



The Socio-Economic Dislocation of the Javanese Chinese Community during the Revolution: The Transformation from Citizens to Refugees

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Abstrak: The journey towards Indonesian independence not only fostered a spirit of nationalism but also revealed a dark side in the form of social suffering among the people. One of the forgotten tragedies was the displacement of ethnic Chinese communities in Java, who lost their homes, jobs, and sense of security amid the political turmoil of the revolutionary period. This study aims to explain the social and economic dislocation experienced by the Chinese community as part of a domestic humanitarian disaster. The approach used is a historical method with qualitative analysis based on archival sources, government reports, and contemporary documents. The results of the study show that the displacement was not merely the result of ethnic conflict, but a reflection of a power vacuum and widespread socio-economic tensions. Despite suffering great losses, the Chinese community was able to survive through internal solidarity, community assistance, and adaptation to the new post-war economic structure. This study confirms that the struggle for independence not only brought about political freedom but also left deep social wounds for Indonesian civilians, including those who had been an integral part of Javanese society. This research offers a new perspective by integrating colonial archival sources, visual data, and Karl Polanyi's disembedding theory to understand displacement as a form of domestic socio-economic disaster during the revolution, a theme that has not been widely discussed in Indonesian historiography.

Keywords: Chinese Javanese; displacement; revolution; socio-economic dislocation

Abstract: Perjalanan menuju kemerdekaan Indonesia tidak hanya menumbuhkan semangat nasionalisme, tetapi juga menyingkap sisi gelap berupa penderitaan sosial masyarakatnya. Salah satu tragedi yang terlupakan ialah pengungsian masyarakat keturunan Tionghoa di Jawa yang kehilangan tempat tinggal, pekerjaan, dan rasa aman di tengah kekacauan politik masa revolusi. Penelitian ini bertujuan menjelaskan bentuk dislokasi sosial dan ekonomi yang dialami masyarakat Tionghoa sebagai bagian dari bencana kemanusiaan di dalam negeri. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah metode historis dengan analisis kualitatif berdasarkan sumber arsip, laporan pemerintah, dan dokumen sezaman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengungsian bukan sekadar akibat konflik etnis, tetapi cerminan dari kekosongan kekuasaan dan ketegangan sosial-ekonomi yang meluas. Meskipun mengalami kerugian besar, komunitas Tionghoa mampu bertahan melalui solidaritas internal, bantuan komunitas, serta penyesuaian terhadap struktur ekonomi baru pascaperang. Kajian ini menegaskan bahwa perjuangan kemerdekaan tidak hanya melahirkan kebebasan politik, tetapi juga meninggalkan luka sosial yang mendalam bagi warga sipil Indonesia, termasuk mereka yang selama ini menjadi bagian tak terpisahkan dari masyarakat Jawa. Penelitian ini menawarkan perspektif baru dengan mengintegrasikan sumber arsip kolonial, data visual, dan teori disembedding Karl Polanyi untuk memahami pengungsian sebagai bentuk bencana sosial-ekonomi domestik pada masa revolusi tema yang belum banyak diulas dalam historiografi Indonesia.

Keywords: dislokasi sosial-ekonomi; pengungsian; revolusi; Tionghoa Jawa



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Introduction

The Indonesian independence revolution not only brought about social change for the native population, but also overthrew the socio-economic system of the Chinese community, who faced displacement, loss of assets, and fragmentation of their economic networks. In a socio-historical context, revolution was not merely a political struggle for sovereignty, but also became an arena for economic and social identity struggles fraught with tension (Reid, 1974). The increase in ethnic violence and political dislocation ultimately triggered the displacement of ethnic Chinese communities from one place to another that was relatively safe, which had long-term consequences for their social status and economic capabilities. This phenomenon shows that the independence revolution had a paradoxical implication: on the one hand, it fought for national independence, but on the other hand, it created new marginalization of certain ethnic groups, namely the Chinese.

During the Dutch colonial period, the Chinese ethnic group was classified as second class in the social stratification system. In the 1900s, there were 280,000 Chinese people living in Java, and this number continued to increase every year. Based on the population census conducted by the Dutch Colonial Government in 1930, the number of ethnic Chinese residents on the island of Java rose significantly to 582,431 (Nuriansyah et al., 2023). Most of them worked in the economic sector, such as trading, harbor master, and tax collector. This can be seen from the economic order since the colonial era, which was dominated by ethnic Chinese compared to the indigenous population, and continues to this day. The dominance of ethnic Chinese in the economic sector in Java eventually led to conflict during the revolutionary era, resulting in physical violence.

Before the revolution, the Chinese community in Java had already played an important role in inter-city trade, retail businesses, and the distribution of imported and local goods. Many Chinese families owned shops and warehouses and had access to informal capital through community networks and inter-ethnic relationships. This position allowed them to enjoy relatively stable economic gains in port cities and large markets such as Surabaya, Semarang, and Jakarta (Colombijn & Lindblad, 2002; Suryadinata, 2003). However, their strong economic status placed the Chinese community in a politically vulnerable position, as there was a public perception that they were close to the colonial powers. This view fueled widespread suspicion and violence during the revolutionary period (Coppel, 1983; Heidhues, 2012).

During the revolution, ethnic Chinese communities began to face mass displacement from conflict areas to cities considered relatively safe, such as Semarang and Surabaya. The *Politieke Verslagen van de Residentie Semarang* archives mention that many ethnic Chinese from Kudus and Rembang chose to leave their businesses and homes due to threats of violence, loss of property, and uncertainty regarding security. Ethnic violence was also influenced by outside intervention. The archives mention attempts by NICA soldiers to pit indigenous and Chinese communities against each other by exploiting social tensions between them. For example, there were still NICA soldiers who came to the city of Bandung under the pretext of protecting Chinese refugees. This caused jealousy among the indigenous refugees, resulting in the Chinese ethnic group being treated with hostility and many of their houses being burned down. After investigation, it was found that the burning of these houses was carried out by NICA soldiers

themselves with the intention of pitting the Chinese population against the indigenous population.

The main concept in this study is based on Karl Polanyi's idea in *The Great Transformation* (1944), which explains that major socio-economic changes are often accompanied by “disembedding,” namely the separation of economic activities from the social order that originally supported them. Polanyi's theory is used because it explains the link between economic structural change and social tensions in societies undergoing political transition. This approach is more relevant than modernization or class conflict theories because it focuses on the disembedding of economic activities from the social order that originally supported community life. In the context of the Indonesian Revolution, political chaos and violence against ethnic Chinese caused socio-economic dislocation, namely the loss of social and economic ties between communities and their original environments. According to Polanyi (1944), social crises and conflicts can sever the links between traditional economic systems (local markets, trade networks, and community solidarity) and the social structure of society. In the case of the displacement of ethnic Chinese in Java, the severing of trade relations, the loss of credit networks, and social insecurity were tangible manifestations of this disembedding process. This theory is relevant for explaining how the Chinese community's economy collapsed not only because of physical violence but also because of the disruption of the social order that supported their economic activities.

This paper specifically examines the limited socio-economic displacement of ethnic Chinese Javanese during the revolution. Hakim's (2019) study examines the survival strategies of the Chinese community in Surabaya during the revolution, but does not discuss in depth the structural economic impact of displacement. Pratiwi's (2022) study on violence against ethnic Chinese in Malang emphasizes the factors of conflict and mass mobilization, but still places economic losses as a secondary impact. Meanwhile, Theonia (2023) reveals the paradox of Yogyakarta's image as a safe city that still harbors practices of violence against ethnic Chinese, with a primary focus on local social and political relations. Other studies examine the social life and economic role of the Chinese ethnic group after the revolution, but have not specifically positioned displacement as a trigger for socio-economic dislocation at the micro community level (Soni & Setiawati, 2017; Nurzayda & Sumarno, 2025).

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the displacement of ethnic Chinese communities in Java during the revolution as a process of socio-economic dislocation by examining the loss of business capital, the disruption of trade networks, and the community's adaptation strategies in times of crisis. The urgency of this research lies in its attempt to broaden the academic discussion on the Indonesian Revolution, which has been dominated by political-military narratives, by presenting the perspective of domestic humanitarian disasters and the socio-economics of minorities through Karl Polanyi's disembedding framework. This approach offers analytical novelty by interpreting the revolution not only as a political event, but also as a structural crisis that uprooted local communities from the socio-economic order that supported their livelihoods. From a qualitative historical perspective, the analysis is based on national archives in the form of regulatory documents and documentation, as well as several existing research literature studies. Thus, this research will bridge the gap between studies of ethnic identity and the local economy in the context of a new country's transition period.

Research Method

This study uses a historical method with a qualitative approach (historical qualitative research). Its main focus is to trace the social and economic dynamics of the Chinese community in Java during the revolutionary period, with an emphasis on the displacement

process of the Chinese community compared to the indigenous community, as well as the economic adaptation strategies of the Chinese community due to the conflict situation. According to Louis Gottschalk, the historical method has four stages, including: (1) heuristics or source collection; (2) criticism of historical sources, which includes internal and external criticism; (3) interpretation; (4) historiography or historical writing. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach allows for in-depth analysis of social meaning, individual experience narratives, and intergroup relations that cannot be explained by statistical data alone (Creswell, 2014).

This study focuses on the region of Java, particularly areas with a high Chinese population during the revolution. The temporal boundaries are set between 1946 and 1949, as this period marked the most intense period of social and military turmoil due to the first and second Dutch aggressions, as well as increased violence against ethnic Chinese and waves of internal displacement from rural areas to port cities. This study is supported by Karl Polanyi's theoretical framework in *The Great Transformation* (1944), which explains that major socioeconomic changes are usually accompanied by the separation of economic activities from the existing social order. In the context of the Indonesian revolution, political chaos and violence against the Chinese community caused the loss of social and economic ties to their original environment. The validity of the data is reinforced through triangulation of sources, namely by comparing primary archival data from ANRI with colonial reports (*Politieke Verslagen*) and the results of modern historical research. The unit of analysis in this study focuses on the Chinese communities in three main regions, namely Cirebon, Malang, and Yogyakarta, which represent variations in displacement patterns and levels of socioeconomic damage.

The research and writing process for this article is described in four stages. The first stage is heuristics or source collection. In this stage, the researcher found several sources related to displacement in Java during the revolutionary era, the chaotic conditions of the revolutionary era, and social and economic changes. Several sources can be found on the website of the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, and by searching for several photo documents through KITLV. In addition, the researcher also collected several scientific articles and books related to the specified title. The second stage is criticism, which includes verification of the sources and articles/books that have been obtained to determine their suitability for the topic being researched (internal criticism) and to identify the authenticity of historical sources (external criticism). The main primary source used was the ANRI source manuscript collection entitled "*Pengungsian Penduduk di Jawa tahun 1945-1949*" (Evacuation of the Population in Java from 1945-1949). Meanwhile, secondary sources were obtained from historiographical studies related to the research title. Next is the interpretation or analysis of historical sources. Interpretation is a way to obtain more detailed, in-depth, and broader meaning and significance of the research being conducted (Usmaedi, 2023). The results of the interpretation of historical sources are interpreted with the support of a theoretical framework on socioeconomic change. The final stage is historiography or historical writing. At this stage, researchers compile scientific articles in accordance with the topic of discussion using the results of the interpretation of historical sources that have been obtained systematically and objectively.

Research Results

Evacuation Patterns and Routes

The 1945-1949 independence revolution gave rise to intense social dynamics in various regions of Java, especially for ethnic Chinese communities. Amidst war and a power vacuum, these ethnic Chinese communities became one of the groups most vulnerable to violence and looting. Research by Geza Surya Pratiwi shows that in Malang, violence against Chinese citizens arose due to the accumulation of anger among the native population over economic

inequality inherited from colonialism. Mass attacks targeted Chinese-owned shops, houses, and warehouses, causing many families to flee to safer areas such as Blitar, Batu, and Surabaya (Pratiwi, 2022). Several colonial archives and local sources describe the ethnic Chinese exodus in Java as occurring in several waves, following the intensity of the conflict in several areas.

This phenomenon confirms that the displacement of ethnic Chinese during the revolution was part of a wider humanitarian disaster in Java. The refugees were not merely victims of political conflict, but victims of socioeconomic displacement who lost their homes, jobs, and sense of security. They suffered physical and psychological hardship similar to that experienced by native Indonesian refugees in war zones. In many cases, the displacement was internal, meaning that the refugees moved within the same province, showing that they still felt part of the Indonesian nation and did not intend to leave their homeland. The process of displacement of the Chinese people was almost the same as that of other civilians, with some walking, using carts or pushcarts, and carrying nothing but the clothes on their backs (Hakim, 2019).

According to records from *Politieke Verslagen van de Residentie Semarang* (ANRI, 1947), in early 1946 there was a mass migration of people of Chinese descent from Kudus, Rembang and Blora to Semarang due to increased looting of their shops and rice warehouses. The report estimates that more than 200 families left their homes due to threats of violence and property burning. A similar phenomenon occurred in East Java. Research by Geza Surya Pratiwi (2022) found that in Malang, violence against ethnic Chinese communities increased since the end of 1946. Dozens of houses and shops were burned by mobs on charges of being “Dutch stooges” or “foreign capitalists,” causing many families to flee to Blitar and Batu. In Surabaya, Noviani Mariyatul Hakim (2019) noted that most ethnic Chinese chose to flee by land to Mojokerto and Pasuruan, while those who had business connections at the port used small boats to Madura. The following is data on refugees, both indigenous and non-indigenous, during the revolutionary era in Java.

Table 1. Data on Refugees in Two Waves in 1947-1948

No	Region	Indonesia (15/1/48)	Indo/Non- Native People (15/1/48)	Place of Departure	Total up to 15/1/48	Addition 15/1– 1/2/48	Total
1	Banten	41.640	2.130	Djakarta, Bogor	43.770	–	43.770
2	Pekalongan	48.800	1.200	Pekalongan	150.000	–	150.000
3	Banjoemas	1.830	–	Miscellaneous	1.830	–	1.830
4	Kedoe	156.451	1.340	Kedu, Semarang & other areas	157.791	157.91	157.791
5	Semarang	17.093	–	Semarang	17.093	–	17.093
6	Pati	8.832	344	Semarang	8.782	9.176	–
7	Jogjakarta	29.888	8.852	Miscellaneous	39.450	38.740	–
8	Surakarta	29.389	5.041	Surakarta, Semarang	34.30	–	34.30
9	Madiun	48.020	476	Malang	59.863	–	59.863
10	Kediri	592.599	694	Malang	59.863	–	–
11	Bodjonegoro	4.859	868	Surabaja	15.763	581	–
12	Surabaja	54.725	148	Surabaja	54.873	–	54.873
13	Malang	41.365	142	Malang	41.507	–	41.507
14	Besoeki	–	–	–	–	–	–
15	Madura	65.000	–	Madura	65.000	–	65.000

Source: National Police Archives No. 713

The above data is an official report from the National Police recording the number of refugees in the Java and Sumatra regions between July 21, 1947 and February 1, 1948. This report was sent to several institutions such as the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Information, Defense (Social Affairs), Prosperity, People's Food Supply, Health, and Labor in Yogyakarta. Several entries include special notes regarding the status of reports that have not been received, changes in data, and ethnic classifications, particularly the separation between Indonesians and ethnic Chinese. Based on the report in the same document, it is mentioned that there were 8,861 refugees of Chinese ethnicity and 477 refugees of other nationalities. The flow of refugees to safe areas was partly voluntary and self-initiated, but many also went through intermediaries from the region using land vehicles such as trucks.

In the Bandung area itself, it was reported that Chinese people came from Sumedang, Tanjungsari, Pengalengan and Kadipaten (Cirebon regency) due to numerous fires that destroyed many houses and markets, making it difficult for residents to obtain basic necessities and exchange paper money. Based on a copy from Basiscommandant, Hoofd & Inl. Res Kap.der Art.C. van Marion on August 31, 1947, from Chung Hua Tsung Hui in Cirebon, 14,788 Chinese people were evacuated, with the following details:

Table 2. Data on Refugees in Cirebon, 1947

No	Region	Number of Refugees
1	Cirebon	10354
2	Djatiwangi	298
3	Kuningan	1500
4	Indramayu	1083
5	Djatibarang	1053
6	Losari	500

Source: Algemeene Secretarie 1944-1950 Inventory no. 148

The data in Table 2 shows that the Cirebon region was one of the most densely populated areas receiving refugees in 1947. This pattern indicates that the migration of ethnic Chinese took place in stages and in an organized manner, following relatively stable administrative and military security routes. The city of Cirebon served as a major transit center, where refugees were gathered before being transferred to other safe cities such as Semarang, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. Most refugees arrived in groups by truck or on foot in long convoys escorted by Republic soldiers and community volunteers. This phenomenon marked the formation of a semi-formal refugee pattern that combined community initiatives with the support of non-state institutions, indicating that the management of social disasters during the revolution was driven more by the community than by state authorities.



Figure 1. Evacuation of Chinese People to the Chung Hua Tsung Hui Building
Source: ANRI Photo Archive Collection, "Population Displacement in Java, 1945-1949"

This photo shows the evacuation at the Chung Hua Tsung Hui Building in Cirebon, which served as an emergency shelter for ethnic Chinese fleeing conflict areas in Central and West Java. The photo shows refugees consisting of men, women, and children getting off the trucks that transported them in an orderly manner. They carried whatever belongings they had, such as bags, bundles of cloth, and bamboo baskets, demonstrating the limitations and urgency of the evacuation. This visual depiction reinforces the data in Table 2 that the flow of refugees to Cirebon was not a sporadic event, but rather a planned and collective effort. The Chung Hua Tsung Hui building became an important coordination hub in the Chinese ethnic refugee network in Java, as well as strong evidence that the Chinese community was able to build a relatively efficient social assistance system amid the absence of adequate state protection.

Meanwhile, in the Yogyakarta region, Venessa Theonia (2023) noted that although Yogyakarta was considered safe, violence against ethnic Chinese communities continued to occur in Kota Gede, Bantul, and Sleman. Many Chinese families fled to Magelang and Klaten to avoid local clashes between republican forces and armed civilian groups. These reports indicate that the pattern of Chinese community displacement was regional, from high-risk cities or villages to relatively safe major cities such as Semarang, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta.

The Economic Impact of Displacement

The socioeconomic dislocation experienced by the Chinese community during the revolution was a consequence of the loss of security, the disruption of trade networks, and the destruction of economic assets. Before the revolution, the Chinese community was known as the main player in the local trade sector in Java, especially in the distribution of rice, textiles, and daily necessities (Suryadinata, 2003; Colombijn & Lindblad, 2002). However, the riots and displacement during the revolution caused these sectors to collapse, with many entrepreneurs losing their property.

Research by Geza Surya Pratiwi (2022) states that in Malang, around 70% of the Chinese economic network ceased operations due to the destruction of shops and homes. Most traders lost their working capital and switched professions to become port workers or small traders. In Surabaya, Hakim (2019) found a similar phenomenon, with many Chinese traders losing their stock because their warehouses were seized by armed groups, forcing them to move to the informal sector to survive. This situation shows a shift in social class from established traders to a vulnerable economic group (downward mobility).

Tabel 3. Dampak Ekonomi Pengungsian Terhadap Usaha Tionghoa di Jawa

City	Number of Businesses Damaged/Closed	Changes in Trading Turnover	Socio-Economic Impact
Malang	±50 the store burned down	Down 70%	Loss of capital and jobs
Surabaya	±40 warehouse seized	Down 60%	Traders switch to the informal sector
Yogyakarta	Unknown (narrative data)	Down 50%	Social segregation and collective trauma occur
Tuban	No major damage	Down 20%	Local trade adaptation

Source: Adapted from Pratiwi (2022), Hakim (2019), Theonia (2023), and Nurzayda & Sumarno (2020)

Table 3 shows the significant economic impact on Chinese-Indonesian businesses in several cities in Java during the revolution. The data confirms that the level of damage and decline in economic activity varied in each region depending on the intensity of the conflict,

security conditions, and the strength of local socio-economic networks. The cities of Malang and Surabaya suffered the most severe damage as dozens of shops and warehouses were burned or looted by the masses. These conditions illustrate the downward social mobility experienced by the Chinese community as a result of losing their livelihoods and changing professions. Business damage, declining turnover, and changes in economic roles are clear indicators of the disembedding process. Thus, the revolution was not only a political event, but also a socio-economic change that caused suffering among the people.

In Yogyakarta, Theonia (2023) found that violence against the Chinese led to suspicion of the Republic's government, which was considered to have failed to protect non-native civilians. This situation deepened the social divide between the Chinese community and the local community, who had previously lived side by side. To visually illustrate the impact of violence experienced by ethnic Chinese communities during the revolution, the following archival photographs document the condition of factory buildings destroyed by mass attacks and arson in Malang.



Figure 2. Condition of the food preservation factory in the warehouse where the bodies of Chinese victims of violence were burned.

Source: <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/fotocollectie/>

The documentation shows the remains of a burned-down food preservation factory in an area of East Java. The facade of the building still displays a signboard with Chinese characters, indicating that the location was once owned by a local Chinese businessman. This fire not only illustrates ethnic violence, but also symbolizes the collapse of the economic infrastructure that supported the local trade network. In the context of Karl Polanyi's theory, this event is a concrete form of the process of disembedding, namely the separation of economic activity from the social order that originally supported it. The burning of shops and factories erased the economic ties that had been established between the Chinese and native communities, triggering the collapse of the circulation of capital, labor, and distribution of goods. Furthermore, this visual evidence reinforces the argument that the violence during the revolution was not only political in nature, but also economic, as the destruction of production and trade facilities was carried out to shift the colonial economic balance towards a new system that was still unstable. In this case, the above documentation can serve as silent testimony to the painful social changes that took place, as well as the beginning of the restructuring of the economic identity of society after the revolution.

Social Impact and Collective Trauma

The social impact of the displacement of ethnic Chinese communities in Java during the revolution was not only related to changes in residence and economic losses, but also included the collapse of social structures, mass fear, and collective trauma. The experience of losing their homes, having their property confiscated, and facing threats of violence caused deep

psychological stress on the refugees, especially women and children. Reports in the *Algemeene Secretarie* 1944-1950 noted that most refugees who arrived in Cirebon and Semarang showed signs of severe exhaustion, malnutrition, and emotional instability. Some notes from Indonesian Red Cross social workers even described many children who “did not speak for several days” after witnessing the burning of their homes in Kudus and Rembang. This phenomenon illustrates the existence of post-conflict social trauma, in which experiences of violence lead to a loss of trust in the social environment and the authorities that are supposed to protect them.

One concrete example of this social dislocation can be seen in the evacuation of refugees to the Chung Hua Tsung Hui Building in Cirebon in 1947. The building became a shelter for hundreds of Chinese families who fled Kudus, Rembang, and Ciledug after waves of violence and house burnings spread. The Chung Hua Tsung Hui organization, which was originally a social and cultural association, transformed into an emergency humanitarian agency that sheltered and assisted refugees amid political and military turmoil.



Figure 3. Evacuation of Chinese People at the Chung Hua Tsung Hui Building
Source: ANRI Photo Archive Collection, “Population Displacement in Java, 1945-1949”

The photo above shows the evacuation of refugees in front of the Chung Hua Tsung Hui building, where ethnic Chinese people stand crowded together carrying whatever belongings they have. The tense and exhausted expressions on their faces illustrate the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding. This building plays an important role as a temporary shelter, marking the emergence of internal solidarity within the community amid the absence of adequate protection from the state. In the context of Karl Polanyi's theory, the existence of Chung Hua Tsung Hui reflects a phase of social re-embedding, in which new social structures are formed to replace the old order that was destroyed by war. Solidarity, mutual aid, and internal social networks became the main pillars of the refugee community's survival. Chung Hua Tsung Hui also organized the distribution of food and clothing and the transfer of families to safer areas such as Semarang and Yogyakarta, demonstrating that the Chinese community was capable of independently organizing a social response amid unstable conditions in the country.

In addition to physical suffering, this displacement caused deep collective trauma. The Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) social report of 1948 noted that many refugee children experienced sleep disorders, loss of appetite, and showed signs of excessive fear after witnessing violence and fires in their home areas. Some female refugees also experienced psychological distress due to the loss of family members or having to bear the economic burden alone. In Eyerman's (2001) terms, this condition reflects cultural trauma, which is collective suffering that shapes a new identity within a wounded social group.

On the other hand, displacement also gave rise to social segregation. The Chinese community began to form “*pecinan darurat*” as safe spaces for their fellow ethnic group. This phenomenon reinforced the social boundaries between the Chinese and the indigenous people,

who had previously lived side by side in interdependent economic relations. However, although this segregation was born out of trauma, it also served as a self-protection strategy amid uncontrolled social chaos. Interestingly, the trauma and dislocation did not only give rise to alienation, but also encouraged the formation of new solidarity. Social organizations such as Chung Hua Tsung Hui and Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK) then opened emergency schools, health posts, and public kitchens involving volunteers from different ethnic groups. This shows that amid the chaos, humanitarian values and a spirit of mutual cooperation still emerged, laying the initial foundation for post-revolutionary social reconstruction.

Overall, the experience of displacement and collective trauma of the Chinese community in Java confirms that revolution not only brings about political change, but also shakes the social order that has been built over centuries. Social dislocation, trauma, and the recovery process that took place through institutions such as Chung Hua Tsung Hui show how minority communities adapt and rebuild their social identity. This tragedy serves as a reminder that the struggle for independence also has a human side that is often forgotten: the struggle to survive, to maintain dignity, and to rediscover the meaning of togetherness in a situation full of uncertainty.

Social Mitigation and Re-Embedding Efforts

Efforts to address displacement were carried out through a combination of government policies and solidarity from the Chinese community itself. Archives from the Indonesian Ministry of Information (1948) record that around 1,200 Chinese refugees in Central Java received logistical assistance in the form of rice, cloth, and medicine through coordination between the Indonesian National Committee (KNI) and the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI). In Yogyakarta, the Chung Hua Tsung Hui organization set up an emergency command post that provided temporary shelter for refugee families (Soni & Setiawati, 2017).



Figure 4. Distribution of bread rations to refugees

Source: ANRI Photo Archive Collection, “Evacuation of Residents in Java from 1945 to 1949”

Based on this documentation, it reflects the important role of humanitarian agencies and the government of the Republic in providing social assistance during the revolutionary emergency. The distribution of staple foods such as bread, rice, and medicine demonstrates the efforts of the government and community organizations, including the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) and KNI, in responding to the humanitarian crisis. In social analysis, these activities signify the emergence of an early social assistance system based on mutual cooperation and nationalism, in which all ethnic groups, including the Chinese, became part of the humanitarian agenda of the newly born Republic. Symbolically, the documentation also shows that cross-

ethnic solidarity grew during times of crisis, even though social relations between groups were still filled with suspicion.

In addition to logistical assistance, social and economic recovery efforts were also made through internal organizations such as Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK) and Tiong Hoa le Sia. These organizations opened emergency schools for refugee children and set up small clinics in Semarang and Surabaya (Septian, 2025). The internal solidarity of this community played an important role in restoring the confidence and social structure of the Chinese community, which had been fragmented by conflict. Meanwhile, based on an ANTARA article, the government in several regions finally formed a Chinese refugee committee, which was strengthened by the enactment of Presidential Decree No. 4 of 1948, chaired by “Hidjrah” Aroedji Kartawinata from the Ministry of Defense.

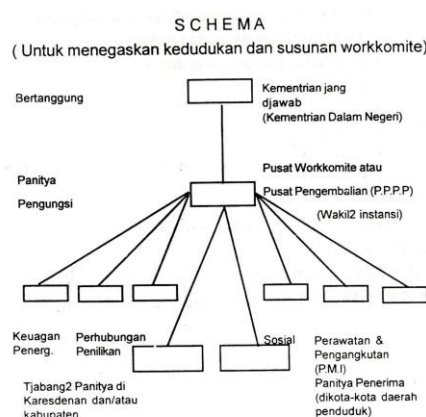


Figure 5. Refugee Committee Scheme

Source: Ministry of Information No. 74, Collection “Population Displacement in Java 1945-1949”

The duties of the repatriation committee include: registering refugees, caring for and placing refugees, collecting support (aid) and gifts, providing food and money, transportation, finance, information, and screening (selection). The existence of this committee scheme is evidence that the handling of refugees is carried out in an organized manner, involving various fields such as logistics, transportation, and communication. From a historical perspective, the presence of refugee committees shows that the state began to institutionalize social responsibility towards civilians, including the Chinese minority group. This effort became the forerunner of the post-independence social welfare system, although its implementation was still limited to areas that were relatively safe militarily, such as Yogyakarta and Semarang.

The return of refugees to their areas of origin was carried out gradually after political stability began to be achieved following the Second Dutch Military Aggression in 1949. ANRI data (1950) recorded that around 65% of Chinese refugees in Semarang returned to their hometowns in mid-1950, but most chose to settle in refugee camps due to trauma and loss of economic assets. However, this recovery process was not entirely successful. Many people of Chinese descent lost their property rights because they did not have valid proof of ownership after their homes were destroyed. They became part of a group of “internal refugees” who settled permanently in new Chinatowns in big cities. This phenomenon marked the birth of a post-revolutionary pattern of Chinese settlement that was more concentrated in big cities such as Semarang, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta.

The social transformation experienced by the Chinese community after the revolution shows that their economic identity did not disappear, but rather changed direction in response to deep social upheaval. When the colonial economic system that had previously supported the stability of the community collapsed due to violence and displacement, the Chinese community experienced a process of disembedding, as described by Karl Polanyi, namely the separation of economic activity from the social and moral networks that had previously supported it. In this situation, they lost not only their economic assets, but also the social trust that was the basis for the continuity of business and inter-ethnic interaction. However, it was from this event that a process of re-embedding emerged, marked by the Chinese community's efforts to re-embed their economic activities in a new social order based on internal solidarity and mutual trust. A more closed economic identity oriented towards intra-community trade was an adaptive strategy to restore a sense of security while maintaining economic continuity in a politically fragile republic. Thus, re-embedding did not merely describe economic recovery, but also reflected collective efforts to rebuild social meaning, trust, and the moral identity of the community in the context of a transforming state.

Referring to the theory of The Great Transformation (Polanyi, 1944), these findings show that the Indonesian revolution was a turning point from the disembedding of the colonial economy to re-embedding in a new social order based on community solidarity. This phenomenon shows that the Chinese community's economy did not simply collapse, but transformed into a social system that emphasized internal cohesion and moral-economic adaptation to the new state.

Conclusion

The Indonesian independence revolution was not only a political milestone for the birth of a new country, but also caused profound social dislocation for civil society, especially the ethnic Chinese community in Java. Some of the local community, who had settled there for centuries, experienced a drastic change from being established citizens to refugees as a result of violence, looting, and political instability during the revolution. This phenomenon shows that the process of independence also left suffering for minority groups who did not have adequate political protection. The impact of displacement on the Chinese community was very complex, including the loss of economic assets, the severing of trade networks, and the decline of their social status in society. Many families lost their homes and businesses, turning to small-scale trading or labor to survive. In addition, displacement also gave rise to new social segregation and collective trauma, although on the other hand, internal solidarity emerged through organizations such as Chung Hua Tsung Hui and Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan, which played a role in providing social assistance and emergency education for refugees.

Thus, the displacement of ethnic Chinese during the revolution was a form of domestic humanitarian disaster that reflected the socioeconomic turmoil caused by the transition from colonial rule to an unstable republic. This tragedy serves as a reminder that true independence is measured not only by political liberation, but also by the ability of the state and society to protect all its citizens, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic background.

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