Chinese Indonesian Kinship and Naming Practices

Among many kinship systems in the world, Chinese kinship system is one which plays a central role in the life of the people in China. China appears to be a complex society that is particularly centered on kinship. Kroeber (in Santos, 2006) who was so impressed with the richness in Chinese kinship system maintains that Chinese kinship system is the most perfect kinship system conceivable to humankind (p.286).

Kinship in China is fundamentally determined by patrilineal descent. This system of kinship relations is illustrated most particularly through kinship terminology. Chinese kinship system is fundamentally based upon lineal and collateral differentiation, sex of the relative, sex of the person through whom the relationship exists and distinction between blood relatives and affinal relatives that are essential to the maintenance of the patrilineal descent system. When many Chinese came to East Indies, which is Indonesia now, they brought with them the kinship system and applied it in the new place.

Use of kinship terms

Since Chinese people are basically family oriented, this can be seen in the address terms they use. Among the *totok* Chinese especially, the correct terms of address have to be used appropriately. Very often the kinship terms are used not only to their families and relatives, but also to other Chinese who do not have any kinship relations (Blum, 1997; McConnell-Ginet, 2003). One can address friends of one’s parents as *ayi*  or *shushu*, while older women on the street are called *popo.*  Chinese children need to learn from their elders the correct terms of address based on the family relationships and whether the addressee comes from the father or the mother side; or whether he/she is older or younger. It is usually the mother who will tell her children the proper kinship terms to address others.

Since Chinese kinship terms are quite complicated, the younger generation of Chinese Indonesians often feels reluctant to keep track on their relationship with their relatives and follow the proper address terms when conversing with them. The younger generation, who have their education in Indonesia or abroad, tend to be more flexible in addressing their family members, relatives, friends, and strangers. They no longer feel the obligation to always follow the complicated Chinese address terms. The address terms they use can vary from Indonesian, Javanese, Dutch, English, Mandarin, or any local dialect of Chinese or Javanese. Hence, to their parents for instance, the address terms vary from *Mama, Papa, Mami, Papi, Daddy*; to their grandparents can be *Emak, Engkong, Bobo, Akung, Oma, Opa, Grandma, Grandpa*; to their siblings *Cécé, Koko, Didi, Mémé, Sis,* or just by names (which for some *totok* Chinese is considered impolite when they are addressed to older siblings); to their one generation older relatives the address terms may follow their local dialect or just *Ayi, Shushu, Tante, Oom*; while to strangers the address terms can be *Mbak, Mas, Cé, Ko,* or *A’ik, Susu’, Tante, Oom, Bu, Pak, Mam, Sir* depending on the appropriateness they think regarding their relationships*.* Hence, the use of Chinese kinship terms of address is gradually abandoned by many young Chinese Indonesians.

The choice of which address term to use is interesting to note. A Chinese Indonesian woman I interviewed concerning the choice of using *Tante* (Western term) or *Ayi* (Chinese term) when addressing a Chinese adult female, commented that “If the woman is wearing good and neat dress, her hair is well combed, she is usually a *peranakan*. Then, I’ll call her *Tante*. But if she is wearing casual dress, a common dress like that, and her hair is not that neat, not well arranged. Then she is usually *totok*. Then I will call her *Ayi.*” She admitted that Chinese *totok* would not care so much for their appearance. She said it was like when they served food, “The *totok* like eating, Eating is number one, not the appearance.”

In using Chinese terms, it is propriety that counts. Many Chinese Indonesians feel that it is just right to address a Chinese with a Chinese term. However, for other Chinese who have been Indonesianized or are Western oriented, using Chinese term is not a must. The use of Indonesian term *Bu* is considered to give the addressee more respect and prestige, though a bit more distance, than the familiar Chinese term *Ayi*. For the Chinese, the use of Western terms like *Tante* and *Oom* are more appropriate when there is no professional relationship between the addresser and the addressee, also when the addressee does not look more like typical Chinese. Chinese terms show more closeness and respect among the Chinese community but is lack of respect based on profession (Kuntjara, 2009). Yet when Western terms are preferred rather than Chinese terms to address a Chinese, there is some recognition that the addressee no longer belongs to the Chinese *totok* community. Therefore it also connotes distance.

The Chinese who have Dutch or other Western education background can be more various in their use of address terms than the *totok* Chinese. One participant in my research who had some Dutch education background, could use Dutch, Indonesian, Javanese, Chinese, a mixture of Javanese and Chinese terms alternately when addressing people. Compared to *totok* Chinese, perhaps they are more at ease with the use of different address terms. One Chinese woman said that in fact the language differences did not arouse any specific connotation or feeling. She admitted that she did not care so much what address term people called her. Even when siblings are calling each other by their names, for her it was quite all right in establishing familiarity and intimacy. On different occasions she used different address terms interchangeably. She used *Tante* (Dutch term for aunt) to her father’s sister, *empék* (Hokkien term for father’s older brother) to her uncle, *Pak* (Indonesian term for adult male) to an adult male guest, *Bu* (Indonesian term for adult female) to her female friends, *dear* to her husband, *Zus* (Dutch term for sister) to the baby sitter, *Nduk* (Javanese term for young Javanese female of lower class) to her young female house helper, *Tacik* (Chinese term for older sister) to her own sister, *Kohdé* (mixture of Chinese and Javanese term for eldest brother) to her cousin, *Nyo* (Dutch term for young boy) to her grandson and his male friends, and proper names to her daughters and son-in-law. It is difficult to find any patterns distinguishing when she would use Dutch, Indonesian, Javanese, mixture of Javanese and Chinese, or English.

Apparently those who have some Dutch education background still maintain the use of some Chinese address terms. One said that “Since we are Chinese, of course we can’t forget the use of Chinese address terms so that we know what our relationships are.” Hence, the use of Chinese terms is considered more as a means of sustaining their Chineseness. It is not a matter of pride (like the *totok* Chinese say), but a matter of appropriateness because they are Chinese. When Javanese address terms are used, they argued that when the addressee is Javanese, it is quite reasonable to use Javanese or Indonesian terms. Meanwhile the use of Dutch terms is not meant to be seen as *ke-Belanda-Belanda-an* [acting like Dutch], but because they have been accustomed to using them and find no point on changing them. While the use of proper names or reciprocal terms like ‘*Dear*’ could be a display of a more egalitarian relationship. Many younger Chinese prefer the use of Indonesian / Javanese address terms when conversing, such as *Pak* or *Bu*, even when the addressee is Chinese. When I asked one of my younger Chinese respondents if she was still using any Chinese address terms, she said that they were limited to her parents’ close relatives. She maintained she would continue using the Chinese terms just because she had been taught by their parents to use them since she was little. She called her older sister *Cikdé* (mixture of Chinese and Javanese term for oldest sister) and was addressed by her younger sister *Cikngah* (mixture of Chinese and Javanese term for middle sister). The custom of adding a Javanese term to the Chinese term which shows the age difference between sibling is never found being used by the *totok* Chinese. Meanwhile the ones who still use such mixed terms do not seem to inherit this custom to their children. Older Chinese people would usually advice young Chinese mothers to teach their children to respect their older siblings by using appropriate terms. However, the young generations think that such customs do not always have to be maintained. They do not seem to object and they think that they are living in the modern era now and people want to be more equal. Hence, young Chinese generation usually use simpler address terms where the display of hierarchical relationships is less. Hence, having a non-Chinese look is considered an advantage. They even say that they are pleased when people call them using Javanese / Indonesian address terms. It may show that he/she may not be recognized as Chinese and so he/she would be more accepted and less ‘discriminated’ by the Javanese.

Naming Practices

For many Chinese, names are believed to contain meaningful symbol for the person who bears the name. Zheng (2006) maintains that Chinese names offer lots of information about political change, cultural continuity, social pretensions, and all manners of identity making. Names are often taken from words that have human values and are related to nature. One’s family name (*shé*) is important in most Chinese families to trace their clan, while the middle name shows the generation the person belongs to, although these middle names are applied only to males.

The practice of naming in many Chinese families in Indonesia has been developing from time to time. When the Chinese men came, stayed, and married to the indigenous women, the women were regarded more as concubines since they still considered their Chinese wives whom they left in China as their real wives. The children born by the local women were then called *peranakan.* Daughters were usually named like the way the local people named their children, i.e. using only one word which is often an adjective connected with manners they expect the child to have, for examples *Manis* [Sweet]*, Rajin* [Diligent]*, Bersih* [Clean] etc. Since the children had Chinese fathers, the parents put a family name with each name. They become *Tan Manis Nio, Ko Rajin Nio, Liem Bersih Nio.* Sons were usually given Chinese names and were often brought back to China when the father went back home. Sometimes men were nicknamed based on one’s physical feature, for instance *Baba Gemoek* [Fat Chineseman]*, Baba Butak* [Bald Chineseman] (Ong, 2005).

Indigenous women who married to Chinese men were given signs in their names to signify that she was an indigenous woman and made as the concubine of a Chinese man. From the archive of Batavia Kong Kuan kept in the Netherlands, Li (2003) found that some names of women registered in the archive include the character *nga, po,* or *fu*. The character *nga* was derived from Fukien sound for the word, which means ‘woman’. This word is close to Malay word *nyai,* which means concubine, but especially for Malay women who became the concubines of Europeans. However, the position of *nga* was not higher than that of *nyai.* The names *Ngamiaoli* and *Miaolinga* were common names written in the registration of some deceased women. These women could have come from Bali, in which the word ‘Bali’ was pronounced as ‘miaoli’ by the Chinese. Many Chinese men married to Balinese women since the Balinese women were tolerant to the pork-eating Chinese.

The terms *po* and *fu* also mean ‘woman’. The word *fan* was often added in front of those two words to become *fanpo* and *fanfu.* The term *fan* in the seventeenth century China, was used to refer to Westerners who appeared in China. They were labeled as *hongmaofan* [the red-haired *fan*].*Fan* here means foreign, alien or exotic with more or less negative connotations. Hence, the label *fan* in the names of those women might show that the Chinese at that time looked down at the indigenous women.

The terms *nga, fanpo,* and *fanfu* gradually disappeared with the increasing number of children born by mix-marriages. The *peranakan* children were regarded as Chinese and the marriages among them were also considered as Chinese marriage and the terms *nga, fanpo,* and *fanfu* were not used anymore.

During the Dutch colonization, the Dutch government separated the Chinese and the indigenous for fear that they might get stronger to oppose the government. The Dutch opened schools especially for the Chinese and taught them Dutch culture. Many Chinese were given Dutch names like *Tan Lies Nio* in which the word *Lies* actually derived from *Elizabeth.* There were also those who put Dutch names in front of their Chinese names like *Karel Kho, Bertha Go* etc. Thus far the Chinese migrants unconsciously kept on searching for their identity as seen from the naming practice.

After the bloody coup d’etat in 1965, besides banning all Chinese related activities, Soeharto’s government also suggested Chinese Indonesians to change their Chinese names to Indonesian names as a way of promoting assimilation process. In general, the Chinese changed their Chinese names with Indonesian names which were similar to their surrounding local people’s names. For those who lived in Java may use such names as *Gunawan, Susilo, Susanti, Purwanti* etc.; those who lived in North Sumatra would use such names *Silalahi,* or *Sihombing*; those from Bali would change their names into *I Made . . .* or *I Ketut . . .;* from Manado one might change his/her name to *Ratulangi* or *Rumantir* etc. It is obvious that such practice of naming themselves and their off-springs using local indigenous names shows that the Chinese have indeed felt their relatedness to the local custom which makes them easily adjusted to the local habit in naming.

It is true that among the Chinese, there are still many who want to maintain their identity as Chinese. They usually insert part of their Chinese names in the new name. For instance, a person whose family name is *Ong* will choose their new Indonesian name as *Ongkowijoyo*, or *Liem* as *Limanta*. Thus other people will be able to identify him/her as a Chinese from the clan of *Ong* or *Liem*. Recently many Chinese who intent to change their names into Indonesian names have in fact been compelled to maintain their family name in their new Indonesian names. Thus, a person whose family name is *Liem*, his new Indonesian name will be *Liem Satya Limanta*.

However, such practice in naming may show double connotations as relating to the way the Chinese Indonesians identify themselves. In one sense, it is true that some Chinese Indonesians still want to show their identity of their Chineseness in their new names. The insertion of the family name in their new names could make their clan easily identifiable as they feel that family name is still important in tracing their descendents. However, some others who may want to conceal their Chinese identity in their new names may want to have full Indonesian names, just like other indigenous names. In this case they may feel that the acculturation and assimilation intended by the Chinese Indonesians to become fully Indonesians are in fact not wholeheartedly welcome and accepted by the Indonesian government / people (Hoon, 2008). The insertion of their Chinese family name is no way for them to escape from being identified as Chinese even if their physical features may not reveal their oriental look. Many younger generation Chinese Indonesians have been named by their parents in western or /and Indonesian names since they were born. Some parents give them informal Chinese names, which are not registered in the birth certificate, but are used to address them among the family and close relatives.

Hence, naming in the Chinese Indonesian community has been perceived in different perceptions by the Chinese in Indonesia. Those who have been accustomed to the use of western and / or Indonesian names (since 1966) might have abandoned the need of remembering their Chinese ancestors as shown in their names. Such feeling could also be caused by the fact that Chinese names for some time after 1966 have often been used as a term to mock them by the indigenous. Many of them thought that the use of Indonesian names were easier to remember and would not sound strange when pronounced by the indigenous. So they can easily blend into the local community without being noticed as Chinese when names only are known. Yet, for those who think that their identity of being Chinese should not be entirely abandoned, still feel the need of mixing part of their Chinese names into the new Indonesian names. Many of such names are usually easily notified, not only by the Chinese particle in the name chosen, but also in choosing Indonesian names, which are commonly used by most middle class and upper middle class Indonesian community. An Indonesian Javanese name like ‘Hartono’ is likely to be chosen than ‘Slamet’, a name more often used by the rural Javanese. Western cultures that come to Indonesia have also affected the names many Chinese Indonesians choose. Western names are considered as better and perhaps more prestigious than Chinese or Indonesian names. The change in the socio-political climate of the life of Chinese Indonesians is quite conducive nowadays, as young Chinese Indonesian people may take a different stand from that of their predecessors. From Lie’s (2003) study on the relearning of Chinese in Indonesia shows that many of them feel that their identities as Chinese descendents are more confirmed after they started their Chinese language and cultures learning. However, such condition cannot yet be seen as affecting them in naming their offspring with Chinese names as their elders did.

Closure

The practices of using kinship terms and naming among Chinese Indonesians have undergone changes along with the changes in social, cultural and political conditions in Indonesia. The studies cannot be seen as a mere process of assimilation, acculturation and integration, for we can also see them as a process of struggles and conflicts, and of constructing and reconstructing their identities which have been going on for centuries. This process will inevitably continue for generations to come.

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