigates the strategies utilized by the Tionghoa ethnicity to position themselves in local relationships. So, it will be explored how Tionghoa adapt to the current conditions. Furthermore, their mode of alternating regimes is similar to the Tionghoa outside China. However, this study does not place these external entities as remotely appropriate, rather it carried out numerous observations on local socio-political dioramas on Bangka Island.

Tin is certainly not the only commodity that attracts the Tionghoa to Bangka Island. Initially, this commodity had an extremely high political-economic value in the Southeast Asia, particularly Palembang and Malacca Sultanates. Preliminary studies proved that tin exploration and exploitation were carried out by laborers from Guang Dong China. These Tionghoa workers are known as metal processing experts in their hometowns. The high demand for tin miners from the Malacca Sultanate promoted the Tionghoa *tauke* (bosses) to employ more laborers. These *tauke* were trading partners of merchants in Malacca and close to the circle of power. Therefore, when the Palembang Sultanate discovered their close relationship, they were forced to deploy tin miners to the Bangka Island (Erman 1995).

The miners visited the island when there was high demand for metals, especially tin. Male Tionghoa laborers traveled in groups without their families to Bangka. After their arrival, they started mingling with the indigenous Malay people residing around Palembang and the island. This led to an emotional relationship between the natives (Idi 2011, Sulaiman et al. 2019). A typical example of this great bond was the rioting and looting of tin by the Tionghoa and Malay workers. Their resistance was similar to

those encountered during the Dutch colonialism (Theo & Lie 2014, Sya et al. 2019). In the 17th and 18th centuries, the colonial government assigned the role of tin clerk foremen to some Tionghoa miners with appropriate wages (Dahana 2000).

Historically, tin mining is inseparable from Tionghoa migration to Indonesia. Ibrahim et al. (2020) stated the influence of Tionghoa technology on the recent tin exploitation. They further stated that the Bangka Tionghoa is certainly not perceived as an ordinary mining community after hundreds of years of adapting to local life, from when Indonesia had not gained its independence, to its self-government. Based on this, the recent Tionghoa Bangka is certainly connected to the metamorphosis that had occurred over the years. This is an interesting condition because even the contemporary Bangka are unable to escape from the shadow of tin mining. At the same time, the changing of the government regime from the colonial period to the post-independence period tended to also change the tin mining policies, which means that it also affected the economic position of Tionghoa ethnics.

The data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik 2021) collected in 2020 on tin processing play an important role in the economy of Bangka. Consequently, there is a close connection between policy making and the development of political impressions in the mining sector. The existence of Bangka Tionghoa is inseparable from the surrounding political economy discourse. Ibrahim (2015) stated that the Tionghoa ethnic group at the elite level is basically an important subject in the recent indigenous political map. However, this study was carried out to determine the Bangka Tionghoa political economy at the grassroots level, by examining its metamorphosis occasionally.

The use of the term "Tionghoa" in this study refers to the Presidential Decree No. 12/2014 on the revocation of the Ampera Presidium Circular Letter Number SE-06/Pres. Kab/6/1967, dated June 28, 1967. According to the decree, the use of the term "Tionghoa/Tiongkok" and "Tjina" led to discriminatory psychosocial impacts on the social relations experienced by Indonesian citizens of Tionghoa descent. The term Tjina/Tionghoa means people or communities were changed to Tionghoa, which is in accordance with the enactment of the Presidential Decree, in all government administration activities. Presently, the Indonesian descendants of Tionghoa origin (Warga Negara Indonesia or WNI) have equal rights and obligations (Anggraeni 2011, Aryodiguno 2018).

For a long time, Bangka Island famous with its tin commodity (Sujitno 2007, Ibrahim 2011) and the Tionghoa migration is a part of the mining. According to a 2010 census, Malays and Tionghoa (8.05%) are considered the two largest ethnicities on the island. Bangka Island is one of the first migration sites for the Tionghoa in the archipelago since the 17th century. One of the major reasons associated with migration to Indonesia is to become tin mining and plantation and trade laborers. Therefore, historically, their existence was influenced by economic factors. However, various literatures revealed that it is difficult to determine the exact period when tin was discovered and mined in Indonesia (Ibrahim et al. 2018).

According to the Dutch records, the Tionghoa migration started in the early 18th century (Akbar 2018). The largest Tionghoa community in Bangka Belitung is the Ke Jia Tribe often known as the Khe people from Guang Dong Province, China. They migrated from villages in certain districts, such as Sin Neng, San Wui, Hoi P'eng, etc. According to Akbar (2018), the Khe (Khejia) tribe is the most experienced in the mining sector, and they are often contracted to execute mining activity, especially in China. Initially, Bangka Island was regarded as the territory of the Palembang Sultanate and their leader imitated the Perak and Johor Sultans by employing Tionghoa miners to process tin reserves. The Tionghoa migration to Bangka was similar to the *bedol desa* system (relocation of all the inhabitants of the village to another place), with the majority from the same hometown. Whenever, the Tionghoa returned to China from Jakarta, they invited their friends and relatives, and this continued till the 20th century. Initially, women did not accompany the *bedol desa* migration, which led to the practice of mixed marriage between the migrant workers and local (Malay) or Javanese and Balinese (Khadafi 2011).

The periodization regarding the migration of the Tionghoa to Indonesia is classified based on some literature as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Generations period of Tionghoa migration to Bangka Island

No	Generation	Migration Period	Migration Purpose	Description
1	First	1600-1700s	Working in the mining sector	The Hakka tribe migrated in small and limited numbers from Guangdong Province
2	Second	1701-1800s	Work in the mining sector	Imported as contract laborers by the Palembang Sultanate, the VOC, and the Netherlands
3	Third	1800-1940s	Work in the mining, trading, agricultural, and service sectors	Work as laborers on contract with the Palembang Sultanate and partly for the VOC and the Dutch government
4	Fourth-Fifth	1940-1945s	Work in the mining, agricultural, trading, and service sectors	Work as laborers for the Japanese government during the colonial period in Indonesia.

Source: Summarized from various sources

The number of Tionghoa ethnic residents on Bangka Island has increased significantly, from its initial number in 1905 by 43,000, thereby culminating in 115,000 (Toer 1998). In 1920, the Tionghoa population was 44.6%; however, it increased to 47% in 1930 (Heidhues 2008). This implies that there was a continuous increase in the early 1900s. Bangka, Tionghoa, and Tin Islands are historically connected. Data show that, during the early days of tin exploitation, this island was generally inhabited by a small population. The Sekak and Lom Tribes inhabit the coastal and inland areas, which, until lately, were considered as the original communities of this island; however, their existence is limited. As a region with open geography, the population growth is relatively significant, especially since it became a separate province in 2000.

Research Method

This is a qualitative study with data collected through literature reviews, interviews, and observations from January to June 2021. Furthermore, based on the time allocation, this research aims to record the latest features associated with the existence of the Tionghoa political economy in Bangka Island. The study area is the initial destination of the migrants, which is presently inhabited by Tionghoa.

The locations referred to are Cengel, Songhin, and Rebo Villages in Merawang Sub-district, Bangka Regency; Parit Tiga, Air Jurung, and Jebus in West Bangka Regency; Keposang in South Bangka Regency; and Sampur in Pangkalan Baru, Central Bangka Regency. In addition, these areas are the centers of the Tionghoa settlements on the island, where they generally lived, mined tin, planted gardens, and other commodities such as vegetables, sweet potatoes, rubber, and pepper. The total number of informants are 20, they were the head of household and considered to know a lot of their ancestral family history. Data collected from informants are displayed, reduced, and triangulated so that accurate conclusions are obtained.

Results and Discussion

Tiko, Kongsj, and Luitenant Der Chinesen

During the migration period and early colonialism, the Tionghoa were suppliers called *tiko* and laborers. Subsequently, the Dutch considered it important to appoint high-ranking officials in the Tionghoa community in Southeast Asia known as *Gewestelijk Bestuur* or regional government. Initially, they were appointed by the indigenous royalties and later by the colonial government. *Luitenant der Chinezzen* was in charge of tin mining in the district and this title refers to those able to

organize miners from China. They were organized in a way to differentiate them from those not under colonial *kongsi*.

In this case, tin mining exploitation was generally associated with two categories of Tionghoa communities. The first is the mining community as members of the *kongsi* organizational system or those directly under Dutch control. Unfortunately, during the tin crisis, they switched jobs as pepper farmers (Erman 2004). The second category is not involved in mining activities or in the Dutch officials' reports known as the *Partikelir* Tionghoa community. In general, this group resides in Tionghoa villages consisting of traders, craftsmen, farmers, and teachers. However, their presence is indirectly related to tin exploitation. For example, traders supplied the necessities to the mining community as well as the Europeans that work in these mines.

Table 2.
Number of population in the Bangka Residency (1930)

Onderafdeling	Europe	Indigenous	Tionghoa	Foreign East	Total
Pangkalpinang	283	30.404	21.179	84	51.950
Sungailiat	111	17.279	16.761	76	34.227
Muntok	312	21.713	9.138	173	31.336
North Bangka	217	11.131	24.072	76	35.496
South Bangka	77	27.055	7.990	128	35.250
Total	1000	107.582	79.140	637	228.259

Source: Erman 2010

Table 2 shows that the number of Tionghoa miners is large with the majority as laborers. Furthermore, the miners also live near commercial areas, such as Pangkalpinang, Jebus, North Bangka, and Sungailiat. Presently, there are no data on the availability of tin labor before 1900. According to Erman (2010), the number of miners in North Bangka, is double the number of natives, which is relatively 24,072 people.

Table 3.
Number of workers in Bangka tin mining, Bangka, 1920, 1930-1938

Year	Europe	Tionghoa laborer
1920	141	19,718
1930	217	19,952
1932	199	11,560
1933	178	7,118
1934	131	5,273
1935	120	6,086
1936	121	9,871
1937	151	15,479
1938	172	16,404

Source: Erman 2010

Table 3 shows a continuous increase in the number of Tionghoa miners with a decrease in the tin recession that occurred from 1933 to 1935. However, the recovery of tin and its high demand from abroad led to an increase in the number of workers, by at least 16 thousand people in 1938. The Tionghoa *tauke* that organized labor contracts also acted as tin collectors before it was processed in the factory. Furthermore, a special house was built to collect tin mining products deposited by the workers. The building was sited in the middle of the workers' settlement, which was close to the mining area. The tin clerk's house, also called the *luitenant der Chinezen*, was used to pay workers that worked for the Tionghoa *tauke* (Lohanda 1994, Erman 2010).

Figure 1 is a graphical representation of a tin clerk's house that is over 100 years old. The figure on the right is SAN (58 years), the third generation of the Merawang-Bangka Timah Clerk with the Ngui clan. SAN stated that their great-grandfather was a tin clerk, the head of the post and regarded as the leader of miners in the Bangka region. Presently, the house they live in was a legacy from their great-

grandfather, which is still beautifully preserved to this day. The area is approximately 500 square meters, with an excessively large courtyard. According to an interview carried out on SAN on March 2021, the original land area is one hectare. A tin clerk usually heads more than 500 contract miners and transports the collected tin products periodically, usually twice a month, to the selling point in Pangkalpinang or Mentok area.



Figure 1.
Surviving tin clerk houses
Source: Researcher's documentation (2021)

Several houses were inherited from tin management officials during the colonial period, and this is evident in their shape, that tends to be different from most of the buildings. However, changes in socioeconomic conditions and modernity have eroded the number of houses that survived their original form, which are being renovated by the current generation. Based on the earlier mentioned data, an important finding during the discussion on tin and Tionghoa in this area is that it was controlled by migrants for a long time.

Tionghoa Bangka in a changed regime

Dieleman (2011) stated that the Tionghoa ethnic group is often considered an important element in any regime. Issues related to cases of violence, marginalization, and discrimination against the Tionghoa always emerge at every transition period, for instance, from the Dutch to the Japanese colonial era, to the Republic of Indonesia government, and from the Soekarno reign to Suharto, as well as the transition in 1998 (Turner 2003, Turner & Allen 2007, Cribb & Coppel 2009, Itoh 2009, Dieleman et al. 2011, Ibrahim 2013, Urban 2013, Herlijanto 2017). This was also related to the Tionghoa in Bangka.

The Tionghoa lived and settled in Bangka long before Indonesia's independence. The history of their arrival on this Island is inseparable from tin discovery (Ibrahim 2013). This fact is authentic evidence that the Tionghoa as an ethnic group is undeniable in the occasional development of Bangka. The drive to choose Bangka as an immigration area and a place for tin workers since the colonial era led to acculturation with the natives. The difference between the Tionghoa and indigenous workers lies in the treatment received. Although the Tionghoa are regarded as the second class in social stratification, it did not change their views internally, especially with the mining background. They continued to interact with the indigenous Bangka based on the principle of complementary and needy relationships. During the colonial period, the Dutch divided the citizens into three groups, namely the Europeans, East Asians, and the Indigenous people (Coppel & Coppel 1983, Reid 2009, Koning 2011, Walujono 2014). The Tionghoa were regarded as second class and played the role of the social middle class that controls the economic sector.

The development of tin workers was based on different dynamics during each regime, from the early generations of the Palembang Sultanate in the 17th century of the VOC era to the 18th century with the Dutch and Japanese colonialism to Indonesian independence. Changes in the existing regime also had a significant impact on the lives of Tionghoa tin miners that were not yet considered as natives of the archipelago. However, as a country that regained its independence after the 1945 declaration, Indonesia failed to consider the existence of the Tionghoa that had lived among its people, especially on Bangka Island. There are many historical traces of the harmonization and existence of Tionghoa ethnics in socio-cultural terms in Bangka Belitung.

Europeans started to migrate to the archipelago since the spice trade increased in their market and the growth of early capitalism in Europe. According to Burger (1965), trade in Asia began centuries before the Portuguese arrived and the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) was founded. Historically, the archipelago was the target of European traders because it was known to be fertile for any type of plant, including spices (Suyono 2005). The VOC was established in the archipelago under the leadership of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen after the seizure of Jayakarta from Pangeran Wijayakusuma who ruled as the representative of the Banten kingdom (Poesponegoro 2009). Initially, the VOC concentrated on the spice trade in the east; however, they rapidly got involved in silk, cotton, coffee, indigo copper, and tin (Baay 2010). The Dutch rule over the VOC trade monopoly ended in 1799 and was continued from 1816 to 1942.

Another record stated that there were approximately 250 tin mines that produced millions of guilders for the prosperity of the Netherlands and generated wealth for government officials. *Bangka Tin Winning Bedrijf* (BTW) estimated gross profits of 400 million in the first 90 years, from 1820 to 1910. Furthermore, in the subsequent 15 years, the profits obtained were f 350 million (Heidhues 1992). A large amount of income obtained by the Dutch was because tin was the third major export commodity after coffee and sugar in the mid-19th century (Sya 2019). The British also managed tin mining from 1812 to 1816 (Erman 2009). Conversely, the Palembang Sultanate and the Dutch colonial era treated the Tionghoa ethnic differences in terms of positioning. This was marked by the special placement of the Tionghoa circles in the trading process.

During the reign of the Palembang Sultanate, the VOC initially entered into a trade agreement with the pepper commodity in 1662 (Gusnelly 2016). Although tin was discovered in Bangka in 1710, exploitation activities were not carried out by the VOC. Tin exploitation was carried out around Palembang waters during the reign of Sultan Abdul Rahman from 1662 to 1704 (Heidhues 2008). However, at that time, the yield of tin mined was relatively small compared to that from the Malay Peninsula, Malaysia. The mining products are further exported to Malacca and brought to China, where it is needed for brazing tea cargo boxes exported to Europe. Furthermore, tin is also needed to make money coins a medium of exchange in trade (Erman 2009).

Bangka Island's position during the Dutch colonialism era was considered a strategic place for tin mining interests. Although this colonialism was opposed by the majority such as Depati Amir, the Dutch still built several properties, such as hospitals, schools, and even drinking water companies (Gusnelly 2016). In the past, the rife tin mining activity did not yield much for its inhabitants. Most of the population was still poor and far from prosperity. During the Japanese rule, Europeans that worked in the government and private sectors, including miners, became war prisoners. Similar to the Netherlands, tin is a significant concern in Japan. Erman (2009) stated that the mines in Bangka, Belitung, and Singkep were managed by Mitsubishi during the Japanese era. Presently, there has not been any agreement or legislation that specifically regulates tin management. Therefore, it was temporarily concluded that Japan used military force to suppress the population at that time (Darwance et al. 2017).

In the Old Order era, the Dutch mining company was nationalized in 1958. *Bangka Tin Winning Bedrijft (BTW)*, *Gameenschaappelijke Mijnbouw Maatschaappij Billiton (GMB)* and *Singkep Tin Exploitatie Maatschappij (SITEM)* were eliminated, and their shares taken over by Indonesia. In 1961, the General Management Body of the State Tin Mining Company namely *BPU PN Tambang*

Timah was established to coordinate the three state companies (Gusnelly 2016). Similarly, in 1968 the Government Regulation Number 21 of 1968 concerning the Establishment of a State Tin Mining Company was issued.

The tin control pattern during the Old (1945 to 1965) and New Orders (1966 to 1998) was monopolistic. Besides, the state companies were the only ones that were legally authorized to exploit tin. This shut the doors of opportunity for those that wanted to improve their standard of living, which affected indigenous miners more than the Tionghoa. The main control lay with the *Tambang Timah* Company, which was established through Government Regulation Number 21 of 1968.

Consequently, the control of tin was inaccessible to the public under the supervision of the *Tambang Timah* Company. Finally, the people reacted by engaging in thefts and tin smuggling. In the 70s, tin smuggling by the Bangka community was quite high. This prompted the central government to intervene by enforcing military operations to curb this act, especially in the Belinyu Bangka area. One of the sources stated that the consequences of this operation led to over 500 deaths, excluding those that died in prison, which was not less than the stipulated number of victims (Zulkarnain 2005, Erman 2009).

During the New Order era, the government enacted Law Number 11 of 1967 concerning Basic Mining Provisions. Tin as a strategic commodity was included in the state regulation territory. The pretext for the interests of the state did not cause any form of resistance because the New Order policy exercised strict control over tin (Susilo & Maemunah 2009). The central government had strong control over the Bangka Belitung. In addition, the New Order government used the *PT. Timah, Tbk* flag. Furthermore, the military's involvement in protecting mining areas, strictly prohibiting residents from these regions, and even storing as much as one kilogram of tin, and trading it, shows that the local government had an extremely weak or nonexistent control (Erman 2008a).

The strict control and hardness of the state's efforts during the Old and New Order eras to keep tin from being mined by the community still have an impression on the minds of miners and the Tionghoa citizens in Bangka. AKU (47 years), a Tionghoa resident in Parit Tiga, West Bangka Regency, stated that "I still remember, when I was a teenager, I witnessed firsthand the way and manner the authorities chased and even threatened to shoot people that were mining (Unconventional Mine) in the land close to their parents' garden." (Informant AKU).

Based on the aforementioned information and the quotes from the interview with one of the informants, it was reported that, before the reform era, especially during the New Order, the grassroots Tionghoa in Bangka experienced marginalization and difficulties in terms of expressing religious-cultural life (Ibrahim 2013). In addition, they also lacked the opportunity and space to exploit tin resources in their neighborhood legally (Erman 2008b).

The questions associated with this research are did the majority of the Tionghoa citizens residing in Bangka dare to execute tin mining activities illegally? What kinds of livelihoods did they engage in during the strict control period by the country?

The interviews with several informants, AKU (farmer), KEN (rubber tappers and oil palm farmers), AGO (tofu trader), and NGI (trader), indicated that, during the New Order period, many Tionghoa citizens had the courage to mine tin illegally. Irrespective of the risk of being "hunted down" and disciplined by the military, the main state apparatus to control tin resource exploitation in Bangka was carried out by the Tionghoa. They were also regarded as criminals during the New Order era (Erman 2008b).

Finally, the grassroots Tionghoa at that time did not solely depend on these illegal activities. However, apart from trading, mainly selling and buying clothes, including supplying basic necessities, the majority also relied on the plantation sector. An interview carried out on AME, one of the Tionghoa citizens (17/02/2021) in Trubus Village, Central Bangka, reported that tin mining was

secretly smuggled to Singapore using illegal vessels during the New Order era. They referred to this smuggling activity as *smoukil*. AME was among the generations of illegal miners during the New Order era in the Rebo area and finally decided to pursue other professions after marrying a Tionghoa ethnic woman from Trubus.

In 1998, when the reform era replaced the New Order, which marked the opening of widespread democratization, many Tionghoa elites in Bangka Belitung decided to get involved in practical politics, by running for regional heads or as a candidate of the Central or Regional Parliament (Ibrahim 2013, Suryadinata 2019), even selected as the head of village (Ibrahim et al. 2019). This also became a momentum for grassroots Tionghoa citizens to venture into massive tin exploitation, both as laborers and financiers of relatively inexpensive mining machines. Meanwhile, those with huge capital chose to build smelters, large mines, or become tin collectors and intermediary traders. The implementation of regional autonomy and the supervision or raid relaxation from the state apparatus against licensed non-company tin mining was carried out under favorable conditions for the Bangka Belitung community, without the exception of the Tionghoa citizens at that time. It was presumed that they had been given space to exploit tin resources with capital and technology operated by the community.

An excerpt from an interview with one of the informants, a Tionghoa citizen of Parit Tiga, West Bangka, regarding this dynamic, is reported as follows;

"After 1998, especially during Gusdur's leadership, the people were free to engage in religious and cultural or tin mining activities. This was because the authorities were not as strict as in the Suharto when they carried out mining raids, especially after the era of President Megawati. The Tionghoa resident in these areas were truly in their heyday economically because of the tin mining activities. Besides, those that travel to Pangkalpinang, from Parit Tiga and Jebus, are known as rich people." (Informant SAK).

This study discovered that the return of the Tionghoa to mining activities in 1998 at the same time ended their release in the history of tin exploitation in Indonesia. It was recorded that the Tionghoa have been separated from the history of the orientation on tin domination for relatively 50 years (30 years during the New Order and 20 years of the Old Order), irrespective of their secretly executed activities. During that time, they engaged in various economic activities to sustain their families. This is illustrated by the orientation of the relationship between Tionghoa ethnics and tin in Bangka Island.

Table 4.
Relationship of Tionghoa ethnics and tin

Ruler	Time	Control model	Control style
Sultanate of Palembang	Early 17 th century	Sultanate mining partners	Cooperation-based control
Colonialism	1700 to 1945	Miners and management	Tied with colonial rules
Old Order	1945 to 1965	Limited mining and smuggling	Illegal
The new order	1966 to 1998	Limited mining and smuggling	Illegal
Reform Order	1998- to date	Tin miners and entrepreneurs	Legal and illegal

Source: Compiled from various sources and findings from interviews in the field

Table 4 illustrates that the orientation and association of Tionghoa with tin metamorphosed occasionally. This is highly influenced by the style of power policy and differs from one regime to another. However, it is interesting to note that metamorphosis is inseparable from the context of tin exploitation, indicating that political policies determine the Tionghoa economy (Yustika 2009). Lane & Ersson (1994) stated that the Tionghoa political economy is not only dependent and oriented toward tin mining, rather it is also part of the management subject.

A description of the Tionghoa ethnic tin political economy based on this study is formulated as follows.

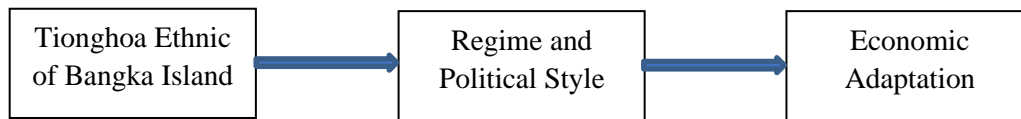


Figure 2.

Scheme of Tionghoa political economy in Bangka Island

Source: Created by the author

Figure 2 shows that the economic adaptation of the Tionghoa community on Bangka Island is determined by the manner the regime changes. The interesting question is whether the elites of the Tionghoa have ever participated in determining the regime change or are merely passive objects adapting naturally? In addition, their position at the grassroots level needs to be determined.

Elites and grassroots disparities on political economy

One of the important findings of this study shows that the narrative concerning the reality of Tionghoa residing in Bangka, from the political economy, it is necessary to distinguish between the happenings at the grassroots and elite levels. This means that there needs to be a major disclaimer that the Tionghoa at the elite and grassroots levels are different entities, especially in the indicators of economic classes, education, and socio-culture.

Based on the political economy aspect, the Tionghoa elites tend to receive support and even protection from the government when carrying out their jobs as the dominant party in the business sector. This was particularly evident in the New Order Era, where the government at that time fostered harmonious relations with the Tionghoa elite and provided military protection based on their relationship (Lim & Gosling 1997, Ibrahim 2013). Chua (2008) stated this relationship was a mutually beneficial coalition between the government and the Tionghoa elites.

Meanwhile, the Tionghoa, at the grassroots level, lacked such privileges. Instead of being able to establish a harmonious relationship as well as be protected by the government, they were in fact under strict control and often became victims of military violence whenever they engaged in illegal tin mining activities, as revealed by an informant AKU. Setijadi (2016) stated that the recent emergence of China as a world giant and the image of closeness between the Tionghoa Indonesian elites and those in the country is also one of the major challenges in the process of encouraging elite inclusiveness. It is feared that the increase in the elites' political configuration tends to impact the collective ethnicity image.

Secondly, since their early ancestors migrated to Bangka, the third generation abandoned tin mining; however, it turns out that, recently, the elites and those at the grassroots have a different work orientation. Elites tend to dominate business enterprises, both in the provincial capitals, districts, and sub-districts. Furthermore, in the post-New Order era, most Tionghoa elites also started to look at and even succeeded in occupying strategic political positions, such as regional heads or legislators (Ibrahim 2013). Meanwhile, grassroots Tionghoa in Bangka prefer to work in the agricultural sector and in rubber, pepper, oil palm, chili, and vegetable plantations. This resolves Lan's (2017) anxiety concerning the manner in which the Tionghoa still struggle to become "local people" or the "slight provocations." According to Brahma (2018), this research discovered that the grassroots Tionghoa context in Bangka Island is almost complete. It further confirms that the continuation of past mistreatment of the Tionghoa with some changes, as reported in the study carried out by Kuntjara & Hoon (2020), is slightly fair when generalized regardless of the differences between the elites and grassroots.

Based on interviews with CIO (resident of Songhin Hamlet, Bangka), ALI (resident of Cengel Hamlet, Bangka), SAK (resident of Parit Tiga, West Bangka), and NGI (resident of Air Jungu, West Bangka), it was discovered that jobs in the plantation have recently become the primadonna sector of Bangka Tionghoa citizens at the grassroots. The excerpt from CIO, a resident of Songhin Hamlet, Bangka Regency, is reported as follows;

"Our families depended on the agricultural and plantation sector for a long time. As far as they are able to remember, even though their parents used to mine (TI), their main job was on the plantation (where pepper and various types of vegetables were cultivated). Recently, in our opinions, people of Tionghoa descent residing in Bangka are turning to the plantation sector, especially oil palm, while fewer people are still working as miners. Currently, in Songhin Hamlet, there are no Tionghoa miners, instead the Malays from Jurung Village carry out this activity." (Informant CIO).

Table 5 explains the disparities between the Tionghoa elites and those at the grassroots-based on their political economy.

Table 5.
Disparities of Tionghoa elites and grassroots in the political economy aspect

No.	Elite Society	Grassroots Society
1	Have an intimate relationship with the government regime	Experiencing a tightly controlled phase and are sometimes victims of violence by the state apparatus
2	Dominant trading and businesses	Dominant working in plantations or agricultural sector
3	Playing identity politics in political economy practice	Identity is not an instrument in carrying out political economy practices

Source: Primary data (2021)

Thirdly, at the elite level, the Tionghoa identity is one of the favorite instruments used to advance their political and economic interests and has always considered carrying out such practices (Ibrahim 2013). For example, when running for regional head or councilor, Tionghoa identity was always used to attract sympathy among the voters. In the economic realm, namely the business world, the elites in Bangka kind of "collaborate" to maintain and keep their position as Tionghoa and high-level traders, without being "confused" with the presence of other non-Tionghoa businessmen (Ibrahim 2013).

This condition seems to be inversely proportional to the reality at the grassroots. Several informants, including NGI (46 years), SAK (40 years), AKU (47 years), and AFI (35 years), stated that Tionghoa identity is not a yardstick in making political choices during elections and selecting colleagues. In other words, ethnic Tionghoa-based identity politics are not popular among the grassroots. An informant SAK even won the 2020 West Bangka Regent Election in the hamlet where they reside. Interestingly, out of the two polling stations, the winner was a candidate pair from Malay and a Muslim, not someone from the Tionghoa ethnic.

Conclusion

The Tionghoa ethnic that carried out exodus migration due to mining on the Island brought about a fundamental landscape, specifically related to tin labor and a culture that tends to be integrative. In the economic field, the Tionghoa ethnic has a big share and plays an important role in this context. The term "economic animal" is a jargon recognized for its existence; however, it has become irrelevant in terms of describing exclusivity in the current field. Meanwhile, from a political-economic perspective, it is evident that power determines the manner by which the Tionghoa ethnic adapted to the discourse of tin commodity. The relationship between this ethnic group and the exploitation of tin occasionally and gradually made them migrate from mainland China. However, the changing political-economic

conditions have created an elite and grassroots cluster within the Tionghoa ethnic group as well as caused their boundaries to become thinner.

Tin mining, which was the initial attraction of the Tionghoa coolies, was the origin of the ethnic status transition across the country. The connection with their native land China and the fusion with the Malays, led to the formation of a new identity within the tin circle. This commodity was able to integrate the Malay and Tionghoa communities into one group, presented in several phases during the power transition from the Palembang Sultanate, the VOC/Dutch Company, England, Japan, and the Indonesian Independence Order. The control over tin was ultimately greatly influenced by the regime in determining policy and the Tionghoa ethnic adapted to each regime, including now when they are again part of the exploitation of tin.

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