

‘The West’ from the view of Chinese Diaspora: Entrepreneurship in Indonesia

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Chinese transnationalism nowadays depicts one important part of Chinese Diaspora Studies, which examine Chinese migration across the world from an economic, sociological, ethnographical and historical perspective. In many cases, overseas ethnic Chinese acquired a cultural knowledge of ‘the West’ much earlier than the majority of the indigenous population, especially in Indonesia, and have hence played their part in shaping the face of Southeast Asia and local perceptions of ‘the West’ alike. Since the Dutch Colonial period, ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Indonesia have operated as intermediary agents, who facilitated local and cross regional commerce through their extensive trade networks and functioned as a gateway to the culturally close ‘East’ as well as the geographically distant ‘West’ at the same time.

The main focus of research aims at examining how the position of Chinese-Indonesians in colonial times has influenced contemporary attitudes of ethnic Chinese towards the West (and towards China/the world)?

Through a combination of qualitative methods, including interviews and discourse analysis, this research project will analyze how these images of the ‘West’ perceived by Chinese-Indonesian entrepreneurs from the colonial period to the present day have changed over time. The research area includes the following regions: 1) Jakarta – early contact with the Dutch Colonial Government, 2) West Borneo – Ethnic Chinese and Missionaries, 3) Atambua – administratively related to the Dutch and culturally related to Portuguese.