

Interview with Benedict Anderson

Cynthia Foo

On October 1, 2008, Benedict Anderson presented a talk at Columbia University in which he discussed his upcoming book, a biography of the Chinese-Indonesian journalist Kwee Thiam Tjing. Having found a book of Kwee's writings in a second-hand bookshop in Indonesia in 1962, Anderson describes his surprise that no one could identify the pseudonymous author, who wrote what Anderson considers to be "the greatest piece of prose written in the first half of the 20th century by anybody in Indonesia." For years after Kwee's death, Anderson explains, details of the journalist's life and work were forgotten. It was only recently that Anderson was himself able to write about the author, in the process considering the role of cosmopolitanism in the life of the colonial subject.

Kwee wrote mainly during the period between the failed local Communist uprisings of 1926-'27 and the end of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. Anderson explains that Kwee's writings detail and often parody the complicated relationships among the Dutch, Indonesian, and Chinese populations. The complex cultural negotiations and facility with language demonstrated in Kwee's multi-lingual writings bely a cultural inter-mingling shared by many: it is a commonly overlooked experience which Anderson describes as "cosmopolitanism from below." Kwee's fierce patriotism for Indonesia also substantiates what Anderson points out is an often overlooked historical fact of significant Indonesian Chinese political support for the burgeoning independent nation, and a rejection of a primary political loyalty to China. Anderson spoke at length with *Invisible Culture* guest co-editor Cynthia Foo, discussing his notion of "cosmopolitanism from below," and offering some thought-provoking suggestions for reconsidering the post-colonial subject.

Cynthia Foo: The questions I had for you were along the lines of what you discussed in your talk when you mentioned the concept of "cosmopolitanism from below." Is that idea part of a larger work?

Benedict Anderson: Well, I've been working on this remarkable biography on Kwee Thiam Tjing, a journalist. But I was partly stuck for resources and what's available is very fragmentary, so I wasn't sure how to go about it. But I started talking about publishing on colonial cosmopolitanism and the more I thought about it the more I thought, "Wow, it gives me a way into some things I didn't see how I could access, but maybe I can." I'm not sure it's going to be one of the fundamental things about the book, but will certainly be a big part of it.

Kwee is one of these Chinese names which, depending on which colonial country you were in, changed. The Dutch spelled it "Kwee," but you can find it in other colonies as "Quay," "Cui," etc. It's a huge clan, one of the biggest clans in Indonesia, dating from the early 17th century.

CF: You mention that one of your interests in this individual was the fact that the entire history and record of his life had almost disappeared. I guess the question could be, given that there are so many histories that disappear, why is this one particularly interesting?

BA: Well, most of it has disappeared, but [there remains] a great piece of prose—I think actually I'd be prepared to say it's the greatest piece of prose written in the first half of the 20th century by anybody in Indonesia. It's really quite brilliant and extremely funny and extremely sad at the same time. And yet nobody seems to have done anything about it.

It was published in very peculiar circumstances in 1947, in the middle of the 1945-'49 armed anti-colonial revolution. Kwee lived for another 27 years and didn't seem to have been able or willing to do anything about republishing it. I ran across a copy in a second-hand bookshop in 1962, and found it to be something quite extraordinary. I asked people whether they'd heard of the book, but almost no one had. I asked them about the name of the author, given on the title page as "Tjamboek Berdoeri," and they'd reply, "It's just a pen name." I'd ask, "Do you know who's behind the pen name?" and the response was negative. I was banned from Indonesia from doing much about this—I was banned for 27 years. When I finally got back in 1998 after the fall of Suharto dictatorship, I said to myself, "I'm going to do my best to see if I can find out who this guy is." It took me much longer than it should have to find him. I mean, he was dead by then, but I've been thinking about this guy for 40 years.

CF: When you mentioned you were banned from Indonesia for 27

years, was this in relation to your research on the communist revolution?

BA: No, there was a failed coup d'état in 1965 and I was one of the students who wrote what became notorious as the "Cornell Paper." The Paper suggested that the government suggestion that the new, military controlled government's insistence that the Indonesian Communist Party was the mastermind of the failed coup was false; in fact the coup came from within the military itself. And this got me banned. It was only after Suharto fell that it was possible for the ban to be lifted.

CF: Do you have an idea why the ban was eventually lifted?

BA: Well, by that time many key people had died or were crippled or retired; a new generation was in the military who were young kids when [Suharto came to power]. I think there was no longer personal animosity in that sense, and I think the post-Suharto regime wanted to show everybody that a big change was really coming. One of my former students, who was fairly highly-placed in the U.S. State Department, also made it her business to help. In that atmosphere, maybe someone figured I'd been banned from Indonesia for so long that it was probably an embarrassment to continue to keep me out.

CF: I wanted to return for a while to Kwee and your biography of him. Do you have information about his background, his education, or how he came to be a journalist?

BA: Yes, it's very clear. He was born in the 1900, so by the time he finished high school, which would have been about 1917, probably 1918, there were still no colleges in Indonesia. So if one didn't have the money to go to Holland, that was as far as anybody went. The Dutch language education was probably the most modern available, but it was deliberately colonial and arrogant when dealing with non-European kids. Kwee has a very funny account of fighting in the schoolyard as a small boy, being bullied. He said, "Well, they [Dutch colonialists] talked arrogantly all the time, but the nice thing is there were rules—if you lost in a fight, all you had to do was shout 'Excuse!' and the person beating you had to stop and then help you to your feet." Then he added, "The Dutch boys were pretty good about this but us Eurasians and Chinese, if we won, we would pretend not to hear the 'Excuse!', so you could get your last licks in." This was about the only case where the colonial had the opportunity to beat up a white boy.

CF: You mentioned in your talk that he wasn't interested in the work that his Chinese parents did—what was the nature of their

employment?

BA: Kwee's mother was a housewife; his father was a sort of inspector at one of the large sugar plantations near the town of Malang.

But Kwee had funny theories about his life. A year or two before he died, and he wrote that some of his ancestors had been top collaborators with the Dutch in the 18th and 19th centuries. I mean, certainly he came from an elite family. He doesn't say much about his father, but he was very close to his mom.

I think Kwee's parents just thought, "Well, what are Chinese going to do? You can't be a bureaucrat; if you're not in business what are you going to do?" Twenty-five years later, you could go to medical school or a training institution, but Kwee's spirit was very independent, and he was quite an adventurous type, so journalism was very attractive.

CF: In terms of being adventurous, did Kwee have a chance to travel around the region, as far as you know?

BA: As far as I know, that's what's interesting about him: he almost never went anywhere. Except he had a sideline—journalism is a very unpredictable and badly-paid profession, so he had to have something else. So he worked as an agent for a quinine factory owned by some Italians. We know that he went to the southern part of Sumatra on company business, but he never talks about it. As far as I know, the furthest he ever went overseas was in 1960, when he and his wife joined their daughter and her husband, who were assigned to work in Malaysia. He only had one child, a daughter, who was very attached to him. As far as we know, Kwee was there for a decade and didn't do much except look after the grandchildren and hang out.

He returned to Indonesia in 1971 and he died in 1974, so I don't think he ever went to Bali or to Eastern Indonesia. He was quite poor, he never had a house of his own for all his life, and most of his articles were written about rich Chinese (sometimes quite nastily) as well as colonialists. In terms of colonial cosmopolitanism, I thought it was interesting because this guy was absolutely a cosmopolitan, but he almost never went anywhere—not even to China, as many of his Chinese acquaintances did. So I had to think about cosmopolitanism to talk about Kwee.

CF: And that was something that struck me quite a lot in your talk at Columbia University—this idea of being a cosmopolitan without needing to travel. This notion of the irrelevance of travel seems to

be implicit in the formulation of the idea of a cosmopolitan: a cosmopolitan, strictly speaking, as someone who's worldly, not because of world travel, but because of their exposure to other cultures. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how this is formulated in terms of Kwee. How would you describe him as a cosmopolitan?

BA: His family had been in Indonesia for 300 years, but Dutch colonial policy had been always, as much as possible, to segregate the Chinese and not let them assimilate with the natives (a policy which was of course quietly resisted). So Kwee was very aware of the fact that he wasn't a native of the country, although he was extremely patriotic about the country. He spoke Hokkien, which nobody except the Chinese spoke, as well as Indonesian and Javanese. He started out, really, with 4 languages: he had a home or "in-the-house" language of Hokkien; he spoke Javanese, which is a street language; Dutch he got in school; and Indonesian he learned in his teens, I think, maybe early 20s, because that was the popular medium for writing in newspapers and magazines.

So you start off with a guy who at 20 is a master of 4 languages, and you've got something right there. The second thing to add was that this was a very rich colony, yet little Holland didn't have the power to say "only for us," so all kinds of people came to seek their fortunes: Indians came, Yemenese came, Europeans of different kinds—Germans, Austrians, English, Americans—and so forth. This is why the population was very mixed; there was also a huge migration of natives, mainly Javanese, from the interior where people were looking for better ways to live. The Chinese ghetto system broke down in the 1910s, so, wherever you went, you were running into all kinds of people.

The other condition that existed was that the Dutch were not able to impose everything. They could impose their taxes, and obedience, but they couldn't get your loyalty. The colonial regime was in a peculiar position. On one level they were very powerful, but on another level they had no real power: you can't command loyalty. The colonial regime was peculiar: they couldn't do nationalism, nor could they be an assimilationist colonial power. So it was possible to make popular alliances, which became much more difficult in the 1950s, after independence and when national governments were in some ways more powerful than the Dutch had been. The independent government had power because it had behind it the hurricane force of nationalism. Under those circumstances, cosmopolitanism was under heavy attack: "Why

are you still using Dutch words?”, “Using Javanese is separatist,” etc., etc. So language was disciplined after 1950 and made more monochrome.

But by this time, Kwee was old and had too much experience to accept this approach. He rejected this attitude until the day he died. It was a very peculiar situation, I mean I don't think people should be talking about colonialism and power without recognizing that, in some fundamental ways, colonialism was very weak and that's why it collapsed so rapidly all around the world.

CF: And when you said that, I couldn't help but remember that in your speech you mentioned this absolute, in a way, powerlessness, because the regional administrators from the Dutch colonial power would be replaced every four years. Regional administrators could form whatever alliances they wanted, but at the end of the four years, no matter how powerful they were, they'd be called back to the Netherlands and then replaced with somebody else. There's always an uneasy space of knowing that your power is temporal and limited. I was also reminded me of Somerset Maugham's short stories—he takes great pleasure in poking fun at the drunken colonial administrator who tries very hard to get along the natives and ultimately realizes the futility of it, and the ways in which the local residents are able to trip him up so well and foil all of his better intentions. There's a lot of comedy and, as you say, there's a lot of sadness as well; a lot of futility at the same time. But when you were talking about the influence of the colonial government from afar, I kept thinking about current discussions of transnationalism. Would you say there are any kinds of links between the processes of colonization and transnationalism, or do you see them operating very differently? How would you compare the two?

BA: If you look at the earlier history when the Dutch East India Company came to Indonesia, and you read the records of the royal courts and so forth, they couldn't figure out how the Company operated because the Governor Generals simply disappeared within several years. Added to that is the fact that the Company operated in a style completely opposite to that of the heredity and marriage-based systems, where you would have the job as long as you were alive. You might be murdered, of course. But the succession in the Dutch Company was not based on lineage or descent, so there was no possibility of marrying into the “ruling family” of the Company. All the ways in which the traditional feudal kings dealt with the external relationships simply couldn't

be successful. While the Dutch took local women, the idea of marrying a royal princess would have been impossible from them and, anyway, they were going to go home eventually. So you're talking about these fundamental contrasts between institutional forms of power.

And that's typical, actually, of most major corporations, where you could be enormously powerful back home, but with rules in the institution that said 5 years—or the age of retirement—is the limit; nobody remembers your name, you're gone, and somebody else takes your place. In fact, corporations are largely anonymous. You can give students a list of the five largest companies in the United States and ask them, "Who is the CEO?" and they never know.

The contrast of course is with people like Suharto and Sukarno, where Sukarno ruled the country for 20 years—Suharto for more than 30. If it's like royalty, then it's not a strange kind of depersonalized institutional power that corporations like the Dutch East India Company, one of the earliest trans-nationals.

CF: I'm trying to think about ways in which power is uneven. There isn't a simple equation: colonialism therefore equals more oppression, necessarily. For instance, the Dutch East India Company used Indonesia's resources to Holland's profit. This process strengthened Holland and was a direct result of its colonialization of Indonesia, but Holland is not able to exercise its power directly on Indonesia as a direct result of this relationship. A question comes to mind in terms of dealing with how to acknowledge Kwee's facility with the system, his ability to hybridize language, and to use it to pun and make really incisive jokes (insider incisive jokes that perhaps a colonial or somebody operating in a monolingual context would not be as able to be as quick on their feet, or be as able to rebut). How would you acknowledge that kind of colonized agency while answering the argument that suggesting that Kwee's facility, while a form of power, doesn't also deny the real effects and suppressions that occurred under colonial rule?

BA: First of all you have to remember, there was a tiny group of Dutch there in the 1880s—there were less than 20,000 people in the Dutch archipelago who called themselves legally Dutch, and half of those were Eurasian. So we're talking about an incredibly small group, in an age before telephones and telegraphs, before trains, before anything else. Obviously [Dutch power] was extremely limited and they *had* to work with local feudal people to get

anything done. The regime was only possible by a complex system of collaborations across racial lines, which the Chinese also participated in—a regime which was basically financed by opium. About half of the budget in the last half of the nineteenth century came from opium auctions, and it was openly sold—partly to Chinese, but mainly to poor Indonesians—and that didn't stop really until cigarettes came to take their place.

The Dutch were a small power and in a not very rich country in those days. Unlike the powerful British in Burma, they were afraid of native rebellions if the old society was messed up too much, so they passed agrarian laws which forbade foreigners—including Chinese—from owning agricultural land. There was a lot of rural dispossession and absentee landholders in other colonies, but this was absolutely not the case in Indonesia. You could also say, by the 20th century, that the practices of real colonial state- terrorism had been abandoned: the Dutch had a system where people weren't tortured and people weren't publicly executed. There was some kind of press, even if it was periodically repressed—I mean, you went to jail for nine months, but you weren't put away forever.

The punitive character of the state, by comparison to what came later, was quite mild. I'm going to say: as nobody could stay very long, the curb on instinct to get power and hold it really was quite strong compared to what came after independence. It's very curious. [The Dutch] made a lot of money out of Indonesia and the toil of the peasants, no doubt about that, and in that sense there was oppression. But the number of people in jail in 1900 to 1940 was very, very small. People can talk differently in retrospect, but during late-colonialism there meant the normality of a stable currency, a normality of a police system—I mean, it had its corrupt side—but basically you knew what the rules were and, on the whole, the judicial system followed those rules. This system completely collapsed in the late '50s/early '60s, where the law basically could be bought and people with money and power flouted the law absolutely with impunity. So normality was assumed where you minded your own business and got on with your life.

CF: I wanted to ask you about a time when Kwee was put on trial for defending [the right to independence in] Aceh in a poem, and his expression that being colonized was “tidak enak” [literally translated, “not tasty”]. I wondered if you could talk about that a little bit?

BA: It was in the early 20s, and he was just a young fellow saying, “If I had been born an Acehnese, my sword would be out of the scabbard. Blood would flow, etc.” It was quite the provocation. Needless to say, it was not surprising that, to Dutch society, he was no good. But it wasn’t as if he was picked up and disappeared. He was tried and, when he was sentenced, it was for eight months. It wasn’t pleasant, but it wasn’t horrible. And I think the expression “colonialism is ‘tidak enak’” was meant to be ironical. You think of the burden of colonialism as not “enak”—it’s about disagreeable food or being uncomfortable on an uncomfortably hot day. “Tidak enak” is about as funny a description of colonialism as you could imagine.

CF: How long was Kwee in prison?

BA: Until November of the same year, 10 months, something like that. When Kwee got out of prison, in Jakarta, as he described it, the Dutch knew something was coming. They were doing preventive arrests of suspected Communists. These people were being brought into the prison just as he was leaving, so he was a political prisoner, but early on. The encyclopaedia for Chinese who mattered, published in the 1930s, said that he was actually charged eleven times, was usually punished, and went to jail about three or four times, but he doesn’t mention that, and I presume it was for a very short period.

CF: Are the charges and jail terms mostly for saying the wrong things or publishing the wrong things?

BA: Yes.

CF: And were they mainly allegations by the colonial government?

BA: Yes.

CF: You described how the category of Eurasian as a category which wasn’t strictly defined in the colonial era. How did the official status of Chinese, or non-Indonesians, or Eurasians, or anyone who was not considered not native to the country change after independence?

BA: The Chinese were a major threat in the 1940s; in Jakarta there was a huge massacre of Chinese. But [the Dutch colonial government] had the idea that it was important to keep the Chinese and Indonesians as separate as possible, and that meant if you were registered with them as a Chinese—even if your mother wasn’t Chinese—you had your own sub-section of law where you were required to live in areas designated as forts, you had to pay a special kind of tax, you had special kinds of passports to move outside the town you lived, and a system of inheritance which was

different from everybody else.

This system became very odd, because immigration wasn't very large until the 1870s or 1880s, and most of these people back then no longer spoke Mandarin. Most of the people would read Chinese, some of them kept their dialects—Hokkien, Hakka, and so forth—but the everyday language was the local language, Javanese, Sundanese, or whatever it was. The Chinese Indonesians adopted many local practices and a good number of them became Muslims and so forth. So the Dutch were always concerned about this. What happened was that around 1910, larger new immigrations came through China for plantation labour and so forth. It meant that the Dutch couldn't keep this practice of segregation up, so the laws on the movement of Chinese and the laws on ghetto residencies were abandoned. The Chinese could move around wherever they wanted, could live wherever they wanted. For criminal purposes, they were still under the law for natives, but for trade and for business—commercial purposes—they were under European law because the Europeans wanted to handle Chinese debts and bankruptcy cases by their own laws. So the Chinese were moving out of those ghettoized situations into a sort of public realm where, legally, they were treated more and more regularly like an equal. I'm sure if the Japanese hadn't come, this system would have become gradually normalizing.

But the most peculiar thing was that the Dutch settled on a term for the Chinese primarily, but also for Yemenese, and people from India, and the Japanese: they legally called them "foreign orientals." They didn't call themselves "western orientals," and the purpose of the former term is that the legal category which entered the law meant that even if your family had been in Indonesia for 20 years, you were foreign. And this sank deeply into Indonesian consciousness, which is one of the reasons why Chinese are always in a category of a mixture of intimacy and hostility: people always got it into their minds that Chinese were always foreign.

After independence, this practice was abandoned, though Chinese were faced with a choice: if you wanted to be a public citizen, what kind of a public citizen do you want to be? A citizen of China or a citizen of Indonesia? This put the Chinese into a very difficult psychic state. What was the right thing to choose? Because if you had a Chinese passport (which was available to them) then they were subjects of a government who might say, "Well, we don't want you here any more. It's time you went

home." On the other hand, if you went for Indonesian citizenship, it wasn't always easy to obtain. You had to pay money and that sort of thing and, as the states got more lawless, the advantages of Indonesian citizenship also became dubious. So there was a split in the Chinese community between those who decided to become Indonesian citizens, those who decided to be Chinese and those who didn't know what to do.

CF: Is this around the time when Kwee writes about being denounced by a rival editor for trying to be a "true native"? Where the editor crudely suggests that Kwee had been circumcised (and is therefore a Muslim)?

BA: I don't know much about the other guy, but he wasn't a native of East Java. He came from Bandung. He was sent there and he was very pro-Sun Yat-sen. He said all Chinese wanted to become real Chinese, that only real Chinese visit the home country, that one should be loyal to the home country, and so forth. And for Kwee, this was absurd; he was proud to the end of his life that he couldn't read any Chinese and didn't know any Mandarin. He really did consider himself absolutely almost in an American way, that this is a country full of all kinds of different people, that we have to get along with each other, we have to be faithful to the country where we were born, and that this is the place where we were going to die. I think Kwee was of the opposite group, the group which said, "Look, we've been born here, we were educated here, our food tastes like this, we speak like that, and we belong here." So this accusation by the other guy was a very contemptuous one, sort of suggesting Kwee was a barbarian. It came with a certain kind of arrogance about the "great Chinese civilization in the world."

Like any form of racism, Kwee had accused the Dutch of racism, and here he accused the Chinese of racism. And he didn't just have Indonesian friends, he had Dutch friends, he had Japanese friends, he was familiar with all kinds of people, so this thinking didn't attract him at all.

There hasn't been major anti-Chinese violence now for a decade. The last one was in 1998 and actually the main victors were Chinese. The problem is that the state policy was to re-educate the Chinese in many ways. Chinese were completely excluded from political power. In the whole time there was only one Chinese minister—who was a crony—and he was appointed in the last weeks of the regime. At no time were they in any bureaucratic positions; Chinese were excluded completely from

the military and the police. So what were they going to do if they didn't fill professional positions and become doctors or lawyers? They created businesses, so they became more visible as a group that couldn't do anything except business and who got rich and became arrogant, which is indeed very often what did happen.

The problem with the Chinese community in Indonesia and in fact with the overseas Chinese population generally is that this was a community which had no regrets and which had no memory. Prestige and influence depended heavily on money, something Kwee criticized all the time. Chinese were in the habit of a visible and ostentatious display of money, which they saw as perfectly reasonable. It looked terrible from the outside. And it's interesting, in many of the earlier riots, the actions aren't directed against the person who was Chinese. The most famous one was the one in 1963. In fact nobody was hurt, but hundreds of automobiles were burned. Houses were burned, not taken over. Basically it was a protest against Chinese arrogance.

At the same time, one has to say that, as pretty often happens, minorities produce courageous people precisely because they can't have political power. Far and away the most famous human rights lawyer Yap Thiam Hien, who died 8 or 9 years ago [*Yap Thiam Hien died in 1989. —ed.*] was a national hero to everybody, and wasn't in the regime. He was incredibly brave and went to prison a couple of times. By having things barred to them by a regime, perhaps part of the energy flows into this kind of heroism which native Indonesians with much different opportunities are less likely to do.

CF: Along those lines, I wanted to ask you about a cosmopolitanism that existed in the colonial era that was a lot less available once the colonialists left and Indonesia became a national state. But I was also thinking, on the converse side, of the idea of nationalism in Kwee's time, where you couldn't distinguish by race anyway, so easily. Quay's insistence, "Look, I'm a nationalist"—that idea of being a nationalist is quite different from the same idea, post-independence. Being a nationalist under colonial rule suggests solidarity against colonization and thus cuts across racial boundaries. It seems it's more fluid than nationalism post-independence, wouldn't you say?

BA: It was always quite different. The Bandung conference produced the idea of the Third World having its own world. The idea that the ex-colonial world had and ought to have transnational solidarity lasted really into the 60s and the idea that our nations

should cooperate on an international level—I think it was taken for granted by nationalists in the 30s and 40s.

I want to get the idea that the idea of nationalism just belonged to Chinese, that they weren't affected by the same conditions. The thing really is that China in the war period is a very chaotic place. The Ching dynasty is nearly infirm, there is a huge mess of warlords, youngsters like Chiang Kai-shek—China was a huge mess in the 40s. It was invaded by Japan, which conquered a huge chunk of China. There was an outpouring of overseas Chinese patriotism from other countries—people sent money and aid and support—but clearly that left Chinese in a very bad way. This changed after independence; after Indonesia's recognized independence in '49, more reforms became public. And after that, China was a very important national player, and more and more so 'til today, so that, for Chinese, for the first time in a long time, China was something one shouldn't have to pity, but was something one could identify with and [it] was quite physical in the Chinese community in the '50s. In the '50s there was much more inclination to say, "Well, you know, this country isn't treating us well," or "We have a big power over here who can help us and protect us, and they should." Chinese could be quite national and, actually, that was a problem, too. The Chinese who went to China didn't always adjust. There was a man named Kwee Hing Djiat who was very pro-China and he caused trouble with the Dutch. He was expelled from the colony and forced to live in Shanghai for ten years. And during these ten years, he writes, "It is very touching; I realized I was in a foreign country, I couldn't speak Shanghainese." There was lots of misery—drugs, prostitution, etc.—he didn't like the food, northern Chinese food, and after he comes back he completely changes into a strong Kwee-like figure. Unfortunately he died young, around 38, but was probably the most respected of the middle generation which committed itself publicly and drastically to the future of Indonesia. And there's also lots of people I know who went back to China, then had a very unpleasant experience there. They were looked down as not really Chinese: they didn't speak Chinese properly, they didn't like the food, they were thought to be arrogant and lazy. He didn't like it and he went back to Southeast Asia.

CF: Well I could keep asking you questions but I realise you have a limited amount of time. I wanted to address the issue of the topic of the publication. We're considering questions of the state of the

field of post-colonial theory, including positions on cosmopolitanism. How does cosmopolitanism affect definitions or descriptions of people? How do you categorise—or not, as the case may be—what this means? What are some impacts? And I wonder if you would share a general view of cosmopolitanism now? When you are looking at the way in which Kwee and Kwee Hing Djiat interacted with their city—not just Chinese, but other people in the community? How would you compare cosmopolitanism: the experience then, with the experience in Indonesia now?

BA: A very important change took place after Indonesia was established, and this is of a huge break in the exclusion of foreign-born people from the public field. This raises the question of nationality of Kwee, because the system of patriarchy survives, but it is in conflict with the principles of nationalism. So if a woman—let's say she's French and meets this lovely guy from Brazil and they love each other and decide to get married, and she goes to live in Brazil, but she doesn't want to give up her French citizenship, and the Brazilian government said, "Well, you are going to be living here and your children are going to be raised here. You should obey your husband. We are going to give you Brazilian citizenship." And she says, "Okay, but does that mean I have to give up my Frenchness? Sorry, it's not going to happen." It becomes increasingly an issue, particularly between Europe and South America, and what comes out of that is the first systematic form of dual citizenship, which was available only to women: women had dual passports, and it was not available to men.

Part of the reason for that was that males were still regarded as special citizens because they fought, and were subject to being conscripted to the army. That lasted really up until the Vietnam era. After that, there were really no countries that have real conscription any more. Armies were considered semi-professional, semi-mercenary organizations. Once that happened, men questioned why only women were allowed to have dual citizenships and said they should have it too. More and more countries started to accept the principle of dual citizenship. Dual citizenship would have been horrifying to people who lived in the 19th century: it was impossible. Even the United States, that doesn't allow somebody born abroad to be president: in fact from the middle 1970s you had dual citizenship. It wasn't easy to get, but it was available. So in international law, it's been accepted grudgingly. Dual nationality is a respectable possibility.

Needless to say it was abused by all kinds of crooks and people

who have as many passports as they can lay their hands on. And it has to be said that Chinese have an especially bad reputation in this respect. The idea is not to offer citizenship on the basis of loyalty and attachment, but that it is simply a racket in order to do certain kinds of business. So this is one important part of the new cosmopolitanism, that is, the possibilities for multiple citizenship either for forming attachments or for opportunistic reasons. I mean, I remember the first Indonesian I knew who took American citizenship in the 1970s: he was absolutely desperate to keep his citizenship, but no, he changed his citizenship and he was ashamed for his betrayal of the country and so forth. But now, it's taken for granted. I mean, that's one form of cosmopolitanism.

The other form which is interesting is that the kind of movement that's available to people is rather different. I mean, for, shall we say, intellectual and artistic circles, and it's especially visible in regional cinema: this is something which excludes Hollywood, but some of the most important directors are coming from Korea or Japan; there are lots from Taiwan, the Philippines, etc., with festivals which circulate this stuff. Not global cosmopolitanism, but *regional* cosmopolitanism. This reality is reflected in a much higher level of translation into different Asian languages than English, so that reading is available to people in not just English; there are translations into Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and so forth. And in literature, it's something to be proud of if you get translated into Japanese. In that sense, I think there is a tradition of conferences and spending half a year here, and half a year there. There is an experience of being overseas, but not in a position of being a prostitute or a manual labourer. There is a sense of mobility which wasn't there in the 1930s, but definitely is there now.

CF: I was wondering as well if some of the festival circuit of movies would have to do as well with a diasporic community returning to Indonesia and trying to articulate an Indonesianness that obviously includes references to whatever culture that this person was a part of? So there's a whole new generation. There are not often any explicit references, and in fact there is a real desire to reform that kind of hybrid experience as an intrinsic Malaysianness when that's not really true to the historical context.

BA: There's a Malaysian director under former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad who deliberately plays with that in a big way. He deliberately has Indians, Chinese, Arabs, etc. It's one of the great movies of our time. Everybody's jabbering away in their

own language, and it's held together politically by Mahathir. It's funny, the last thing he did was about the Communist Chinese, but everybody's in the picture. His shorts are also very good.

And of course this enraged the establishment, but people recognize themselves and they all feel bored with the earlier regime, which is probably falling apart now. And Yasmin, you know, is a transsexual, married to a Chinese which would be something absolutely impossible 30 years ago. The movie opens with a brilliant scene where a young man is practicing Indian dancing in his little shop, and does it beautifully and very funnily, and it's very touching at the same time.

And then on the other side in Singapore, there's the picture of absolute alienation from the PAP regime and from Singaporean society with all of its ghastliness. It is really quite poignant and, again, it's something that presumes Singapore, and Singapore is the frame within which it's set. It's like a prison where the people running the jail are mom and dad, essentially. And then you have Chinese-Malaysian Liang [Tsai Ming-liang]. He goes to Taiwan, but is internationally known.

So you have at least four striking figures who are very courageous and who go ahead and do their stuff and with absolutely no question that Malaysia's their home and there's no special reason for anybody not to be Malaysian. It's clearly directed against the whole structure that the British left behind. The beauty of these movies is that they aren't simply didactic: there are often sides to it which are very funny, or are desperately sad, not in any kind of ideological way. So it's not about a Chinese boy, but about what it's like to live in an endless tyranny.

Communism ended in Malaysia, at least officially, 50 years ago and you have people in their twenties now, and what they face is a stupid and corrupt government. I think that the people who go on and on and on about colonialism are elderly people, or who are people who live in America where post-colonialism is a fad. But I always thought it was a stupid category and you have to think about where you sit to have to think about it.

CF: Would you say cosmopolitanism would be a good replacement for the problems associated with post-colonialism then? What words should we use?

BA: I'm not sure that cosmopolitanism is the way out, but there is a certain sense... I mean if you look at the most famous writers, these are people from Africa, India, the Caribbean. And in French literature, all the most vital writings come from Arabs: Algeria and

Morocco. You also have the invasion of the former empire into the global cultural elite and so forth, and this is something that people have a certain kind of pride in—and in that sense you could say it's a kind of something new.

CF: May I ask you one last question? It just sparked something else. There has also been criticism of cosmopolitanism. I think Eric Lott suggested this: there's also a way that cosmopolitanism becomes a foil for a reinstatement of nationalism, so you have a culture that says, "Oh, look at us, we're so—however you want to say it—civilized, or exposed to different cultures, therefore we are such a great nation." What would you say to somebody like that? Or to that comment?

BA: The whole idea of the nation is that it survives with other nations. It's impossible to have only one nation in the world, so that the idea of only one nation is something odd. I think there are better things like sport contests, cultural exhibitions, which on the one hand, one could say, "Look what we can do," and at the same time say, "Well, we're going to show it to the world and we expect to see what the world has to say," but on the condition that it means we also accept visits. People come to Thailand, etc.; there are all those kinds of circulations which are there all the time. One of the most striking things I've heard is the ban on the Chinese New Year celebrations in the Suharto regime: fireworks and noise, but also cantankerous press, were banned. But when Suharto fell and there was a discussion of allowing celebrations as they did in the past, there were plenty of intellectuals who said, "Oh no, this will raise all kinds of tensions, we shouldn't do this, and so forth." But it turned out—and this is very entertaining—the interesting thing is that everybody loved it, and rushed out to take part in the fireworks and so forth, and the people who actually danced the lion dance, because the Chinese middle classes were too lazy, were street boys, and they thought it was a wonderful change to do something. And I'd say, "Why do you think that happened?" And they said that what happened in the 1980s were TV clips showing all these touristy kinds of programs—you can see them in Hong Kong, lion dances in Malaysia, you can see fireeaters, etc.—and these become, as it will, commercial display. They are accustomed to seeing Chinese movies, Japanese and Korean movies, even lousy historical epics, and it becomes something which is fictive and which is a form of entertainment. So, it's drained of all of its political power; it's just part of the flow of interesting and bizarre things.

And it seems to me that I probably was surprised. Everyone was perfectly happy, nobody was saying, "My god, what are the Chinese doing?" That's also a funny part of receptive cosmopolitanism: you have this distribution of images internationally. People recognize the pyramids and they know what they are; they've probably seen them in some brochure. So the world isn't as alien as it used to be.

I think the contrast between cosmopolitanism and nationalism is mistaken; it's actually conjoined. And I have to say that, even though these Olympic games are ugly in the jingoism that we see, nonetheless, it's a hell of a lot better than murdering people and going to war. If these aggressive impulses have to be expressed somehow, it's much better if they're expressed in a football stadium at a football match. I mean, you could also ask sports fans and youngsters from different countries if they're interested in the country or the sport. It's not which country you support but the second country one would support. For example if the national team is knocked out, who do you support? It's not like when their choices disappear, they stop supporting the game. They can be just as rowdy and noisy in favour of their second or third country. And it seems to me that's crucial. People who look at these football matches and say they're examples of nationalism—I mean, they are—but that's not all they are. There's a lot of stupid practices, but on the whole, it's not all bad. This, I think, is also an example of how inadequate the category of post-colonialism is. Because it doesn't recognize any new, in-the-moment experience; it's an endless recycling. To me, theorizing is like watching a drop of water: you can see the water and that's all it is, a drop of water. But the minute you actually bring a microscope in, it's completely different. Theory is really good at a sort of long-distance framing, but how people live their lives is something else, and I'm personally more interested in that than abstract theorizing.