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Indonesian Young Researchers on Research of Chinese Indonesians

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Abstract: Learning from Indonesian past experience in which Chinese Indonesian had been the scapegoat whenever there were critical national conditions in Indonesia, more research on Chinese Indonesians should be conducted in the present peaceful situations. The activities in preserving the peranakan culture, literature, culinary etc. are really worth doing. Centers for Chinese Diaspora, especially Chinese Indonesians, are excellent efforts of researchers in the academic area. More important than that is the existence of beginner or young researchers. Opportunities to become young researchers should be created by offering university courses on Chinese Indonesians in a master level department. In this article it was done in a master level of literature in the faculty of languages and literature. After reviewing the curriculum and the human resources, the idea of adding new courses on Chinese Indonesians was brought to the department meetings. Two new courses were added in the new curriculum besides the existing one. The last step was offering one different course on Chinese Indonesians every semester and explained to the students the topics discussed and what research could be conducted for their theses. The new curriculum produced three theses on Chinese Indonesians instead of only one in the old curriculum and eight students' presentations on Chinese Indonesians in a conference held in 2021. I consider that offering several courses of Chinese-Indonesians in the master level program in universities is necessary; whatever the department is. It is important to encourage Indonesian young researchers to conduct research on Chinese Indonesians who are part of Chinese overseas in general and of Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia in particular.

Keywords: Chinese Indonesians, Young Researchers, Master Level, Reasons

INTRODUCTION

In the years before the pandemic I noticed that a lot of activities were conducted to bring the Chinese Diaspora feel the togetherness. Baba Nyonya gatherings have been conducted more than thirty times in different locations in Southeast Asia. Having attended the one conducted in Indonesia, I attended the one in Malaka, Malaysia and planned to attend again the following year if there was no pandemic. From my personal point of view, these gatherings were marvelous in creating togetherness, in giving me an identity that I am one of the Chinese Diaspora. Despite the fact that I am Indonesian in my ID card and passport, long time ago in my teenage years, I was also called 'Cino'. This made me then thought that I was not considered Indonesian by the Indonesians. However, when I was among my *totok* friends, their families did not regard me as a Chinese because I did not speak Mandarin. Although I could bargain at Pasar Atom using Mandarin, that was not enough for them to consider it as an ability to speak Mandarin a little. Even being not able to use chopsticks was also connected with my being Chinese by the Chinese; at that time I had not known the term of Chinese Indonesians. These incidents and later the readings about the 1998 riots and the unmentioned Chinese Indonesians' participation during the the struggle in Indonesian independence have made me question several things. How much more can be revealed and not kept hidden? This made me think that more and more researchers are needed in the study of Chinese Indonesians, especially Indonesian young researchers.

As a part of Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia, the existence of Chinese Indonesians has been significant for a great numbers of years for several reasons. First, from the population of Chinese Indonesians alone, in the year of 2000, seen from Aris Ananta et al.'s survey (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020) the number is 2.83 million people, the twelfth largest ethnic group in Indonesia and 1.5% of the whole population of Indonesia. In Aryodiguno's article (2018, p.3), however, the data varies.

The data for the population of the Chinese varies. The statistical data from the National Central Bureau of Statistics of Indonesia mentions that the total population of the Chinese is 2,832,510. According to the research data from non-profit foreign organizations, the actual population of Chinese-Indonesian is about 11 million (Christian, 2017.) Conforming to the Overseas Chinese Affairs Council of the Republic of China(Taiwan), Indonesia's Chinese population is approximately 12 to 15 million (Overseas Community Affairs Council, Republic of China "Taiwan" 2016).

Whether it is a raise in sixteen years or not, it is quite a big number that cannot be ignored.

Second, there is a great interest in studying about Chinese Indonesians. One of the examples of the conferences on Chinese Indonesians was Chinese Indonesians: Identities and Histories held on October 1-3, 2019) on Clayton Campus, featuring some of the world's leading scholars in the relevant fields. "Dean of The Faculty of Arts Professor Sharon Pickering remarked emphatically that "it is impossible to study modern Indonesia, without adequate knowledge of Chinese Indonesians" with their paradoxical position." (Monash Herb Feith Indonesian Engagement Centre, October 16, 2019). Another example is this conference itself is a continuation of the previous six conferences starting in 2017.

On June 12, 2021 Petra Christian University held International Conference on Chinese Indonesian Cultural Heritage (<https://ic-cich.petra.ac.id/>).

The international and national interest in Chinese Indonesian studies and the opinion I have about the importance of research on Chinese Indonesians made me curious to know about the academic situation concerning Chinese Indonesians. In the book launching of *Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia* in 2018 at Semarang Gallery, having been curious about the existence of the courses in the universities in Indonesia, I asked a question concerning the existence of a Chinese Indonesian department in Indonesia. The answer I got was surprising; there was no such department. If I am not mistaken, the answer I got at that time was that throughout Indonesia only one subject on Chinese Indonesians was offered in a university on bachelor level (in Indonesia it is called S1 level). This situation, I thought at that time, would not be able to produce young researchers.

METHODOLOGY

In 2018 when I was appointed to be the head of the department of the master degree of literature (S2 level) at Petra Christian University, I determined to create opportunities for S2 students to be young researchers on Chinese Indonesians, since in S2 level, in my opinion, real research begins. Therefore, first, I reviewed the curriculum. In reviewing it, it turned out that in the curriculum used in 2018, there was only one course of Chinese Indonesians offered. One master course on Chinese Indonesians, I thought, would not be enough to trigger master students to conduct research on Chinese Indonesians.

Second, I reviewed the professors who could teach the courses on Chinese Indonesians. Out of ten full time professors in the master department, there were three who had been conducting research on Chinese Indonesians. In another department in the same faculty, several professors were also interested in Chinese Indonesians. In other faculties at the university, some other professors were also interested in Chinese Indonesians.

Third, I brought the idea of adding the number of courses on Chinese Indonesians into department meetings. Meetings after meetings were held, not only to make the semester teaching and learning plan and the topics for each sessions, but also to determine who would teach the sessions. After a lot of meetings and efforts, two more optional courses on Chinese Indonesians were ready to be added in the curriculum. The three courses do not have prerequisites, so that students are free to take any course any time it is offered. This would attract the students to it.

Fourth, in 2019 it was time to review the curriculum periodically and thus, the two new courses were added in the new curriculum in that year. The courses of Chinese Indonesian in Media and Cultural Hybridity of Chinese Indonesians have been offered along with Chinese Indonesian Society and Culture which was already in the curriculum. The new curriculum was included Panduan Akademik 2019, which was not in the website of Magister Sastra anymore. In *Pedoman Akademik Program Studi Magister Sastra Universitas Kristen Petra 2021* (pp.22-23), it is written there that the discussion of the three courses of Chinese Indonesians involve the literature, language, media, organization, culture, identity, hybridity, economy, culinary and society of Chinese Indonesians (https://magister-sastra.petra.ac.id/Pedoman_Akademik_Magister_Sastra_2021.pdf).

Fifth step was introducing the new curriculum, especially the courses on Chinese Indonesians. First, it was introduced to the two undergraduate departments, the Chinese and the English Departments, in the Faculty of Languages and Literature (now the name becomes The Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries) so that they would be interested to take the master degree. The introduction of the new curriculum included a special mention of the three courses on Chinese Indonesians because most of the undergraduate departments were and are Chinese Indonesians. Second, whenever there were people interested in the master program, the courses on Chinese Indonesians were especially mentioned and explained. The same thing was done every semester to the master students in the semester study plan: the topics discussed in the classroom and the research that can be conducted on topics of Chinese Indonesians.

The next step was offering one different course out of the three Chinese Indonesians courses each semester so that every student was given a chance to take the three courses in their study time of four semesters and could have an idea of a topic and conduct research on Chinese Indonesians for their thesis.

RESULTS

Although this observation was done in a small scale and possibly there were other aspects influencing the result, there is a difference between the old and the new curriculum. The previous curriculum with one course on Chinese Indonesians produced one thesis. The research is about the construction of Chinese Indonesians' identity and their value on their identity as Chinese Indonesians, their attitudes and opinions about the policy of name changing (Wijono, 2017). According to her, there are three gradations of attitudes and values on their constructing identity as Chinese Indonesians with their new names: becoming true Indonesians, maintaining identity as a Chinese, and acknowledging double identity as Chinese and as Indonesians (<https://dewey.petra.ac.id/catalog/digital/detail?id=39518>). The new curriculum with three courses on Chinese Indonesians produced three titles of theses. There was a research on the hidden ideology within the motivation in learning Mandarin (Hananya, 2020). It is found that "the young Chinese Surabayanese informants perceived the ideology of learning Mandarin as an advantage, i.e. to globalize their life

opportunities in work and communication, to gain power in the markets because of the rise of China, to invest in their linguistic capital, and to understand parents' influence; learning Mandarin has no effect on their sense of Chineseness, because the informants perceive Mandarin as an advantage" (<https://dewey.petra.ac.id/catalog/digital/detail?id=46683>). The next study done was about Chinese Indonesian single women. Although the informants experienced the discrimination and the stigma, they also get the benefits of being single (Tedjaatmadja, 2021). Another thesis is in the form of a creative work, a novel that explores the triggers of trauma that can disrupts one's social identity and the recovery from the trauma (Octavia, 2022). Another student is still in the process of writing her thesis on Chineseness and terms of address preferences and she will soon finish writing it. In short, after two more courses of Chinese Indonesians were added in the curriculum, more theses were written on the topic on Chinese Indonesians.

Besides theses, as a requirement to graduate, students need to present in a conference. In 2021 eight students presented in International Conference On Chinese Indonesian Cultural Heritage (ICCICH): Rejuvenating Chinese Indonesian Cultural Heritage on June 12th, 2021 by eight master students held at Petra Christian University. The eight titles of the presentations can be seen at <https://ic-cich.petra.ac.id/RUNDOWN.pdf>: (1) Chinese-Indonesian Identities in Films: An Analysis from The Films "Ca-Bau-Kan" And "Cek Toko Sebelah"; (2) The Hybridity in the Chinese Indonesian Art of Lion Dance: Ulin Barong Sekeloa; (3) Lontong Cap Go Meh as a Hybridity in Chinese Indonesian Tradition; (4) A Cinematic Portrayal of Wei: Chineseness in Between Two Worlds; (5) The Reception Analysis Toward Chinese-Indonesians on Typical Chinese Indonesia YouTube Video; (6) Heavier on the balance: How Chinese Indonesians are reported in news portal; (7) Chinese New Year celebration at school: From reviving Chinese roots to cultivating multicultural roots; (8) A bowl of cultural indulgence: Identity construction through Chinese Indonesian cuisines in Pematangsiantar and Surabaya. The latter five papers can be read in the proceedings at <https://ic-cich.petra.ac.id/Proceedings-ICCICH.pdf>

DISCUSSION

Is it as simple as offering more courses on Chinese Indonesians in a university? Probably it is not the only factor that can encourage students to be interested to conduct research in Chinese Indonesians. However, it can be one of the factors, an important one. First, courses on Chinese Indonesians in universities provide knowledge about Chinese Indonesians. Second, what seems to be everyday trivial thing can be an important and interesting discussion if it is brought in an academic atmosphere. Third, university courses, especially after the undergraduate, will trigger research, be it small or big scales because master's degree usually deals with academic papers. The more research on Chinese Indonesians produced and published, the more people know about Chinese Indonesians, hopefully their positive contributions to the nation which might not be revealed intentionally.

Another reason why the existence of researchers should be encouraged is that Indonesia is a very large country and very diverse in culture. Although the name Chinese Indonesian seems to be one kind, the diverse local culture would create a diversity of Chinese Indonesians since "many Chinese Indonesians were more comfortable identifying themselves with local ethnic groups than with their cultural identity (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020 from Ananta et al. 2015; Coppel 2017)". The cultural synthesis ... have produced a unique peranakan heritage in language, religious, customary and culinary practices (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020). This is a rich field to investigate.

Third, young researchers can counter the negative sentiments to Chinese Indonesians in social media. With the existence of social media and the speed of communication, negative sentiments towards Chinese Indonesians can be spread very quickly. Young people are the ones who are good at using social media and young researchers with knowledge of Chinese Indonesians and their problems can be expected to counter the negative postings in social media with the positive ones from their research.

Lastly, in the past, "the targets of anti-Chinese riots in 1998 were all Chinese in Indonesia, regardless of their political orientation" (Aryodiguno, 2018, p. 8) and "all expressions of Chineseness in the public sphere, ... organization, ..." (Hoon, 2017, p.7) were banned. There might be a possibility that it can happen again. Some people will say that past is past; however, it is better to be on guard. Who can guarantee that it will not happen again in the future? In case it happens again, university courses, in my opinion, might not be so easily banned because first, courses are only a part of a curriculum. Second, moreover, if only two or three courses offered in a department and they are optional, such an offer would not be considered dangerous. Third, there are many departments that can offer courses on Chinese Indonesians, such as history, economics, etc. If such departments can offer courses on Chinese Indonesians, then it is likely that more young researchers can emerge.

Hopefully, mandarin fever (Hoon & Kuntjara, (2019) will also hit young Chinese Indonesians, not only to learn Chinese language, but also to conduct research about Chinese Indonesians themselves. When the new curriculum with three courses on Chinese Indonesians was introduced to the Chinese Department in my faculty, the undergraduate students were, I was informed, not interested in studying Chinese Indonesians. They were interested in Chinese language, but were not interested in studying Chinese Indonesians. Probably the finding in Hananya's thesis (2020) mentioned above is true; learning Mandarin is not about Chineseness, but merely seen as an advantage. Probably it is only true in Surabaya because the informants were young Surabayanese. Probably it can also be true in other big cities. Questions about the hidden ideology will certainly trigger further research.

CONCLUSION

The theses of the students discussed here tend to be about language since the faculty was also the Faculty of Languages and Literature. Other departments can do it, too, according to the faculties they are under. Two or three courses in a department will be a good trigger to make students of the master level conduct research on Chinese Indonesians. The important thing is if there are professors or lecturers who are interested in and have conducted research on Chinese Indonesians, optional courses on Chinese Indonesians can be offered. If there is only one department in a university that offers courses on Chinese Indonesians, students of other departments should be given the facility of taking the courses on Chinese Indonesians in the department that offers them, since interdepartmental courses is possible in the era of *merdeka belajar*.

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