



E-ISSN: 2706-9117
P-ISSN: 2706-9109
www.historyjournal.net
IJH 2023; 5(2): 111-115
Received: 28-05-2023
Accepted: 08-07-2023

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Assimilation of Arab descendants in Indonesia in the process of national integration

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/27069109.2023.v5.i2b.235>

Abstract

This article is intended to examine the existence and role of people of Arab descent in Indonesia. Arab descendants, as part of the population formed from a long migration process, are part of Indonesian society. There is a dynamic in the process of unification with the native Indonesian population, which is influenced by the conditions and political situation that occur. This paper was developed through the historical research methodology, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. This study is based on the importance of building a complete reconstruction of the role of all societal groups in Indonesian history. So far, existing studies have focused more on *overseas* Chinese or Chinese. In contrast, studies on other Peranakan groups, in this case Arabs, have rarely been the focus of study in history textbooks. This study attempts to examine, examine, and describe the role of Arab descendants in Indonesian history and how efforts were made in the integration process toward a complete identity as part of Indonesian citizens.

Keywords: Arab descendants, Indonesian history, integration process, assimilation

Introduction

Indonesia is a country that has a pluralistic society with several differences in terms of ethnicity, socio-cultural life, language, customs, religion, and so on. One of the problems with the pluralism of Indonesian society is related to the existence of minority groups of people who come from ancestry outside Indonesia. Terms about natives and non-natives still appear, which delimit and mark the differences between groups of foreign descendants and native Indonesian descendants. Even though the Indonesian Government has issued regulations stipulating the cessation of the use of the terms indigenous and non-indigenous, these terms still appear in the lives of Indonesian society. The terms native and non-native reflect the social separation during the Dutch colonial era, which divided society into three classes: Europeans, the Foreign Eastern group (Chinese, Arabs, Indians), and the final group of natives. Thus, this terminology should no longer be used in this era of independence. For national integration, these terms must be merged into one, namely Indonesian citizens. Apart from the terms indigenous and non-indigenous, in Indonesia, several minority groups come from outside, namely ethnic Chinese, Arabs, and Indians. There are not many studies about Arab descendants in Southeast Asia in general and Indonesia in particular, especially compared to "Overseas." "Chinese" (overseas Chinese). This is because, in many Southeast Asian countries, Arab descendants are considered the same as native Muslims, especially in Indonesia. Thus, Arab descendants are considered a minority who have successfully assimilated with the rest of Indonesian society.

Methods

This article was written using a qualitative approach using historical methods. The historical method is a process for testing and reviewing the truth of recordings of events that have occurred by analyzing them critically so that they become reliable presentations and stories. Methods are related to a systematic procedure, process, or technique in investigating a particular scientific discipline to obtain objects as the materials studied. The scientific method in history aims to confirm and explain facts based on the evidence and data obtained. The stages ^[1] include:

1. This source collection (Heuristic) is associated with efforts to obtain primary and secondary sources by developing techniques/library studies.

2. **Source criticism:** Examines the authenticity and integrity of the source, reliability, and credibility. The stages are to carry out external criticism first and then continue with internal criticism. From this stage, some facts will be obtained whose truth can be accounted for
3. Fact analysis, including interpretation in interpreting and explaining phenomena that occur.
4. Exposure/ historiography, the final stage in a series of historical methods is the writing process.

Results and Discussion

Historical Background of the Existence of Arab Descendants in Indonesia

Most Arab descendants in Indonesia originate from the Hadramaut area in southern Yemen. There are also citizens of Arab descent who come from other Middle Eastern and African countries in Indonesia, for example, from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, or Morocco. However, the number is smaller than those from Hadramaut. The arrival of Arab colonists from Hadramaut to Indonesia is thought to have occurred since the middle Ages (13th Century), and almost all of them were men. The initial purpose of their arrival was to trade and preach, and then gradually, they began to settle and raise families with the local community.

For a long time, long before the Hadrami people - the name for the Hadramaut people - migrated, they were known as traders and sailors, similar to the ancient Phoenicians (now Lebanon and Syria). Therefore, according to Natalie Mobini Kesheh ^[2], the Hadramaut people are known as "the Phoenicians of the Middle East". Their maritime trade has been active since approximately five centuries BC. Having experienced a setback, they rose again after the arrival of Islam. They traded while spreading Islam. The Hadrami trade route with the Indonesian archipelago has existed since the seventh century. They trade and return with agricultural products to be traded elsewhere.

It is the political and security situation in the country that drives Hadrami people to migrate. After a significant split occurred among Muslims, resulting in the murder of the fourth caliph, Ali bin Abi Talib, a large-scale migration (hijrah) of his descendants began in various corners of the world. When Imam Ahmad Al-Muhajir moved from Iraq to the Hadramaut area in Yemen approximately a thousand years ago, this descendant of Ali bin Abi Talib brought with him 70 of his family and followers, starting from among the said alawiyin (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through Fatima and Ali bin Abi Talib). In the mid-8th and 9th centuries, the Umayyad and Abasiyah regimes targeted the Sayids for assassination because they were afraid of being a political threat. Because they were continuously chased and intimidated, they fled to various parts of the region such as Africa, the Hijaz, Persia, and India. Among those who fled, some fled to the South Arabian region and then continued their journey by sea to the archipelago.

After that, the poor Hadramis followed suit. Unlike the rich, they traveled to nearby destinations, such as the Red Sea region and the coast of East Africa. "Rich people can afford long and expensive journeys to destinations such as India and the Far East because they have enough money for travel expenses and for the families left behind.

Those who migrate to East Africa and India can return to their homeland more easily and more often than those who migrate to the Indonesian archipelago. The reason is that Arab sailing ships make trade trips every year between

India, Arabia, and East Africa. "Before steamship lines were established in the Indian Ocean, sailing to the East Indies was more time-consuming, requiring stops along the way to wait out the monsoon winds for almost a year. Therefore, many Hadrami live in the archipelago permanently. "Even after travel by steamship became easier, for family or business reasons, they rarely returned home due to the cost and length of the journey.

These Arab-Hadramatic migrants began to come en masse to the archipelago in the last years of the 18th century AD. However, they began settling on Java Island after 1820 AD, and their colonies in the eastern part of the archipelago only arrived in 1870 AD. According to Berg's research ^[3], there are three social stratification groups in Hadramaut who migrated to the archipelago: the sayid group, the tribes, and the middle class. Initially, most Hadramaut migrants who came to the archipelago were sayid groups, but in the future other groups from other social stratification systems also followed in the sayid's footsteps.

The Sayid group are descendants of Sayidina Husain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. This group has the title Habib for men and Habibah for women. In Hadramaut, the Sayid group was a noble group. They are highly respected and influential because they are descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. Tribal groups are not descendants of the Prophet Muhammad but have a high position based on their purity as native residents of Hadramaut. This group consists of two groups, namely qabilah, who are native residents of Hadramaut, and sheiks, who are immigrants who then marry native residents of Hadramaut. This group of sheiks (Masyaikh) is people who have certain knowledge, especially in the field of religion. Meanwhile, the middle class is a group of free residents who work as traders, artisans, farmers and servants ^[4].

These Arabs then formed colonies in various cities in Indonesia, one of which was in Batavia or more precisely in the Pekojan area. Initially, this place was dominated by Muslims from Gujarat, Coromandel, and Malabar, located in India. However, as there were more and more Arab immigrants from Hadramaut, especially with steamship transportation and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 AD, this place became dominated by immigrants from Hadramaut. Therefore, in 1844 AD, the Dutch East Indies government required the existence of a head of the colony, who was then named captain Arab captain or Arab Lieutenant. The local Regent elects the head of the colony, and the Resident carries out his appointment based on the considerations of the internal affairs advisor.

Considerations in appointing the head of the colony include being well-known among the local Government and the Arabs themselves, his economic status, and, most importantly, being invited to cooperate with the Government.

The word community comes from the Latin *communire* (Communion), which means to strengthen. The term community was formed from this word: unity, brotherhood, congregation, group, and even society. A community is a society that lives in an area (in a geographical sense) with certain boundaries where the main factor is the basis for more significant interaction between its members ^[5]. From the explanation above, it can be understood that a community is a unit of human life that occupies a particular area bound by a sense of shared identity and interacts with one another to achieve common goals. The connection with

the Arab community in Betawi is that they initially came to Betawi in stages, not all at once, following their country's social and political conditions. Some came individually on board a sailing ship, and some came in groups. Generally, they come without bringing their wives or children. This is because the archipelago's location is so far from their home area and can only be reached by sea using a sailing ship, so it is hazardous for their wives or children if they bring it. Therefore, only men dared to emigrate to the archipelago^[6]. Their migration peaked at the end of the 19th century AD. Most of them worked as traders, and a small number also served as preachers. After arriving at their destination, as is the case with traders, they do not immediately return to their place of origin, apart from having to wait for their merchandise to run out and they can bring in new merchandise, as well as waiting for the return voyage time which depends on the season. This ultimately forced them to stay for months in foreign lands. While living overseas, they interact with local residents, and it is not uncommon for local residents to eventually want to marry off their daughters to these migrants-especially Arab traders who were very rich and had high social strata, such as the Sayyids. From the marriages of these mixed couples, children of mixed Arab descent were born who were called Peranakan Arabs or mutated. With the birth of these Peranakan Arabs, the number of Arabs in the archipelago, especially in Betawi, increased so that the colonial Government issued a regulation requiring every foreign citizen to occupy places determined based on their race and nationality. Likewise, some rules require you to bring letters when you want to travel. With regulations like this, Arabs, who previously only married native women, switched to marrying women of their ethnicity, especially among the descendants of their generation of mixed marriages. So, their numbers increased, and their sense of kinship increased.

Based on the census first held explicitly in 1859 AD, it was stated that in the Batavia residency, there were 312 Arabs, most of whom lived in the city. Then, in 1870 AD, their number tripled to 952 people. 34 Fifteen years later, precisely in 1885 AD, the Batavia residency accommodated 1,662 Arabs, 1,175 of whom were born in the Dutch East Indies. 35 Then, between 1900 AD and 1930 AD, there had been a significant increase from 2,245 to 5,231 Arabs.

Looking at the census above which started from 1859 AD to 1930 AD, with numbers continuing to increase and their sense of kinship increasing, this shows that the Arab minority has developed into an established community,

The Role of Arab Descendants in Indonesia

The struggle for Arab-Hadrami identity due to the diaspora can be referred to as the phenomenon of the "old" diaspora, which has been on a large scale from the mid-18th century until the late 1950s^[7]. Amid discrimination imposed by the Dutch Colonial, Arab-Hadrami people played their role in the social, political, and economic fields. In the new place, these Hadrami immigrants expanded the business market, gained prosperity, and sent them back to the land of Hadramaut^[8].

This contact between Java and Hadramaut is also an illustration of the existence of the Hadrami community in the Southeast Asia region. The Hadrami diaspora actors send money to their families and send their children to Hadramaut to receive education. Some are in contact with

political activities in Hadramaut^[9]. However, due to the idea of nationalism and the discourse regarding nation-states, this activity decreased drastically^[10].

At the beginning of the 20th century, the result of this Hadrami diaspora process was also the establishment of modern educational institutions, such as Jam'iyyat Khair and Jam'iyyah al-Islah wa al-Irsyad (Al-Irsyad). These two educational institutions produced two large groups within the Arab-Hadrami community, namely traditionalists (Jam'iyyat Khair), which were filled by the Alawiyin (Ar-Rabithah) group and reformists which were filled by the Al-Irsyad group^[11]. These two groups represent the same conflict in their homeland, namely Hadramaut, and become the subject of debate in their new homeland. The traditionalist group, represented by the Sayid group, and the reformist group, represented by the non-Sayid group, in the following period transformed from a social debate into a doctrinal debate.

What was interesting in this phase was the emergence of "new" and "progressive" intellectuals who were actively involved in the discourse and became the driving force of the Arab-Hadrami revival in Indonesia, both from non-sayid and Sayid groups. This discourse has also changed the debate from sayid and non-sayid to totok and Peranakan.

The trade sector dominates the role of Arab descendants in Indonesia. However, it is still related to the spread and confirmation of Islam, such as the role of religious teachers and preachers establishing religious schools as sponsors and donors of religious activities, as a fighter against things that are contrary to Islam, active in organizations affiliated with religious activities and so on. Many Islamic religious education centers, Islamic religious figures, and activities related to the history of Islam in Indonesia are closely related to Arab descendants.

Furthermore, the role of Arabs in the socio-religious field was prominent when entering the early 20th century AD, namely with the founding of a modern organization called Jami'at Kheir in 1905 AD. This organization was famous not only because of its success in establishing schools. Modern Islam, but also because of social activities of a religious nature, especially when several figures from this organization took the initiative to establish an extraordinary institution called ar-Rabithah al-Alawiyah. This institution was founded in 1928 AD on the initiative of Sayyid Ahmad bin Abdullah Assegaf and Sayyid Muhammad bin Abdurrahman bin Ali bin Shahabuddin. This institution was registered with the Dutch East Indies government and recorded in the notarial deed of Mr. AH Van Ophuijsen No. 66 dated 16 January 1928. Then ratified by the Dutch Government on 27 December 1928 AD, signed by GR Erdbrink, a Dutch East Indies government secretary.

The culmination of this role was the Conference of Arab Descendants on 3-5 October 1934 in Semarang, which gave birth to the Arab Youth Pledge in Semarang. As a result of an internal Arab-Hadrami agreement, this youth oath was a revolutionary step. Then, the most shocking thing at the conference was the Youth Pledge of Arab Descent which contained three statements^[12], namely:

1. The homeland of Arab Peranakans (descendants) is Indonesia.
2. Arab Peranakans must leave a life of solitude (self-isolation).
3. Arab Peranakans must fulfill their obligations towards their homeland and the Indonesian nation.

The 1934 Arab Youth Pledge was a revolutionary step, not only for Arab descendants but also for the entire Indonesian nation. The 1934 Arab Youth Pledge and the birth of the revolutionary PAI (Indonesian Arab Party) indeed invited reactions from both those of Arab descent and outside Arab circles, such as Java, China, and the Netherlands. On average, Arab-Hadrami circles who agree with this idea are those from non-Sayid and "progressive" Sayid backgrounds. The Sayid group agreed because the Arab Youth Pledge which was later confirmed as PAI, would cause social stratification barriers based on the Prophet's "sacred" genealogy to become loose and no longer exist. This is psychologically understandable because it will increase their honor and dignity and place them in an equal position with those claiming to be descendants of the Prophet.

Overview of the Assimilation Process of People of Arab Descent in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the problem most prone to occur due to societal diversity is the issue of SARA (tribe, religion, race, and between groups). Racial and ethnic issues will become a source of conflict if not handled appropriately. Because racism sometimes gives rise to serious actions such as acts of violence, physical clashes, and other extreme actions.

The term SARA became known in the New Order era. A government that has a military character upholds unity and wants everything to be the same, even regarding issues of ethnicity and race. Therefore, the Government wants equality for all Indonesian citizens.

The decision taken by the New Order government to implement an assimilation policy for non-indigenous people can be returned to the socio-political conditions at the beginning of the formation of the New Order. However, the history of the emergence and development of the basic idea of assimilation can be returned to the early days of immigrants (Arabs, Chinese, etc.), namely during the Dutch colonial period, Japanese occupation, the struggle for independence, and the Old Order.

The assimilation problem for foreign descendants is a complicated issue for the Government. This did not only happen during the New Order era, in previous times, especially during the colonial Government, it was a severe problem and received significant attention. This was quite reasonable because the colonial Government was worried that the economic domination they had controlled would shift to foreign immigrants and their mission to spread religion and culture. Since the presence of foreign immigrants was considered a threat, several laws relating to foreign immigrants began to be made, including Indische Staatsregeling (IS) article 163, which divided foreign immigrants into three groups namely the first group were Europeans, the second was easterners - foreigners such as Chinese, Arabs, Indians, etc., thirdly indigenous people. Arabs, as *Vreemde Oosterlingen*, are a foreign eastern group separated from the Islamic majority.

The colonial period was a difficult time for Arab descendants because the colonial Government differentiated Indonesian people based on race and nation, which influenced the thinking of Indonesian nationalists^[13].

Since the establishment of the policy of assimilation in all areas of life for Arabs in 1967, this policy has not been implemented easily. It took a very long process to achieve what the New Order government wanted with its assimilation policy. Presidential Decree Number 240 of

1967, chapter II concerning the Development of Indonesian Citizens of Foreign Descent, the article states:

"Indonesian citizens of foreign descent are given a good opportunity the same as native Indonesian citizens in mobilizing Daja and Dananja in all areas to speed things up development and increase prosperity and the welfare of the Nation and State".

This means that Arab descendants are free to manage and explore their abilities and develop them to accelerate assimilation in the economic field.

Things that speed up the assimilation process include tolerance, equal opportunities in the economic field, an attitude of respect for foreign culture and its culture, an open attitude from the ruling groups in society, equality in cultural elements, mixed marriages (amalgamation), the existence of common enemy from outside^[14].

The 2000 census, which provided data on the distribution and ethnic composition in Indonesia, failed to provide data on the number and distribution of Arabs in this country. Can this be interpreted as meaning that people of Arab descent in Indonesia do not identify themselves as Arabs or are not identified as Arabs by the enumerators? Their numbers may be so small that they are classified into miscellaneous groups. Does this show the success of assimilation of Arab descendants in Indonesia?

For example, the number of Chinese people in Indonesia is quite significant. There is a classification for this group, which is divided into Indonesian citizens and foreign citizens. Thus, for Indonesia, there is no information regarding the number and distribution of Arab descendants, which could mean that in terms of quantity, their numbers are small, or they do not see themselves or are not seen by outsiders as different from Indonesians.

Thus, in the case of Arab descendants, the assimilation process was relatively successful, mainly because of the similarity of the Islamic religion and the role of Arab descendants as spreaders of Islam. Even though the Dutch colonial Government tried to separate social categories and residential divisions, this could have been more effective. The continued establishment of communication, especially in mosques and markets, as well as the frequent occurrence of intermarriages has resulted in "Arab villages" in many cities being mixed with native housing. Likewise, Islamic ideas from the Middle East varied, and in the Middle East, there was never one strong "nation-state" that could gain the loyalty of Arab descendants. Even until the end of World War I, most of the Arab region was under the rule of the Ottoman dynasty Empire) from Turkey. Thus, the loyalty of Arab descendants is only to the countries they live in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. Unsurprisingly, many figures of Arab descent have become pioneers of national movements, such as in Malaysia and Indonesia, as shown by the establishment of the Indonesian Arab Party.

The development and conditions of these Arab descendants are different from those of Chinese descendants. This is due to differences in the number of migrants, the size of the settlement (Chinatown), the nature of relations with the country of origin, the level of socio-political assimilation, and the competition between Chinese civilization and Malay and Javanese civilization. In terms of the number of migrants, for example, because of its close location, there were relatively many Chinese migrants, especially at the beginning of the 20th century. Although limited after the massacre by the Dutch in Batavia in 1740, Chinese migrants

increased rapidly so that they constituted the majority in many large cities in Indonesia in the 1930 census, such as in Medan. Women also participated, so intermarriage with natives was quite rare. The strict restrictions of the colonial Government meant that contact and communication with Arab descendants was not as frequent. Even though there was already a dichotomy between Peranakan and "totok," social communication became more intensive after independence. As ethnic villages, especially Chinatowns, faded after independence, social relations strengthened. The 1911 Chinese Revolution spread Chinese nationalism among "Overseas Chinese". However, Chinese descendants, especially Peranakans under Liem Koen Hian, founded the Indonesian Chinese Party, just as Arab descendants founded PAI. However, political assimilation through national political parties became ineffective with BAPERKI's almost monopoly power over Chinese descendants. The pro-communist tendencies of the Chairman of Baperki, Siauw Giok Tjhan, brought the organization and Chinese descendants in general into a crisis after 1965, even though at that time, there were already those who expressed their opposition, such as Mr. Yap Thiam Hien, who left Baperki and the LPKB group from Sindhunata and friends. This is different from Arab descendants who, after the dissolution of the Indonesian Arab Party, continued to join national parties. Another area for improvement in assimilation is the existence of Chinese schools with an exclusive curriculum. After the abolition of Chinese schools in 1966, assimilation ran more smoothly because the younger Peranakan Chinese studied in schools with the national curriculum. Schools managed by Arabs, such as Djamiatul Chair and Al Irsyad, have, from the start, used a curriculum that follows the Government's curriculum. With the new policies since the New Order, the younger generation of Peranakan Chinese no longer have multiple loyalties or are "Divided." Loyalties "but already like the ideals of the Indonesian Chinese Party in the 1930s.

In contrast to Arab descendants who share the same religion as most natives, namely Islam, Chinese descendants are still divided into various religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, and Islam. There are few followers of Islam, namely less than 100,000 people out of around three (3) million people of Chinese descent. This is related to the strong resistance of Chinese civilization to external influences. This condition also occurs among Chinese migrants in Malaysia and Singapore. This differs from Chinese descendants in Thailand, who embrace Theravada Buddhism, and in the United States, who embrace Christianity. By understanding these different conditions, it is possible to understand more clearly the political role of Arab descendants in all its aspects within the framework of increasingly national solid integration and the comparison with Chinese.

Conclusion

Indonesia is a multicultural country characterized by differences both horizontally and vertically. On the one hand, these differences can cause conflict, but on the other hand, they can be used to strengthen national integration.

One of the riches of the Indonesian nation from an ethnic perspective is the presence of minority groups of Arab descent. Most of these Arab descendants come from the Hadramaut area of South Yemen. The Arab community in Indonesia has become part of the population and citizens of

Indonesia. Apart from being traders, their role is also in the Islamic religious sector, in spreading the influence of Islam. The assimilation process of Arab descendants in Indonesia has been more successful than other ethnic descendants, especially Chinese. This is due to the similarity of religions and their dominant role in the spread of Islam. A more open interaction pattern in the trade and settlement system also resulted in a more vigorous assimilation process for Arab descendants. This is also politically reinforced by the lack of tendency of Arab descendants to uphold national and state identity in their region of origin.

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