

China Town Magazine and Indonesian-Chinese Identity

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Abstract

The new democratic political system in Indonesia recognizes Indonesian-Chinese as part of the national building. In the post-Suharto era, they are enjoying their cultural identity including freedom of press and freely to use their mother language. In fact, they were still develop their identity inside Indonesia as the multi-cultural country. The magazine called *China Town* is one of the Indonesian-Chinese Community Magazine. The magazine is not merely as the media which periodically reporting Indonesian-Chinese activities and opinions, but also as the representation of their existence and also identity. This article attempts to measure the role of the magazine particularly concerning on the identity issues. Specifically, this research will examine to what extent the *China Town* magazine achieve the objectives in terms of media coverage in order to develop and strengthen their identity? This is a qualitative study with content analysis. The empirical data found that, the *China Town* magazine have attempted ~~tries~~ to convince that Indonesian-Chinese is part of the Indonesian nation, as the Indonesian identity, and they are not exclusive as well as homogenous community. However, the magazine have also expressed and emphasized that Indonesian-Chinese were part of Chinese diaspora. It portrays that the magazine gave a balance information between Indonesian mainstream media and Chinese news.

Keywords: Indonesian-Chinese, diaspora, identity, media

1. Introduction

Indonesian-Chinese have felt experience on discrimination for more than 30 years in Indonesia (Tan, 2008). They have discriminated in the various aspects such as politics, social, culture and economy. The Indonesian New Order regime under Suharto administration gave discrimination policy toward Indonesian-Chinese notably on the three contexts. Indonesian government have strictly prohibited to the any single of Indonesian-Chinese culture performance, Chinese language and organization (Wibowo & Lan, 2010). The Indonesian-Chinese community only have one news media that established by the government and hugely influenced by military (Lindsey & Pausackers, 2003. Wibowo, 2001).

The new democracy era have brought a new opportunity for Indonesian-Chinese following the revision of some discrimination policies toward Indonesian-Chinese like the Anti-Discrimination Act and The Citizenship Act (Giblin 2003; Wibowo & Lan, 2010). As a result, Indonesian-Chinese allowed to demonstrate and perform their culture identity (Mahfud, 2012). They also have recognized as an integral part of the Indonesian nation. The Indonesian-Chinese has responded by establishing some media especially since 2000s.

Some studies found that the establishment of many Indonesian-Chinese media as the euphoria effect due to the political system change in Indonesia. However, most of the media were hard to survive due to some various problems. There are three important problems. First, the change of Indonesian-Chinese interest. Second, due to political pressure during the New Order era, many Indonesian-Chinese cannot speak Chinese and read the Chinese characters. Third, the Chinese media were also faced financial burden.

A study discovered that Chinese media in Indonesia faced three challenges (Hoon, 2012). First, the decline of reading culture which replaced by digital media such as internet. Second, Indonesian-Chinese prefer to read national media rather than their own newspaper. Third, the Chinese media are mostly reporting a historical news which basically suitable for old generation. Henceforth, the young generation are lack interest to read the Chinese news.

One of the media which still exist until today is *China Town Magazine*. The magazine recognized itself as the only one Chinese magazine in Indonesia. The headquarter of *China Town* located in Jakarta and have more than 200 shops and have covered outside Java, like Bali, Kalimantan (Borneo), Sumatera and Sulawesi or more than a half of Indonesian territory.

This magazine is published monthly. In November 2013 is the 73th edition. The study about this magazine is important due to the survival compared with other Chinese media. Up to now, this magazine have circulated nationally around 15.000 copies every month. Thus, *China Town* magazine is the representation of Chinese community in the contemporary Indonesia. The study examine to the content of the news and the objectives of the message delivered.

2. Literature Review

Indonesia is the largest country in Southeast Asia and living place for the large number of Chinese diaspora (Jacques, 2011). In 2006, nearly 3% of Indonesian population of 245 million are Indonesian-Chinese, yet they are totally control over 80% of the Indonesian economy (Qin, 2007). This Indonesian-Chinese achievement is bigger than in Malaysia where Malaysian Chinese take control over 60% of the country's economy. However, the total number of the Indonesian-Chinese population in Indonesia is not found due to political reasons (Suryadinata, Arifin and Ananta, 2003). In the 2000 Census, Suryadinata, Arifin and Ananta estimated that the population of Indonesian-Chinese around 1.5% of the national population and mostly they were settled outside Java Island. In the context of Chinese sentiment, they have divided Indonesian-Chinese ethnic into two groups, Indonesian-Chinese in Java and outside Java (or called outer island). They have mentioned that Indonesian-Chinese outside Java is more "original" (in the context of culture) and their ethnicity sentiment is higher rather than who were live in Java.

Chinese diaspora in Indonesia is the most complicated in the region (Wibowo, 2001: 1-34). The Indonesian-Chinese continuously being questioned about their nationalism and the loyalty to the nation as well as some negative characteristics embedded (Coppel, 1994; Gondomono, 2002). They were allegedly as "unchanged Chinese" which believed more loyal to their homeland in China and always being labelled as a pragmatic people (Suryadinata, 1995). Furthermore, Indonesian-Chinese was also identified as "a problem" to the other. They were perceived as immigrant which have different region, culture as well as political orientation and also viewed as PRC's Communism supporter (Heryanto, 1998). Basically, the Indonesian-Chinese identity is smoothly maintained and reproduced. Yet, during the New Order regime the development of identity got stuck due to the repressive policy of the government and should be transformed to be so-called Indonesianness (Philpott, 2000). Instead, the New Order regime have defined Chinese ethnic as Chineseness (Chua, 2004). The Chinese problem was actually more related to the identity construction in Indonesia (Lan, 2001). They are being exclusive attempt to make a separation for instance the residence, having superior thinking, being opportunist and loyal to their original culture. The last character creates the stereotype that their loyalty to Indonesia has been questioned (Coppel, 1994: 25-26). Those stereotypes have triggered anti-Chinese sentiment, including the economic competition between indigenous people and the Chinese (Coppel 1994:57; Purdey 2006: 4-6; Ham, 2008). The stereotype toward Indonesian-Chinese is also constructed due to the government policy since the Dutch colonial which had divided them with the local people (Reid, 2009; Anggraeni, 2010; Anggraeni 2011: 257-258; Afif 2012: 6; Soyomukti, 2012; Heidhues, 2012). In the post-independence era, the policy of the government is remain the same even until the *Reformasi* (reformation) era in 1998.

In the post reformation era in 1998 brought a changes in *Indonesian-Chinese* social and political life. The Indonesian-Chinese have given freedom of politics, social, economic and culture as well as to express their identities. The situation is like the bloom of many flowers (Coppel, 2003). Periodically, Indonesian government has made revision on discriminative acts and regulations related to Indonesian-Chinese (Jacobsen, 2005; Suryadinata, 2007; Sukma, 2009; Hwang & Sadiq, 2010; Tan, 2011; Jiaxuan, 2011; Suryadinata, 2012; Liji, 2012; Mahfud, 2013). The third Indonesian president B.J. Habibie for instance began to stop the use of the concept of indigenous and non indigenous. While his successor President Abdurrahman Wahid has lifted the ban on Indonesian-Chinese culture and recognized Confucianism as part of the Indonesian official religion. The Indonesian-Chinese community totally happy when President Megawati Soekarno Putri has declared that Chinese New Year as a national holiday. She also appointing one of the Indonesian-Chinese economist as a minister.

In the meantime, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) has amended the Citizenship Act and remove the term of "*asli*" or indigenous people to distinguish between indigenous and non-indigenous. He also appointed Indonesian-Chinese economist to be a minister during his second term of his administration. In 2014,

SBY has released a decree concerning the replacement of the term of *Cina* by *Tionghoa* to call Indonesian-Chinese. Indonesian government also replace China with *Tiongkok* to call People's Republic of China (PRC). The effort of the government to revise and amending policies related to Indonesian-Chinese should be appreciated. Nevertheless, practically, the relationship between Indonesian-Chinese and the local is still problematic (Lan, 2012). Being Indonesian and also Chinese are the two important points to define Indonesian-Chinese identity. Collective identity is important as self-identification development process, where the ethnicity is unchanging, essential and primordial. Every generation with different experiences, condition and situation may have different perception toward their identity and self-identification process (Koning, 2007). Hence, to understand the Indonesian-Chinese identity we should understand their history in Indonesia and also the contestation of identity development and the influence factors whether internally or externally.

3. Method

This is a qualitative study with content analysis. The content analysis is used to analyze information, meanings and expression of Indonesian-Chinese identity through the *China Town* magazine. We have analyzed throughout a publications which consist of 12 editions. The analytical tool and guidance we used is pertaining issues related to the concept of identity and diaspora.

4. Result

4.1 From Nostalgia to Recent Life

As Hoon's studies about Indonesian-Chinese Identity, one of the weakness of Indonesian-Chinese media is on the content that seems out of date from young generation's perspective. The media mostly deliver the news or article about memoir of old generations, nostalgia meeting and discussing uninteresting topic like traditions etc. The content is more nostalgic and history as a part of Chinese diaspora (Hoon, 2012).

China Town magazine's contents are also discussing about nostalgic article but they also make it balance with new taste of new generations. They made equal portion on it. The only one column that describe about nostalgic article is on "History" column. In every edition, this column published the picture of Indonesian-China relations from Old Order, New Order and Reform Order. On every picture they give explanation about the event.

China Town also provides the special column to discuss about the modern culture. We think this column provided for young readers. The column named *Seleboriental*. This column discussing about the entertainment news from China, Taiwan or Hong Kong celebrities and also sometimes they discussing about fashion style. In other way, they also publish the Indonesian artist news in the other column called "*Hiburan* (entertainment)".

As the community magazine, *China Town* also discussing about tradition and culture. They have three columns about it. First is the prediction of 12 Chinese zodiac (*shio*). Second is the *Fengshui* consultation. This column managed by professional *Fengshui* consultant. And the last is prediction and discussion about the monthly prediction of special *shio* which is getting bad lucky or good lucky.

4.2 From China to Local Indonesia

As Indonesian-Chinese Community media, the identity is important point. From many years, Indonesian-Chinese face the problem of identity. They still viewed as outsider from some Indonesian people. We can analyze the Indonesian-Chinese identity by observe the content of *China Town* magazine. What identity that they want to develop? In this study, it can be said that in *China Town* magazine, the identity appears as mixing identity among Indonesian, Chinese ethnic and Chinese diaspora. First, as Indonesian citizen and the fact that they are born and grow in Indonesia, the identity as part of Indonesian nation is appear. Second, they cannot deny that they have special culture that distinguish them from other ethnic in Indonesia. So the identity as Chinese ethnic also appear. Third, Chinese diaspora identity means that they also have relations –strong or weak- with their descent or mother land in China. In other word, sometime they felt that they have feeling relations with China. This last identity appears into two columns. The first is "*Kabar Tiongkok* (News from China)". This column published the hot news from China. It can be news about the government, economy or social issues. In this context, the news about China is like an evident of the relationship that they feel with the country. They think that something happen in China is important to known by Indonesian-Chinese. The second column is "*Wisata Tiongkok* (China Tourism)". This column more like description about some tourism spots in China. In some edition, the news about China placed special column or placed in the head line or special report column. For the example the news about leader succession in Communist party and President Xi Jinping opinion about China-Indonesia relations placed as the head line news.

In other part, *China Town* also published the events that have done by Indonesian-Chinese community in many local-area in Indonesia. Usually the news is discussed in two columns are *Komunitas* (Community) and *Laporan Daerah* (Local Report). On both columns, the news is about the gathering, meeting, seminar, religious event, culture event, social and culture activity of some Indonesian-Chinese organization and community around Indonesia. The most interesting in this column is that *China Town* seems to show the unity of Indonesian China community, although they have different dialect, sub-ethnic, local tradition, political orientation etc. Although, the *China Town* seems pro to China, which they often publish news about China, they also accommodate the event that done by Indonesian Community that looks more Taiwan oriented like Taiwan alumni etc. In this context, *China Town* seems accommodate and give wide space for all of Indonesian-Chinese community and organization, whatever their social-culture or clan.

4.3 From Politics to Business and Culture

If some of Indonesian-Chinese media avoiding political topic, the *China Town* looks to take a discussion about politics, although in the limited explanation. It seems that *China Town* carefully to discuss about politics. The politics topics usually as comments on national politics, of course, from Indonesian-Chinese community perspective. Some of special report discuss about national politics like elections, senate candidate or discussion about identity and nationalism of Indonesian-Chinese. Others issues also appear in opinion column that written by not only analyst from Indonesian-Chinese, but also non-Indonesian-Chinese.

Indonesian-Chinese usually identified with the business. The business topics is also important part of *China Town* magazine. Some columns provided especially for discussing about business. They are executive, entrepreneur and *peluang usaha* (business opportunity). They usually discussing about success story of Indonesian-Chinese businessman. They also inform many business opportunities in the market and also the information about top Indonesian-Chinese businessman in Indonesia and also in China. For example, *China Town* published the Top Indonesian-Chinese Businessman and 50 Richest Businessman in China on the headline. They also try to encourage the young generation to do business, like special report on Young Indonesian Entrepreneur.

To save the culture identity of Indonesian-Chinese, *China Town* also provide the special column related with culture. In the special time, like Chinese New Year, the news about culture dominating the portion on the content. On ordinary editions, the discussion about culture usually is not limited in the report on culture event, but also information about culture history and culinary.

The important point on discussion about Indonesian-Chinese media is its relations with “*Masalah Cina* (Chinese problem)” (Coppel, 1994, Suryadinata, 2004). The Chinese problem in Indonesia actually be based on the identity problem (Dawis, 2010; Suryadinata, 2010). In this issues, *China Town* play interesting role. *China Town* seems to combine of Indonesian-Western-Chinese identity. The name of “*China Town*” for this magazine with English is looks as the balance position. It means that the use of English will make it looks more general and professional. It is used to avoid negative intension from the reader when they read the cover from the first time. It also uses to avoid the “exclusive” impression. It will different if they use the word “*pecinan* (Chinese Town in Bahasa Indonesia)” or using the Chinese words. The name of Chinese Town will make non-Indonesian-Chinese reader feel not strange to read although the content describes about Indonesian-Chinese.

The second point is about the Chinese word in Chinese character on the right side of *China Town*. It is, of course, as a symbol that the magazine is relate with Chinese community. And the third point is the headline style using Bahasa Indonesia.

4.4 From Old Generation to Young Generation

On the observation to the contents in the magazine, it seems that *China Town* take segment to all of Indonesian-Chinese generations. The Indonesian-Chinese community can be divided into two groups. First, is the old generations that still can speak Chinese language and have strong emotional feeling with China. And the second group is the young generations who almost cannotspeak Chinese language and less emotional feeling with China. Mostly, this second group, are Indonesian and Western education product.

In this context, it is look that some column and information inside, are to accommodate both generation groups. For the old generation, the news and information about China’s culture accommodated by *China Town* with the column related with history, people, tradition and festivals. In other hand, for young generation, the column about infotainment, business opportunity, parties, available for them.

China Town seems learn from other Indonesian-Chinese media experience which is not aware with this situation. They less creative to response the different generation of reader. So, *China Town* establish as the media for all of Indonesian-Chinese generations.

4.5 From Mandarin and Its translation

It still relates with the generation differentiation. *China Town* is the Indonesian-Chinese magazine with full of Bahasa Indonesia as the language. More than 90% of the information inside *China Town* use Bahasa Indonesia. It also uses word of *Indonesian-Chinese* (Indonesian-Chinese) and also uses word *Tionggok* to call China. It is important, because it is like recognition of their identity as Indonesian-Chinese. If they use word *huaqiao* (Chinese overseas), it will give different meaning. *Tionggok* is the official word in Bahasa Indonesia to call China. In other hand, less than 10% of the information in *China Town* using Mandarin and Chinese characters. The Chinese character usually uses for specific columns like *Shio*, *Kabar Tionggok* (News from China), *Seleboriental*, *Wisata Tionggok* (China tourism). In some columns they also use both Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese.

That is interesting point because it seems that *China Town* tries to show the side of identity as Indonesian-Chinese and in another side is as Chinese diaspora.

5. Discussion

China Town likes to show some meaning based on its context. They are:

5.1 Indonesian-Chinese Identity

China Town describes Indonesian-Chinese identity in post Reform era in Indonesia. It can be viewed on how *China Town* describes the life and activity of Indonesian-Chinese community and organization, as well as, the discussion about Indonesian-Chinese issues and their relations with China.

From some news about Indonesian-Chinese, it can be viewed that they try to show that they are part of Indonesian nations and society. It can be identified by the use of Bahasa Indonesia to show their Indonesian identity. But in other side, *China Town* also shows that Indonesian-Chinese have specific tradition and culture that are different with local culture and tradition. So, in this context they also want to show that they are part of Indonesian diversity. In some case, they also show the acculturation culture between Chinese culture and local culture in Indonesia.

In this context, *China Town* can be viewed as a tool to develop Chineseness of Indonesian-Chinese identity. We can found they use Indonesian name and also Chinese name. In the New Order regime, Indonesian-Chinese prohibited to use Chinese name. They had to create their Indonesian name. On the culture context, the news about Indonesian-Chinese tradition is not only as event report, but also as re-introduction of it to new generations. They viewed that the tradition is not only as heritage which had to be saved but also the identity. Discrimination on 30 years teach Indonesian-Chinese to redevelop their knowledge about the tradition toward young generation. It can be used to educated new generations about their culture and tradition.

5.2 Diversity of Indonesian-Chinese

The news about tradition, culture, ceremony and events from various Indonesian-Chinese community and organization bring the message that in fact, Indonesian-Chinese is not as homogenous society. Indonesian-Chinese are also diverse. Many Indonesian understand that Indonesian-Chinese are homogeny and have similar stereotype such as apolitics and as economic animal. The information about tradition, culture, ceremony, event and organizations is the education for the people to understand that Indonesian-Chinese are not homogeny.

The diverse of Indonesian-Chinese hope can give information to the reader, especially for non-Indonesian-Chinese readers. In other hand, the information about Indonesian-Chinese participation on social activity is also describe their participation in the Indonesian society and for Indonesian-Chinese, it can be a good information and example. When the stereotype can be decreased, so the conflict potential will also decrease.

5.3 Chinese Diaspora

The information related with China seems to show the cultural relations and emotional feeling of motherland of China. On the analyses to the content of the news, it can be understood that *China Town* tries to show that Indonesian-Chinese is part of Chinese Diaspora. In this context the news and information about this issues describes “relations” and “feeling” between Indonesian-Chinese and China. This point is important because, compare with Malaysian Chinese or Singaporean Chinese, Indonesian-Chinese is the most complicated Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia. It is because of their relations with political power and the regime policy toward

them.

5.4 Business as Character

Chinese always identified with the business. The business is the important point and placed special portion in *China Town*. On this context, *China Town* is not only as community magazine as well as socio-cultural communication but also as business communication.

5.5 Indonesian-Chinese Is Part of Indonesian Nations

The *China Town* is important, not only for Indonesian-Chinese, but also for Indonesian society. This magazine is not only communication tool to deliver information but also education tool. By accommodate all of Indonesian-Chinese community and organization, *China Town* is a symbol of unity in diversity of them, including Taiwan alumni organization. *China Town* brings message that Indonesian-Chinese is diverse but they are united into common identity as Indonesian-Chinese. Second, under the *China Town* words, they put the sentence "Indonesian-Chinese Community Magazine". This sentence is as recognition and also declaration of their identity as Indonesian-Chinese. The "Indonesian-Chinese" word is different than "Indonesian-Chinese". The Indonesian-Chinese concept means that Indonesian identity is the first and bigger than Chinese identity. This is important, because many Indonesians think that Indonesian-Chinese is always China oriented and less Indonesian.

6. Conclusion

In his work, Charles Coppel mentions that Indonesian-Chinese problems are related with stereotype labelled to them and also the core is their identity as they are not an indigeneous ethnic in Indonesia. However, during the New Order regime, Indonesian government tried to assimilated them to the Indonesian ethnic even change their Chinese name to be sound "Indonesian name" and also prohibited any cultural expression. The experience during discrimination and also the change of political system in Indonesia made Indonesian-Chinese communities aware about their position in Indonesia. Then they face the dual identity expression, as Indonesian and also as Chinese. However, the identity problem is not as complicated as before since they understand and may consider that their Indonesian identity is important. Another reasons may be the situation change in government policy and also social relations with non Indonesian-Chinese communities. Then they express their identity as Indonesian with Chinese ethnic.

Our observation toward the content of the series of *China Town* magazine, we find that although Indonesian identity seems stronger or dominant than Chinese identity, but it doesn't mean they loss their Chinese identity. They keep the Chinese identity as herigate although in minimum elements like put Chinese character bellow the head news, special feature about Chinese event and also the *Shio*. There are some collums related with Chinese culture and China. The Chinese identity occurs in two ways, as ethnic Chinese (Indonesian-Chinese) and as Chinese descent. The Chinese descent or *Keturunan Tionghoa* in Bahasa Indonesia shows that there is diasporic element. Of course, they have relations with China, strong or weak, but it doesn't dominant compare to Indonesian identity and as Indonesian-Chinese ethnic. The collums about China is the lessest portion of the magazine. The Indonesian-Chinese identity in *China Town* magazine shows that there are Chinese element in one side and also Indonesian element in other side. The Chinese identity seems still be maintained however it is not dominant than their Indonesian identity. The identity then, reproduce becomes an Indonesian-Chinese identity.

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