

The Formation of Chinese Identity in Young Chinese Women According to Fathers' Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Violence against the Chinese in Indonesia is increasing, and much trauma has arisen among the ethnic Chinese because of this fact. In this paper, the authors present the result of interviews with three Chinese women from the current generation who have experienced trauma. The goal of this study is to comprehend how their families' trauma can be told and how that traumatic experience forms their Chinese ethnicity. Chinese ethnicity is often thought to be formed by the narration of the fathers. Fathers play a central role in the formation of generations and the ethnic ideologies in Chinese families, especially with regard to their own children, while the mother's role is often marginalised solely responsible for the children's biological identity. This is a qualitative research study with a feminist approach intended to understand and identify the maturation process of young Chinese women according to their fathers' narratives. This study used Anthias and Davis's theory along with Spivak's work to find the thread between the father's

role in ethnic identity formation and self-agency as represented by interviews with three ethnic Chinese women. The end of this paper presents the self-agency and the representation of how these ethnic Chinese were affected by their society and their education. These three subjects each received different types of education and are from different societies; thus, they represent some ethnic Chinese who have had similar experiences. The results show that the trauma continues for these women and that it is passed down by the father;

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furthermore, the women's educational backgrounds influence the subjects' perspectives.

Keywords: Chinese women, ethnic, identity, representation, subaltern women

INTRODUCTION

Identity is liquid and changeable. It is a personal reflection of how a person presents who he or she is, and a change in it may be caused by internal or external factors. Newman (2006) wrote that personal identity was affected by social identity, which had various components. These components may take the form of physical characteristics or the ideologies of certain groups. Personal identity cannot be separated from one's race and ethnicity. Race is an individual's makeup of biological features showing similarities with others; for example, skin colour, hair colour and texture, or eye, nose, or head shape (Newman, 2006). Thus, racial identity is related to physical features. Many people assume that physical features represent the characteristics of someone's physiological condition, behaviour and personality. However, in sociology, this sameness is referred to more accurately as ethnic, or encompassing characteristics from the same culture, history, language and patterns of behaviour and belief.

Historically, ethnic and racial categories have formed in various ways; such as by conquest, colonisation and immigration. The modern versions of these influences are capitalism, imperialism and liberal democracy as the prominent political forms

(Anthias & Davis, 1989). In some cases, the shaping of ethnicity and race is done with political intention. Whether minority or majority, all ethnic groups form under the assumptions made by surrounding society. According to Anthias and Davis (1989), ethnicity may be constructed from outside the group, in the form of social representation by other groups, or by the states. Identity is also influenced by the collective memory of events. This paper examines how the identity of young Chinese women is shaped by the narratives and collective memories of anti-Chinese violence experienced by their families.

As background information on the violence suffered by the ethnic Chinese, the authors note the history of the rise of anti-Chinese in Indonesia that eventually led to violence against this minority ethnic group. Beginning from the colonial period and continuing up to the present time, the ethnic Chinese have often been the targets of violence. The violence may have had its starting point during Jan Pieterzoen Coen's rule, when a massive Chinese immigration to the island of Java occurred. These Chinese came mainly from Hokkien, a southeastern province. Dutch government came to fear that the Chinese citizens in Batavia would outnumber the locals and that this imbalance would lead to bad results, so in the early 18th century, in-migration of Chinese was limited (Dahana, 2000). Dutch government then ordered Adrian Valckenir, Governor-General of the colony, to commit mass murder of Chinese prisoners and the Chinese living in Batavia. This was an awful

tragedy that took place during a hostile time in the colonial period (Toer, 1998).

The Dutch government then began to provide legal positions to the Indonesia-Dutch citizens using a racist criteria. It placed the ethnic Chinese higher than the indigenous people, calling the Chinese *vreemde-costerlingen* (Eastern) citizens and the indigenous inlanders (Purcell as cited in Dahana, 2000). This was the beginning of widespread anti-Chinese sentiment. The indigenous citizens concluded that the Chinese had been awarded privileges by the Dutch government which made their conditions even worse. Even though the Dutch government was providing advantages to the ethnic Chinese, the anxiety about the Dutch government's actions could not be erased easily.

The Dutch adhered to a European civil code that provided them a higher position than the indigenous people. In addition, European and indigenous people lived very different lives. However, they had the chance to join the plural community and find their home in society by participating in the economic sector (Furnival, 2010).

In 1942, the Japanese came to Indonesia and replaced the Dutch, who had been occupying the territory up until then. Conditions for the ethnic Chinese were no better than under the Dutch government. The arrival of the Japanese worsened the status of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The subsequent violence committed by the Japanese against the Chinese occurred because of the long history of wars between China and Japan (Purdey, 2013).

In May 1946, Indonesian independence mass murder was committed against the Indonesian Chinese people by the racial Moslem group Tangerang. This was the first anti-Chinese violence after the Indonesia's independence. On this occasion, approximately 600 Chinese were killed. This prompted many Chinese people to move away from rural areas to live in larger cities. This led to a speculation on the part of Indonesians that the Chinese were allies of the Dutch, whose influence was prominent in large cities at that time (Purdey, 2013). A New Order then emerged, during which Soeharto's government was brought to power in part through a riot by a coalition of anti-communist groups making up a Golongan Karya ('Golkar'), which formed a single political party. At this time, the military was granted a central function in politics, with dual functional systems (Purdey, 2013).

After 1995, violence against the ethnic Chinese erupted again in various regions of Indonesia. The peak came in 1997-1998, when the Asian economic crisis hit Indonesia. Anti-Chinese sentiments culminated in violence targeted at property belonging to the ethnic Chinese. As part of these violent acts, Chinese women were also targeted for injuring Chinese ethnicity. The mass rape destroyed not only women's bodies but their self-esteem as well (Stinglmayer, 1994).

The 1998 tragedy left behind continuing trauma for its victims. Nineteen years have passed without justice for them. The memory of the event remains alive for many.

The tragedy is a black page in Indonesia's history. The event targeted citizens based on ethnicity and religion, many of them Chinese. The tragedy saw pillage, burning shops and mass rape, which all deeply wounded the victims. The traumatic effects were felt not only by the victims, but also by almost all the Chinese. In the aftermath, many Chinese fled abroad to save themselves. The woman we call Clara in this paper is a member of this group.

Many people do not believe that there was a mass rape in 1998. Even two decades later, there is no justice for the victims. Their voice was silenced by narrative told by those in power. The Chinese women's narrative was swallowed up by their position in the nation as a subaltern community. They were marginalised for their ethnicity, religion and because they were women. Their narrative was nothing next to the major narratives of men. As subalterns, they produced their own agency and represented their life conditions differently.

The trauma experienced by the ethnic Chinese families caused them to reproduce their fears in the form of narration, advice, or even stereotyping, with the objective of saving themselves (Dhani, 2017). The women interviewed in our study were Chinese women with narratives describing the trauma of experiencing anti-Chinese violence. As the heads of families, their fathers and other men had full control in shaping their personalities and their positions as Chinese women. This implies that the mother's narratives were not received properly. The socialisation of

ethnic identity was not conducted only by the fathers but also by the mothers. Mothers in Indonesian society are responsible for biologically passing down their ethnicity and they are not allowed to build their children's ideas of ethnicity and norms. In this study, the authors show how men or fathers shape their children ethnically and how the mother's roles disappeared in shaping their children ideologically.

The objective of this study is to illustrate that as a mother, a woman has no great role in shaping the ethnicity of her child. This study proposes a solution to anti-Chinese sentiments and deconstructs stereotypes about the ethnic Chinese by examining young women's experiences. This study also explores young Chinese women's experiences as targets of anti-Chinese sentiments and that relationship to the Chinese patriarchal system.

Theoretical Review

The authors used Anthias and Davis's (1989) ideas on women, nation and state to observe the position of women as a generation related to ethnicity and as a group living in a country. First, Anthias and Davis (1989) investigated ethnicity and nationality as they related to gender construction. They noted certain methods that separated people and destroyed ethnicity and nationality. Various studies have found that, in terms of states and national identities, and with the connotation of ethnicity and collective orientation, nationality may be considered a synonym for ethnicity. On the other hand, ethnicity is

also commonly related to minority groups or subordinate groups in a nation.

Anthias and Davis (1989) explained that women often played the role of preserving the identity of ethnic groups in a state. Women also assisted on a national scale such as in the economic sector, politics and sometimes even in military defence. This theory supports the observation of the position of women in a country as part of an ethnic group and their participation in various sectors. According to this theory, the mothers of Chinese women do not have an important position and cannot create a doctrine for their children. Instead, the doctrine is created by the patriarchal system of the Chinese ethnicity itself, within which women are a silent majority.

It is also clear how women function as ethnicity carriers and participants. Interpreted according to Anthias and Davis's (1989) theory, the woman studied here show how they play this particular role. They are minority participants in society with large roles. These Chinese women are defined by their father figures, not their mothers.

Spivak (1994) proposed another relevant theory concerning the subaltern that described the agency in every individual. Spivak noted that there were two types of representation: representation by 'speaking for', as in politics, and representation by 're-presentation', as in art or philosophy. The term *vertreteren* refers to representation in the first sense and *darstellen* to the word in the second sense. These theories are interrelated as representation of the law of subject-prediction.

Spivak found that educated people represented themselves, but they represented the subaltern. This representation destroyed the subalterns' subjectivity. This happened during the colonialist period in the third world. Colonial history plays an important role in the destruction of the subalterns' subjectivity. Spivak (1994) found that in the context of colonial production, subalterns had no history and could not speak, and female subalterns were even more deeply in the shadows.

This theory shows the condition of Chinese women who are silenced. The colonial situation created anti-Chinese sentiment among indigenous people that continued to grow up to the present time. The narratives of identity formation were created and passed down by the father, while the women were the ideological carriers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study applied a qualitative method with a feminist perspective, as this could disclose the sociological element most deeply. This method would yield more fruitful findings than any other methods, and it was an accurate and efficient way to obtain information (Poerwandari, 2011). Using a feminist perspective, the study researched women's impact on their neighbourhoods. The study's documentation of women's lives and experiences provided a clear illustration of gender stereotypes and bias and produced information from disciplined women, while built on a basic feminist structure (Brooks, 2007).

The feminist perspective was also used to review the relationship between women and men as minority and majority communities. Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) said that researchers could use a feminist methodology to study gender relationships, social lives and sexuality and gender concepts and their meanings. Through a considered approach, researchers could examine how people could study their own experiences and how that power affected their knowledge.

The standing of feminist epistemology challenges researchers to review and understand the world by studying the minds of oppressed women and applying their insight and knowledge to social activity and social changes (Brooks, 2007). This can be conducted by studying these women's life experiences, which are often invisible unless one knows where to look. According to Nielsen (as cited in Brooks, 2007), women's culture, history and lives have remained 'underground and invisible', relegated to the 'underside' of men's culture, history and lives.

A qualitative approach from a feminist perspective was used to reinforce the historical findings of research performed to observe women's experiences. In connection with this particular study, the authors traced the lives of young Chinese women who experienced how the memories of anti-Chinese violence were passed down by prior generations. The authors observed their trauma and examine how the current power (controlled by a majority community) was understood.

Data Collection

The data were collected through library study, in-depth and informal interviews, and by tracing oral histories. The subjects of this study were young Chinese women approximately 25-30 years of age who had familial backgrounds of experiencing anti-Chinese violence. A tape recorder was used in the interviews to allow easier categorisation and analysis. Field notes were also employed to record things that were not spoken but rather implied by gesture facial expression. An interview transcript was produced once the data retrieval process was completed, and the results were categorised thematically.

Research Subjects

The authors conducted interviews with three Chinese women and produced information based on a long process. First, the authors characterised the research subjects to simplify the choice of appropriate subjects related to the authors' research questions. Initially, four Chinese women were interviewed, and only three were chosen as suitable research subjects. Each research subject represents one group of young Chinese women pursuant to the following criteria:

1. Domicile: The location of the domicile affects personal identity formation
2. Education: Most of the ethnic Chinese attend Catholic school.

These two subjects were chosen in order to focus the research issues and allow more in depth study. The names of the women

given in this research were changed to minimise any possibility of disadvantages to them.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the library study and the in-depth interviews were analysed critically according to the identity formation of the young Chinese women using thematic analysis. The use of thematic analysis allowed the authors to identify a pattern that other researchers might not have found (Poerwandari, 2011). Thematic analysis is a process of information coding resulting in themes, models, complex indicators, qualification related to a theme, or any matter related to these or any combination of the above (Poerwandari, 2011). The theme may explain a phenomenon that can only be studied using a qualitative approach. This research applied a feminist perspective to the thematic analysis; this technique focused on women's narratives as the primary source to show social phenomena.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The stories of Three Chinese Women

First, Bella (29), a pure Chinese was interviewed. Her grandfather experienced anti-Chinese violence in 1946 that traumatised him and her grandmother and caused them to view indigenous people in a negative way. This family experienced another riot in 1998, which made the trauma even worse. Even though Bella did not experience violence herself, her grandparents' story haunted her. Bella's

grandmother repeated stereotypes about indigenous people to her and others of her generation. Fortunately, her parents had a different perspective. They gave her freedom to make friends with anybody and to choose a husband of any ethnicity as long as he had the same beliefs. As a Chinese woman, Bella contradicted her grandmother's stereotypes. She believed that violence arose not because those who committed it were indigenous but because of their personalities. This experience was what Spivak referred to as representation in the second sense (Spivak, 1994). Bella possessed the agency to contradict the stereotypes instilled by her grandmother. Bella considered her grandmother closed minded even though it stemmed from the sense of trauma the grandmother had about what happened to her family. But Bella had had various experiences both with fellow Chinese and with indigenous people who made her mind remaining open to an environment of friendship with the natives.

Bella had a Christian education from elementary school to senior high. She studied at Christian schools because her parents thought that public schools were full of indigenous people. She then went to the University of Indonesia, which marked the beginning of her life as a minority Chinese woman in society. She saw diversity, but it did not hold her back. In fact, she learned a lot from those conditions. Now she works at a bank in Jakarta. She also served as a representative of young people in the Chinese community, trying to build bridges between young Chinese and indigenous people.

Attending the University of Indonesia had been a catalyst for her. It had made her more nationalistic. The situation in her neighbourhood did not make her an exclusive person. She was open. Her love of her country was shown in her participation in many social activities. At the university, she met her boyfriend, who is not an ethnic Chinese; this in spite of her extended family and even her brothers being against the relationship. Her father did not insist that she should marry a Chinese man. He was an open-minded person who worked to dampen the effects of her grandparents' trauma on her.

Bella was an open-minded nationalist because she faced various processes of identity formation. She had been able to represent herself as a nationalist woman in various institutions. Identity is a fundamental and an essential issue that is produced by a narrative used to explain and understand one's life (Lawler, 2014). This true even now about Bella's identity as a Chinese woman who wanted to reform herself.

Clara (29) was an employee at a cosmetic company in Jakarta. She had the same background as Bella, a pure Chinese. In 1998, while the riots were happening in Jakarta, Clara's family experienced threats. They received information from an army general in their neighbourhood that there would be a large riot. Prior to the violence, her father sent one of his children to Australia to prepare documentation that would allow them to move there. Once it was clear that many Chinese people were targets, she and her family fled to

Melbourne, Australia, for safety. Before moving out, she had been attending a parish school, which she continued in Melbourne. There, she had many friends from various ethnicities: most of them were white but some of them had different skin colours. She had never been insulted about her ethnicity. She even insulted herself by using the word 'Chinese' in her current work or 'Asian' in Australia.

In Australia, she connected with a globalised society that paid little attention to ethnicity or religion. She never felt discriminated against in Australia. Her father also had a relationship with the globalised society. He hardly ever spoke to her on ethnic matters. Her father also allowed her to have friends and to have a partner from any group, although she knew that her father wanted her to marry a Catholic Indonesian Chinese man. Her father advised her to make friends based on their personalities not their ethnicity or religion. For this reason, she did not overtly show her Chinese identity. She also felt that she was not a real Christian. She believed that every religion was good, except that of a radical racist. In 2016, the issues of ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group relations re-emerged in a peaceful action held on November 4. She wore a Kevlar vest to work to protect herself from the rioting.

Davis stated that the father's role in forming a child's ethnicity could be criticised. In Clara's case, the father emphasised being a devoted Catholic. Her ethnicity was formed by an external factor; as stated by Davis and Anthias (1989),

one's ethnicity might be constructed from outside the group, by the form of the facial and social representation by other groups of the state. Clara's physical appearance showed her to be a Chinese woman. The assumptions made by those outside the group ethnicity about her forced her to realise that she was Chinese. She had a bad experience in connection with the 1998 tragedy and she realised that Chinese people in Indonesia had bigger problems than other ethnicities did. She also felt that anti-Chinese sentiments in Indonesia were powerful and created a real-time bomb.

Diana (25) was an employee in Jakarta. Her identity was different from Clara's, which was constructed by her father. Diana's story was more interesting due to the cultural diversity between her parents. She was born to a Javanese Moslem woman and a Chinese Catholic man. Her mother is the second wife. His first wife is Chinese. She had three children and now they lived in Australia. Her biological mother left her for a man. When Diana told me about her biological mother, her hatred for her was clear. She told me that she fled with a man who had completed the hajj. Then her father married her previous babysitter, and she came to live with them. She was close to her stepmother because she had taken care of her since she was a child. Her father married his second and third wives according to Islamic traditions. She had her mother's Javanese Moslem blood but not the Javanese ideology. Even though her stepmother was also a Javanese Moslem, she could not pass the Javanese norms on to her. Here

the mother's role was only to be an ethnic biological carrier; as noted by Davis and Anthias (1989), women only passed down ethnicity biologically and could not inherit ideologically. This state of affairs is owing to the government's maternal ideology in Indonesia's New Order, in which women only hold the roles of mother and wife.

Diana experienced much violence in her neighbourhood, where many indigenous people lived. In 1998, her father's shop was burned and robbed during the violence, and her family became bankrupt. She and her family moved to the Bintaro area and her father started a new business. She had often had negative encounters with members of the indigenous community. Before moving to Bintaro, she had only lived in Senen, where many indigenous people lived. She had nine dogs and her neighbour poisoned all of them. Now, she raised goats, and she gave them to the mosque on Iedul Adha day. She had heard many stories from her Chinese friends about how indigenous men behaved toward them. As a result, she had a great resentment for the indigenous people.

Her family indoctrinated her on the anti-Chinese violence experienced by her extended family. Her father also fed her stereotypes about indigenous people which formed her current identity. Her father had told her negative things about indigenous people since she was very young. Her father provided a Catholic education for her, from elementary to university. This was because he believed that the public schools were full of indigenous students who were naughty, undisciplined and lazy. She remembered

these stereotypes and she would repeat them to her children and grandchildren in the future. She was a chauvinistic Chinese woman and she was exclusive to other groups.

The dual acculturation of the Javanese and the Chinese still shapes Diana as a Chinese woman. Her father taught her about Chinese culture and its rules. He chose her school to form her identity as a Chinese person. She believed and took for granted the characteristics of the indigenous stereotypes her father told her about. Her father inherited the chauvinistic Chinese ideology. Because fathers and men have more of the responsibility of passing down the ideology and norms to their children (Davis & Anthias, 1989), they are the more powerful determinants in their children's identities. In this study, Diana was found to have a racist and chauvinistic personality because her father constructed it.

From her father, Diana learnt how to be a Chinese woman and she concluded that her mother's ethnicity was bad. She admitted her resentment against ethnic Javanese. She felt that ethnic Chinese were the best, but she wondered why her father married her mother, a Javanese Moslem, when it clearly contravened Chinese ethnic customs. She did not conclude that her identity contained some acculturation of another ethnicity. She saw herself as pure Chinese, and she would not marry a non-Chinese man. However, Chinese men rarely glanced at her due to her acculturation. Her children and grandchildren would inherit her racist attitudes, because she wished to make them pure Chinese. The

overall representation provided by the three subjects in this research represents Spivak's (1994) second stage, which states that the representation in the second stage is a result of the person living in a marginal community him or herself. According to Spivak, such individuals cannot represent themselves fully due to the dominated relationship of the subaltern community by the majority culture.

It is interesting to observe the father's dominant role in the family. Diana was not allowed to marry a non-Chinese man, but her father married a Javanese woman. This issue illustrates Davis and Anthias's (1989) conclusion that women are not allowed to have sexual relations with men of other groups. Here, the patriarchal system is coming into play. This rule is intended to make a woman remain on the inside of the community. The father is allowed to marry a woman from any ethnicity, but a woman must only marry a man of the same ethnicity. Her father married a woman from a different ethnicity, which automatically brought her into his community, the Chinese community; whereas Diana's biological mother has the role of ethnicity carrier.

Women born to Chinese families in communities who choose natives occupy a difficult position. First, their identity as Chinese and Catholic creates alienation by approved community groups. They have many other community groups, such as Arab groups. Second because they were born female, making them a minority within their own groups. They become weak in politics and vulnerable in defence.

Anthias also said that women in the country participated in national politics. From the third subject, we see that they are Chinese women who in fact are a minority group that is easily politically defied and likely to become victims as happened in 1998. Thus, the three are most connected to their Chinese and female identities.

CONCLUSIONS

The ongoing anti-Chinese violence continues to cause prolonged trauma to the ethnic Chinese. They became scapegoats after the riots. In 1998, during the culmination of anti-Chinese violence in the New Order era, many attacked the property or life of ethnic Chinese, and Chinese women were raped, tortured and abused. This incident was traumatic. Chinese families now keep their wives and daughters away from any possible anti-Chinese sentiments. The father, who is the central figure of the family, must be extra careful to keep his daughters safe. The father and grandparents, who had experienced direct anti-Chinese violence, are very nurturing of the grandchildren. They bring them up to see what it is like to be a Chinese woman in Indonesia. The ethnicity of those three subjects is shaped by their fathers' narratives. Their Chinese identities are perceived differently based on the narratives they were given. Two out of the three subjects have two Chinese parents, and they are open to interactions with indigenous people. Their fathers told their daughters how to be open-minded Chinese women and see people beyond their ethnicity. On the other hand, Diana is a chauvinistic Chinese

woman, because her father filled her with stereotypes about indigenous people. The difference in educational background influences the subjects as well. Bella, who went to the University of Indonesia, was a nationalist and did as much as she could for the country to show her love for Indonesia. Clara, who was used to living in a globalised community, chose to do nothing. She had a Western attitude. Diana, who had known many Chinese people since she was very young, had become a Chinese woman exclusively. She was close to indigenous people but maintained the indigenous stereotypes shaped by her father. The government needs to be fair to its citizens to enable them to recover from the trauma they have experienced. Even in the absence of a resurgence of anti-Chinese violence, the trauma will continue to break the narrative chain. Discriminatory policies will only make ethnic Chinese society perpetuate the narrative of violent trauma as a form of self-protection. Both indigenous people and the ethnic Chinese must open themselves to each other.

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