Writing this book has been a deeply personal and at times difficult intellectual journey. As a Chinese Indonesian woman who left Indonesia for Australia as a teenager in 1997, I was not in Jakarta when the riots and anti-Chinese attacks of May 1998 (and the subsequent fall of the New Order regime) happened. While my family and I were not directly affected by the riots, I remember feeling an immense sense of shock and grief. Like so many ethnic Chinese, I had always felt wholly Indonesian. I did not have a Chinese name, my family did not speak Chinese (coming from peranakan backgrounds, my grandparents spoke a mixture of Dutch and Indonesian), and Jakarta was at that point the only home that I had ever known. It was true that every now and again I would be reminded that I was somehow different because of how I looked. Walking down the street near my house as a child, the local kampung kids would sometimes yell out “cina!” as I walked past, leaving me perplexed as to why I was being called Chinese. However, for the most part, I never felt I was any different from other Indonesians, especially since we lived in a part of South Jakarta where the Chinese and non-Chinese mingled and lived side by side, and my family and I had many non-Chinese friends.

In hindsight, the sense of grief I felt when May 1998 happened was probably a sense of a loss of innocence, when for the first time I came to realize the problematic nature of belonging for the Chinese in Indonesia. This led to many questions that developed throughout my formative years as a young adult. For one, why was it that after so many centuries of being in Indonesia (to my knowledge, both sides of my family had been in Indonesia for at least five generations) the Chinese were still regarded as foreigners? Why was it that despite having to change their names and be assimilated to be more Indonesian the Chinese were still not regarded as being Indonesian enough? Could the Chinese ever be Indonesian enough? Ultimately, if Chinese like me were rejected by the only home that we had ever known, then where could we possibly go? Later, I found that these questions were shared by many other Chinese Indonesians who also felt severely dislocated by the events of May 1998.
And so began my journey to find answers to these questions. Thanks to the wealth of information and scholarly works on Chinese Indonesians in the post-Suharto era, I learned about the long and complex history of race politics in Indonesia and how the “Chinese problem” was tied to issues of class inequality, religion, politics, and ethnonationalism, among others. My eyes were opened to the fact that Chinese Indonesians were paradoxically the victims of the very structures of inequality and exclusion that they were also complicit in maintaining. I became particularly interested in collective memory and trauma, and how contemporary Chinese Indonesians remember and understand their past.

Yet, when it came to determining my own research topic in graduate school, I was initially reluctant to do a research project about Chinese Indonesian identity politics since I feared it would be too close to home, and I was not sure about how my own subjectivities would cloud my analysis. Furthermore, I was also uneasy at the thought of doing research on a topic that was essentially about myself. I was lucky to have had the guidance of my supervisors at La Trobe University, Alberto Gomes and Helen Lee, who taught me to see my personal experiences and subject position as strengths rather than weaknesses. After all, this kind of self-reflective scholarship is not without precedent: major scholars such as Edward Said, Ien Ang, and Stuart Hall have all used their own life experiences as the basis of some of their most pivotal work.

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used in this book are reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute. Parts of chapter 6 are a revised and condensed version of my article “‘A Beautiful Bridge’: Chinese Indonesian Associations, Social Capital and Strategic Identification in a New Era of China–Indonesia Relations,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25 (102): 822–835. I thank Taylor & Francis for their permission to reproduce parts of the article.

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