Cemetery Squatting and Anti-Chinese Tensions: Insights From Central Java

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Over the centuries, the Chinese minority in Indonesia has lived in an environment characterized by social tensions. This paper will explore Chinese-Javanese relations in the microcosm of a Javanese squatter settlement that has invaded a Chinese cemetery. Four issues will be considered which will illustrate the nature of long-standing tensions between these two ethnic groups: 1) the manner in which informal sector housing is developed; 2) economic attitudes of the Javanese with respect to the Chinese; 3) the relationship of the Chinese to law and authority and how conflict resolution is approached; and 4) the linguistic context of Chinese-Javanese relations. Although cemetery squatting has been an incremental process, it has been the result of a fundamental perception of the weak position of the Chinese in Javanese society. Similarly, the illegal occupation of land also results from perceptions that both the Chinese and public officials will ultimately acquiesce to the squatters' aspirations.

Over the centuries, the Chinese minority in Indonesia has lived in an environment characterized by social tensions. More recently, it has been observed that "almost every individual of Chinese descent in the country has to cope with the general predicament to some degree of his daily life, either as petty discrimination or as personal tragedy."¹ This paper will explore this inter-ethnic difficulty in microcosm as manifested in the development of a Javanese squatter settlement in a Chinese cemetery located in the community of Blimbing Sari in Central Java.² In doing so, four issues will be considered that will shed additional light on the relationship between the two groups and the manner in which this conflict proceeds towards its ultimate, though perhaps not consensual resolution: 1) the manner in which informal sector housing is developed, who the squatters are, and why they came; 2) economic attitudes of the
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Javene se with respect to the Ch in ese; 3) the relationship of the Chinese to law, authority, and formal vs. informal routes to conflict resolution; and 4) the linguistic context of Chinese-Javanese relations.

Informal Sector Housing and Characteristics of the Squatters

As one might expect, the squatters are Javane se workers in the informal sector who require a central residential location in order to maintain proximity to their employment. This is reflected by the fact that virtually all informal sector housing units can be considered a form of “infill” in Indonesian cities. That is, they were built as the result of a gradual or organized invasion of previously unoccupied land characterized by a continuing ambiguity in ownership status.

This process of spontaneous settlement has focused on centrally-located but environmentally disadvantaged locations. Typically, they are situated off major thoroughfares on the sloping embankments to a river. However, when all such sites have been absorbed, Chinese cemeteries emerge as a second tier of advantageous habitat because they are located on high ground far removed from floods and the inevitable economic dislocations following a natural disaster. In addition, they are often proximate to existing urban communities and public services. However, Javanese cemeteries are off-limits in a country that is ninety percent Islamic, and Christian burial grounds are similarly excluded due to the strong societal and governmental recognition accorded that faith. In contrast, the historical and economic roles of the Overseas Chinese in Indonesia (and indeed, in all of Southeast Asia) have left them vulnerable to the larger society’s ability to impose informal restraints, sanctions, and discrimination.

The cemetery itself arose in the early twentieth century, and an examination of headstones reveals that the most recent burial occurred in 1992. The squatting commenced in late 1984 when eleven dwellings were constructed. A spurt of thirty more units followed between November 1984 and December 1985. The rate of growth then slowed to four houses in the next seven months. This pattern continued for the next four years, with only twenty-four houses constructed between August 1987 and August 1991. At this point the pace accelerated, with twelve units built over the ensuing sixteen months. By January 1993, a total of eighty-one dwellings had been built over a period of about nine years.

What determined the rate of growth of the squatter community during this time? It is apparent that the initial sites selected for squatting were in more remote (and therefore less desirable) locations where familial visitations to gravesites had been observed to cease. When these were absorbed, greater temerity and risk were necessary, and this may very well account for the decrease in houses built between January 1986 and August 1991. The pace of squatting then accelerated as the Chi-
nese community showed no inclination to attempt to halt these incursions. As one resident observed, "Investment is a function of bravery." A second noted the lack of action by the Chinese, attributing it to the fact "The community squats together."

Another perspective on this invasion is suggested by the squatters' prior residences, which suggest the monitoring of events from a near vantage point; more than half lived in the vicinity prior to squatting. Economics also plays a major role. An adjacent community characterized by legal land titles had incomes twenty-five percent higher than those in the squatter settlement. This is consistent with other observations from Indonesia that a strong relationship exists between income and legal tenure.

With this description of the squatters and their motives, issues can be examined that relate to the tensions between Chinese and Javanese, and other third parties whose attentions may be brought to bear on relations between the invaders and the invaded.

Javanese Economic Attitudes Towards the Chinese

In addition to the essential need for centrally-located land, the superior economic position of the Chinese provided a convenient rationalization for squatting in Blimbing Sari. Families visiting uninvaded gravesites had the appearance of affluence, invariably arriving in automobiles; in contrast, such ownership was limited to less than five percent of Blimbing Sari squatters.

Nevertheless, while various economic explanations have been offered to explain anti-Chinese sentiment, they do not appear to have much relevance in this particular situation. Blimbing Sari residents are largely employed as street vendors (forty percent), while a fifth are retired, another fifth are employed by the government, and no employment data was available for the remaining fifth. Clearly, the element of economic competition with the Chinese is not a factor in this instance.

On a larger scale, while economic development has been a primary objective of the Suharto government, its welcoming of foreign capital would benefit the urban upper and upper-middle classes. Although the Chinese are well-represented in these strata, it is unlikely that those connected with Blimbing Sari would be included in these groups. If they were, one might expect such economic ties to generate stronger political influence. In this context, it would be more plausible to suggest that had Blimbing Sari enjoyed a more strategic location, e.g. close to major street, or had it been located in a key commercial or industrial center where a cukong could exert its power, then a cemetery invasion would not have occurred. This is underscored by the existence of another Chinese cemetery within a mile of Blimbing Sari whose frontage on a main artery is rumored to be the site of a shopping center. No squatting has
occurred and it is expected that generous compensation will be paid if the graves are removed.

If anything, it is the popular stereotype of the Chinese that is emphasized again and again in the media that appears to underscore the most frequently-heard rationalization for squatting in Blimbing Sari: “They can afford it.” Additionally, it should be noted the recently-held national election in the Spring of 1992 might have reinforced resident attitudes. In his campaign, President Suharto emphasized that “conglomerates” should pass on their wealth to those less fortunate. Several analysts said that “Conglomerate was a code for Ethnic Chinese.” At the same time, Suharto’s half brother, Probosutedjo, accused the Chinese of clannish behavior and hoarding their wealth, thereby “suggesting they were working against the national interest.”

Perhaps it is fortunate that the Indonesian government does not compile, or has not made available ethnic compilations of wholesale or retail trade data, which would probably suggest a strong Chinese preponderance. As a provincial official observed concerning the economic success attributed to the Chinese, “Most of them have talent in business.” In Blimbing Sari, the opportunity to construct a house at the expense of the Chinese represents a grass-roots activation of Suharto’s exhortation.

The Chinese, Authority, and Conflict Resolution

Social harmony and the resolution of conflict, *rukun*, is the ideal which every Javanese community strives to achieve and maintain. As Jay has observed, “Rukun is a term both for a state of being and for a mode of action.” It is this equanimity and its relationship to the Chinese in Blimbing Sari that will be examined in this situation.

By most standards, *rukun* might appear to be ill-suited as a descriptive term for the uneasy equilibrium in Blimbing Sari. But, indeed, efforts made by all parties were designed to promote at least a temporary state of harmony. If the squatters are accommodated by building sites and the Chinese are mollified by the preservation of the remainder of the cemetery, the equilibrium is maintained. In order to better understand this phenomenon, we can examine the hierarchy of institutions in Indonesian local government, each of which has a specific role to play, either as a neutral party, a mediator, or an advocate. In doing so, the administrative system of local government in Indonesia will be considered, as well as non-governmental entities. Further complicating matters is the fact that the cemetery is divided by the boundary of two mutually-exclusive jurisdictions, one a *kabupaten* (country) and the other *kotamadya* (city) (see Figure 1).
Governmental and Non-Governmental Actors in Blimbing Sari

County: Kabupaten
Sub-district: Camat
Rural Village: Lurah
Neighborhood: Tukun Warga
Community: Ruken Tetangga

Kotamadya:
Sub-district: Camat
Urban village: Lurah
Neighborhood: Rukun Warga
Community: Rukun Tetangga

City:
Sub-district: Camat
Urban village: Lurah
Neighborhood: Rukun Warga
Community: Rukun Tetangga

**CEMETERY**
PUK (Chinese organization): Area 3
Juru2 Kunci (caretakers): Area 2
Royal Court (landowner): Area 1

Regional ABRI (Military Office)
The Royal Court: In existence since the eighteenth century, this institution is not a monolithic organization. In fact, its activities involve the administration of assets owned by the Sultan, those of his family, as well as those belonging to the kraton (palace). Because the Chinese are not allowed to own land in this area, they are dependent on the desires and decision of the Sultan, and it is not clear how long the cemetery will be permitted to exist. At the same time, it has been widely discussed among some of the squatters with longer histories in the area that it is possible that the kraton will provide them with some type of land tenure—either as individuals or as a collective—in order to formally recognize their status. In any case, their view of the kraton is a benevolent one: "We follow the Sultan." As for the Chinese, their relationship with the kraton appears to be one of deference, recognizing their claim on the land "depends on the Sultan's will and decisions."15

Perkumpulan Usaha Kematian (PUK): This is a Chinese association, whose idiomatic title loosely translates to "burial society:" it not only serves Chinese bereaved families, but serves a social purpose as well as provides aid to families of travelers who may have lost their lives in the general region. Its existence is reminiscent of the institution of Captaincies prior to World War II. During the period, peranakan Chinese communities preferred to have as little contact with the government as possible. Instead, they relied on officers who represented their interests to Dutch colonial authorities. Although these formal positions were abolished in the 1930s, the tradition of mediating interests has persisted.16

The PUK remains an active advocate for Chinese cemetery interests. In the case of the cemetery on a major thoroughfare noted above, it has worked with the landowner (coincidentally, the kraton) to forestall squatting and, as noted, negotiations are in progress to provide compensation for moving the graves to an alternative site well removed from any urbanization.17 However, in Blimbing Sari, the PUK has facilitated some decisive action in concert with local government. In October 1992, a four and a half foot high cinder block wall was constructed on the boundary between Areas 2 and 3 of the cemetery (see Figure 2), a line which also coincides with the division between two major administrative divisions, the kabupaten (county) and kotamadya (city). Further, a perpendicular extension was also constructed simultaneously, and there are plans to finish the enclosure if and when funds become available from the Chinese community. These monies are collected by the PUK and the project is managed by the Rukan Warga (RW), Pak Mischbah, of the appropriate kabupaten neighborhood. The PUK does not have any formal responsibilities for safeguarding the cemetery; that is the role of the caretakers (juru2 kunci), whose role will be discussed below. Ultimately, however, it is each individual family's responsibility for the maintenance of and vigilance over each gravesite.
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Figure 2

AREA OF STUDY

- Existing Wall
- Proposed Wall

N

Squatter Settlement

Formal Land Tenure Settlement

RIVER

3m 6m 9m

3m 6m 9m
The PUK's motives for the construction of the wall was to stop expansion of squatter housing into Area 3 and to make everything clear as to where future houses could be built. However, should this fail and the situation continue to deteriorate from the Chinese point of view, the PUK can "broker" this interest and report the situation to the kraton, with which it already does business, to the bupati (regent), i.e. the chief official of the kabupaten (country), and/or to the military (ABRI—Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia). Since a relationship already exists with the kraton, it is unlikely that contacts with the bupati or ABRI will be undertaken, if for no other reason than informal procedures would be more effective than pursuing formal avenues of redress. The reasons for this are twofold: first, the Chinese are politically weak in this region and there is little expectation that higher authorities will assist them if the kraton chooses not to do so; second, it is doubtful that formal procedures will work efficiently for anyone. The system grinds very slowly even when a clear-cut, legitimate claim is at issue.

The Caretakers: Over the years, Javanese caretakers have been loosely employed to maintain the cemetery. Because this position does not require regular compensation, their responsibilities are not well-defined and any type of "police" function is out of the question. The PUK offered the opinion that if gravesites are to be preserved, it is the responsibility of the families of the deceased. It would be further observed that gravesites that received regular familial visitations would not be disturbed.18 Neither the PUK nor the caretakers could control the degree of familial attention in this regard. Referring to Figure 2, Area 1 of the squatter settlement has been looked after by Pak Dono since the 1940s; in early 1993 he reported his age to be ninety-four. Area 2, the first to be developed, was the domain of Pak Harjo until his death in 1982 or 1983. It could not be learned why a replacement was not obtained upon his demise. Pak Karto and his wife are the present caretakers of Area 3 and until late 1992 have been able to repulse any new squatters. But since that time, a young friend of his built a bamboo house to the northwest of Area 3 and by January 1993 three other temporary dwellings were under construction. However, this series of events should not be interpreted as a sign of ineffectuality on the part of Pak or Ibu Karto. Rather, it appears that they were working in conjunction with Pak Mischbah, the Rukun Warga (RW) responsible for Area 3 in local government administration. Though in their seventies, the Karto's are still vigorous and could be regularly observed fulfilling their caretaker tasks such as weeding and cleaning gravesites in response to requests by the families of the deceased. Additionally, Pak Karto operates a warung (foodstall) on the northern edge of the cemetery: this appears to have the sanction of the Chinese. The most likely explanation for the December 1992/January 1993 squatter invasion was the pursuit of rukun (harmony) through the efforts of Pak Mischbah. This will be discussed in the context of the efforts of governmental entities in Blimbing Sari.
Governmental Entities

Kabupaten (county), Camat (sub-district) and Lurah (village) Administration: These levels of Indonesian local government are not involved in matters pertaining to the cemetery unless called upon to take notice. For example, the PUK could report matters to the Bupati (regent, something that has not been done either on the Kabupaten (county) or Kotamadya (city) side of the jurisdiction boundary. At that point, the Camat (subdistrict) office and the Lurah (village administrator) would be called in to make inquiries. But since the Chinese have not sought to activate these levels of oversight, the more central role of neighborhood administration, the RW, will be considered.

Rukun Warga (RW) (Neighborhood Head): Unlike officials on higher levels, Pak RW (pronounced “air-way”) is a non-salaried post and the person holding this position is an individual of civic spirit and higher occupational status, e.g. a present or retired governmental employee with both administrative and interpersonal skills. As Guinness has observed, RW's "are elected to these offices because they have been able to translate their social rank into social esteem." According to Pak Mischbah, the general responsibilities of the RW whose authority encompasses Area 3 of the cemetery, include: a) issuing kartu penduduk (the resident identity card, a requirement for all Indonesian citizens); b) writing letters of introduction for individuals seeking to relocate out of his jurisdiction; c) mediating conflicts among neighbors; d) coordinating gotong royong (community mutual cooperation), assisting in community development projects and increasing resident participation in this sphere; and f) maintaining order and harmony (rukun) in the community. As the conversation proceeded, Pak Mischbah discussed his specific role in the Chinese cemetery. His primary link was with the juru kunci (caretaker), Pak Karto, whose responsibility was Area 3. As a result, Pak Mischbah was well informed about the new houses that had sprouted rather quickly in December 1992 and January 1993. In contrast, the RW of Areas 1 and 2, Pak Pudiono, has had little or no contact with the caretakers. That is understandable in the case of Pak Harjo, who died in 1982 or 1983. But Pak Dono, the nonagenarian caretaker of Cemetery Area 1, appears to be outside his area of immediate concern. This further underscores the informal nature of Rukun Warga oversight, which appears to depend more on individuals and their perceptions rather than on any procedural guidelines. It then becomes more understandable why Pak Mischbah would play a central role in Blimbing Sari affairs than would his counterpart on the kotamadya (city) side of the boundary. First, at the request of the PUK, the Chinese organization, he managed the construction of the wall. He was well aware of their concerns. Second, he maintained contact with the caretaker of Area 3 and was cognizant of the circumstances behind the "invasion" of new squatters. Third, he es-
Established informal guidelines to control and monitor the homes built in late 1992 and early 1993. Fourth, he remained available to coordinate the construction of the proposed wall as funds become available. Fifth, he had given consideration to the problem posed by the new squatter houses should the wall project be brought to completion. And sixth, he was in regular contact with the appropriate lurah (village) and camat (sub-district) officials about events in the cemetery as with the bupati (chief county official). It was surprising to learn that in the long run, Pak Mischbah envisioned that the graves in Area 3 would be moved out of the urbanized area after compensation was paid, that some building sites would be reserved for households from the immediate vicinity (he called them "house-seekers") whose shelter needs were severe, and that the largest remaining territory be developed as a school. One could conclude that a "Master Plan" had already been worked out for Area 3, and that the Chinese (specifically, the PUK) were not aware of this at the time these interviews were conducted. In fact, Pak Mischbah intimated that the idea for the school had already been approved in principle by the Governor of the province.

Secure in both his long and short-term concepts for his jurisdiction in Blimbing Sari, Pak Mischbah established the criteria for the new squatter invasion. First, only families known to him would be permitted to build; further, they would have to be truly in need of housing. Second, should the Chinese mobilize funds to continue their wall project, the houses built would have to be moved. And third, they could only be built on sites that would not interfere with the normal functions of the cemetery or with those who came to visit deceased relatives. No such guidelines were established in the kotamadya (city) cemetery, Areas 1 and 2. In fact, Pak Mischbah indicated that any house built close to the kabupaten (county) side of the jurisdictional boundary might have to be removed. However, on both sides of the wall, perceptions are more incremental. Everyone agrees that the desire of the Chinese to make everything clear has been realized. In Areas 1 and 2, the pace of house consolidation has quickened as more permanent building materials are used to retrofit bamboo houses. Houses built after the wall was constructed have been made entirely of brick. Pak Pudiono, the RW of Areas 1 and 2, has been issuing kartu2 penduduk (identity cards), establishing official recognition of residences. Water and electrical services has been expanding, echoing the "more is better" attitude of utility companies in developed countries. Nevertheless, no one is absolutely certain what will ultimately occur, though optimism grows on a daily basis for the permanence of this settlement. The sanction of the landowner, the kraton, has yet to be obtained.
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The Linguistic Context of Chinese-Javanese Relations

Thus far, it has been observed that cemetery squatting possesses inherent circumstantial qualities which suggest tensions and hostility directed at the Chinese by Javanese squatter/invaders. As shown above, these feelings have been demonstrated in the economic context where the depersonalization of the Chinese has been noted. Further, in the political realm, the Chinese have pursued their objectives along more informal lines rather than pursuing formal channels with their potential for direct confrontation. Even though this approach may not work expeditiously for Javanese either, the Chinese recognize that they would be placed at a disadvantage should they pursue their interests in an adversarial manner.

Nevertheless, there is still more direct evidence of anti-Chinese feeling, this time manifested in the use of pejoratives by the Javanese in everyday speech. Specifically, two words, Cina (formerly Tjina), its derivative, Cino, and bong are sufficient to clearly express Javanese hostility against the Chinese in Blimbing Sari.

Although Cina had been in use since the seventeenth century, by 1900 it was considered to be derogatory by the peranakan community. These feelings continued unabated so that in Semarang in the 1930s the Chinese were able to effect a street name change from "Jalan Kebun Cina" to "Jalan Kebun Tiongkok." This, therefore, reflects the long-standing preference of the Chinese for "Tiongkok," meaning "China" in the South Fujian dialect, and for "Tionghoa" as its correlate for "Chinese." These terms also gained in cachet among the Chinese during the first decades of the century as the result of Indonesian proto-nationalism excluding the Chinese from the very beginning. As a result, the Chinese were forced to confront the reality that they were essentially different from both the Dutch and the Indonesians. Therefore, a consciousness began to grow that they were part of a Chinese nation, "Bangsa Tionghoa."

By the 1960s, these terms became infused with even more complex connotations, all of them vehicles for hostility against the Chinese. Some elements of the Indonesian press argued that "Tiongkok" and "Tionghoa" were terms used by the Dutch as a "superior name for the Chinese." In contrast, "Cina" was a historical Malay usage and therefore, for political reasons, "Cina" must be re-established in order to maintain Indonesian national dignity. Other rationalizations also exist—not the least of which was hostility to the Beijing government itself—but as Coppel notes, "Cina" had been "displaced in polite usage...Its use in 1966 was felt to be insulting by the Chinese, and this fact was known to the Indonesians who used it."

Today, many of the vestiges of the difficult 1960s have faded and the term "Cina" has changed according to the attitude of the par-
ticular speaker. Nevertheless, as Santoyo has observed, "Cina still remains at least a word used by indigenous Indonesians to express their dislike of Chinese in Indonesia."30

How does Cina apply in Blimbing Sari? It is used extensively, while "Tiongkok" and "Tionghoa" have never been encountered. Indeed, Cino is used as much, if not more than Cina. And it is rather obvious that this term, cino, is a powerful and strongly-felt epithet, reminiscent of the ugliest North American racial terminology.

Similarly, rather than use the Indonesian word for grave, "kubur," residents prefer the epithet, Bong. In a 1991 survey, residents were asked, among other things, where did they dispose of trash? In three-quarters of the responses, the unanticipated answer of bong was registered. While the author cannot claim to have mastered all the nuances of Indonesian language, it is nevertheless very clear that bong, cina, cino, and bong cino "speak" for themselves as very strong conveyors of hostility directed at the Chinese. Whether or not these terms have been shorn of their historical context in the minds of Blimbing Sari residents, their contemporary application is not encouraging for better relations between Javanese and Chinese, especially when many call their community Bong Sari.

Conclusions

Cemetery squatting in Blimbing Sari is an incremental process that can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. It represents a logical destination for house-seekers who require a central location at a time when vacant river embankment sites have been exhausted. However, it also bears witness to a rational calculation of the risks inherent in the enterprise. The pioneering squatters in this cemetery began their efforts with a degree of confidence that no sanctions could be levied against them by the Chinese. It was therefore a fundamental perception of the weak position of the Chinese in Javanese society. As the number of dwellings increased, it became apparent that the only immediate authority in the area was vested in irregularly paid caretakers with no desire to exercise a "police" power. The death of one caretaker prior to the first wave of squatting was evidently a primary event in the process. A secondary event was the lack of vigilance on the part of relatives of the deceased which further widened the vacuum caused by a caretaker's demise.

Although the need for housing underscores all motivations in the squatting process, a psychological underpinning is provided by the depersonalization of the Chinese by the squatters. It is easier to usurp a gravesite when it does not come at the expense of an individual. Instead, the collective rationalization, "They can afford it," deflects the impact of the action to an extraneous group. When families arrive at an
invaded gravesite, their tearful reaction is reduced to an anecdote about "the Chinese who cried."\(^{31}\)

By the time the Chinese began to mobilize resources to preserve their remaining graves, the squatters were further emboldened and began to noticeably accelerate investments in their houses with permanent building materials. When the October 1992 cinderblock wall was erected by the PUK, houses began to be built entirely of brick. This surely was seen by all concerned as a capitulation by the Chinese, conceding that the ambiguity of the squatting process was yielding to a clear scenario of unthreatened development. It also sent a signal that the Chinese lacked the political standing to defend their interests. Since the cemetery land is controlled by the royal court, it was the squatters' consensus of opinion that the Sultan would eventually recognize their efforts.

Another indicator of the vulnerable position of the Chinese was the cooperation of the Rukan Warga (Neighborhood Head) with a small number of new squatters attempting an invasion from the north on the site of a proposed but as yet unfunded wall extension. Not only that, this RW had also suggested that plans were discussed by the Provincial Governor for a school in the part of the cemetery that the Chinese were trying to preserve, a fact of which they were unaware.

But the most direct communication of hostility against the Chinese was the terminology utilized by the squatters. Cina and its derivative, cino, are powerful racial epithets. Similarly, the use of bong instead of kubur, the proper word for grave, and the use of graves as trash disposal sites, even as props within a dwelling, speak eloquently for the immense gulf between Javanese squatters and the Chinese.

In a few more years, the residue of the Chinese cemetery in Blimbing Sari will be visible here and there as one strolls amid crumbling headstones and shards of statuary. Two decades ago, a prominent scholar observed, "In the end, nothing which the ethnic Chinese can do can fully account for the feelings against them; nothing they can do can fully counteract that sentiment."\(^{32}\) In the 1990s, the situation in Blimbing Sari continues to lend strength to that view.

NOTES

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26 Suryadinata, 83-4.

27 Santoyo, 37.

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29 Coppel, 72.

30 Santoyo, 42.

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