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Chinese Indonesians in Action: Political Identity Representation in Contemporary Indonesian Popular Films

Anton Sutandio* , Fenty Lidya Siregar , M. Melly Kosasih , Hianly Muljadi , Henni ,
Rizki Theodorus Johan , Sonny Angjaya , Joanna Deborah 

Bachelor Programme in English, Faculty of Languages and Cultures, Universitas Kristen Maranatha, Bandung, Indonesia

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* Corresponding author:
anton.sutandio@lang.maranatha.edu

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Abstract

Objectives: This article describes an interdisciplinary research work that combines film studies, the concept of political identity, and ethnicity theory as the method reviews to show how people of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia are represented in the context of political identity through various contemporary Indonesian popular films.

Methods: The study was a qualitative analysis research. The research objects were four popular films produced between 2000 and 2020 that precisely depict Chinese Indonesians as the main characters.

Results: By referring to the concept of political identity, the research results show that within the short study period of 20 years, films have depicted various political identities among ethnic Chinese individuals, some of which have never been explored before. The ethnicity theory supports the findings from the perspective of the ethnic Chinese culture and traditions.

Conclusion: The findings suggest which dynamics of Chinese Indonesians' political identity might help Indonesian people gain a deeper understanding of the ethnicity's characteristics and its role in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Chinese Indonesians, ethnicity, political identity, popular film, contemporary, ethnic

الإندونيسيون الصينيين في الأعمال: تمثيل الهوية السياسية في الأفلام الشعبية الإندونيسية المعاصرة

أنتان سوتانديو*، فنتي ليديا سيرجار، محمد ملاكوساسيه، هيانلي ملجدي، هنني، رزق تيا دورس جوهان، سوني أنجايا، وجوننا ديبرا

برنامج البكالوريوس باللغة الإنجليزية، كلية اللغات والثقافات، جامعة كريستيان ماراناثا، باندونج، إندونيسيا

ملخص

الأهداف: يتناول هذا المقال دراسة بينية تجمع بين دراسات السينما، ومفهوم الهوية السياسية، ونظرية العرق كأسلوب لاستعراض كيفية تمثيل الأشخاص من الأصل الصيني في إندونيسيا في سياق الهوية السياسية من خلال أفلامها الشعبية المعاصرة المتنوعة.

المنهج: كانت الدراسة دراسة تحليلية نوعية؛ حيث شملت موضوعات البحث أربعة أفلام شعبية جرى إنتاجها بين عامي 2000 و2020؛ إذ تصور بدقة الإندونيسيين من أصل صيني كشخصيات رئيسية.

النتائج: بالنسبة إلى مفهوم الهوية السياسية، تظهر نتائج البحث أن الأفلام قد صورت خلال فترة الدراسة القصيرة التي استمرت لمدة 20 عامًا هويات سياسية متنوعة بين الأفراد من أصل صيني، بعضها لم يتم استكشافه من قبل. تدعم نظرية العرق النتائج من منظور ثقافة وتقاليد الأصل الصيني.

الخلاصة: تشير النتائج إلى أن ديناميات الهوية السياسية للإندونيسيين من أصل صيني قد تساهم في مساعدة الشعب الإندونيسي على فهم أعمق لخصائص العرق ودورها في إندونيسيا المعاصرة.

الكلمات الدالة: الإندونيسيين من أصل صيني، العرق، الهوية السياسية، السينما الشعبية، المعاصرة.

Introduction

Throughout Indonesia's history, the ethnic Chinese have been the subject of bitterness as a minority group in Indonesia. The exploitation by Dutch colonialists through the *divide et impera* policy generated antipathy from the indigenous people against ethnic Chinese immigrants who were placed in a more advantageous economic position by the Dutch during the colonial era. This sentiment towards the ethnic Chinese has taken root such that even after the independence period, the resentment has remained and is continuously cultivated and passed down through generations, as Setijadi (2019, p. 194) argues that "...anti-Chinese sentiment has never disappeared from the Indonesian national psyche, and that, as a result, the place of the Chinese in Indonesia continues to be contentious in nature". The first president, Soekarno, had a close relationship with China, and this gave some hope that Indonesia's ethnic Chinese population would be more accepted by the indigenous population. However, an incident on September 30, 1965, put the ethnic Chinese in a difficult situation when they were associated with the Communist Party, which allegedly attempted a coup. This sentiment and the emergence of communists as 'latent monsters' were preserved throughout the New Order era under Soeharto as a means of power control and as part of an attempt to exploit wealthy ethnic Chinese individuals. This condition amplified the marginalisation of the ethnic Chinese throughout the New Order regime period from 1966-1998. However, some ethnic Chinese businessmen did not mind being exploited as long as they could do business and be close to the authority to ensure their safety.

The fall of the New Order government in 1998 and the beginning of the Reformation era were marked by another violent incident against ethnic Chinese in May 1998, the trauma of which is still felt today. Lootings, killings, and rape of ethnic Chinese and their businesses occurred in some cities, especially Jakarta. The Reformation era, which was supposed to be more democratic than previous eras, gave rise to religious fanatic mass organisations that exploited the democratic atmosphere to further marginalise parties or ethnicities that they disliked. Even though the condition of the ethnic Chinese has generally improved, as evidenced by reduced blatant discrimination and more openness towards them, they are still seen as unequal to indigenous citizens.

Discriminatory cases still occur. The most prominent recent case was experienced by an ethnic Chinese political figure, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who defied the stereotype that ethnic Chinese should not be involved in Indonesian politics. He was a successful governor in his hometown, Bangka, before joining Joko Widodo, the current president, in contestation as the candidate for vice-governor of Jakarta. Although they both won, Basuki faced harsh rejection when he ran for a second term as the governor, and accusations that he was committing blasphemy eventually landed him in jail.

Thus, it can be concluded that, historically, during any heated political situation, ethnic Chinese often become scapegoats or targets of the masses that still carry sentiments toward ethnic Chinese. Compared to other ethnic minorities in Indonesia, such as the Arab or Indian populations, the ethnic Chinese are still seen as non-indigenous even though they have lived in Indonesia for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, in the post-Reformation period, the ethnic Chinese have more access to politics than in previous times – as Setijadi (2016, p. 1) states, "Politically, Chinese-Indonesians now have more excellent representation and participation than ever before. However, far from being "unified," their political views and aspirations are extremely diverse". Therefore, the increased opportunities do not mean that ethnic Chinese are free from ethnic discrimination. They must live vigilantly in a society with a dark history against their ethnicity.

The Indonesian national cinema, which was established in the wake of nationalism in the 1960s, lacks ethnic Chinese representation. The main reason for this underrepresentation is the anti-Chinese sentiments that "were further perpetuated by how they were largely seen as communists and a threat to national security" (Choo, 2020, p. 20). Consequently, ethnic Chinese were often stereotypically depicted in films during the Soeharto era. There are almost no depictions of prominent or dynamic ethnic Chinese figures; instead, they tend to be depicted merely as 'cultural displays' that show Indonesia's ethnic diversity without exploring their character's depth. In addition, very few ethnic Chinese people became actors/actresses during the Soeharto era.

A policy was issued in 1950 that required ethnic Chinese to change their Chinese names to Indonesian names or return to mainland China and not return to Indonesia. This policy forcibly eliminated the essence of being an ethnic Chinese, as they could not display their Chinese-ness in any way. Many ethnic Chinese changed their names to sound more indigenous

so they would be accepted as Indonesians. For example, two directors/actors in the 1970s, Teguh Karya and Wim Umboh, were famous names in the Indonesian film industry and were also ethnic Chinese. It can be said that the roles of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesian cinema from its inception to the present day have mostly been behind the scenes as producers.

Against this background, films not only function as a passive entertainment medium but, more importantly, they also serve as ideological instruments regarding the issue of ethnicity. This study addresses the problems and objectives of how the films aid the transformation of Chinese Indonesians' political identities and how power and resistance relations play out in popular films concerning the representation of Chinese ethnicity.

Theoretical Framework

The review methods of this research are a narrative method where the films are treated as texts that deliver messages, combined with a literature review that focuses on scholarly sources that support the analysis. Firstly, the data from the films and scholarly sources are documented. Collecting data, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, includes finding up-to-date sources from journals as the secondary data and watching films as the primary data. The film screening process is done more than once to ensure that all required data are documented. The data are then analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The quantitative data include unarbitrary visual data that the films convey, while the qualitative data include the interpretation of what lies beyond the visualization and dialogues in the films.

This research treats film as a reflection of a specific place's political and cultural reality at a specific time. In the context of a country and a nation, film as a popular media form has historically played a crucial role in defining and redefining the political identities of specific ethnicities within a nation. Williams (2002) argues that cinema is essential to defining nations in which nationality formation is negotiated among the power holders within those nations. One aspect of political identity is identity through ethnicity. Indonesia, as a multi-ethnic nation, has always struggled with the issue of political identity. Thus, it is normal for ethnic identities to serve as a "playground" that powerholders and politicians use to exploit and expose citizens, including those working within the film industry.

Political identity in a film can be implied or explicit, depending on the sensitivity of the political identity issue being depicted. Traditionally, the visualisation of ethnic identity in Indonesian cinema has been stereotypical, especially for actors who play characters from a particular ethnic group. Observing ethnical identity within this research context is intriguing because characters' depictions are not the only important aspect of political identity depiction. How the overall identity depiction interacts and reacts with the surroundings is also worth considering, which is also the indicator of analysing the political identity representation.

The films analysed in this research met the following criteria. The film had to (1) have Chinese-Indonesian characters as the main characters; (2) be accessible on the OTT platform or other media platforms; (3) be produced between 2010 to 2020 (to ensure the novelty of the films and the analysis results while also revealing the dynamics of ethnic Chinese representation in popular cinema within the last 10 years), and (4) be coming from different genres (5) raise a certain issue on the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. There are about fourteen films that fall into the category, but this research will only discuss four of them that represent different genres: drama, comedy, biopic, and political drama. The four films are *Sapu Tangan Fang Yin* (2012), *Ngenest* (2015), *A Man Called Ahok* (2018), and *Susi Susanti: Love All* (2019).

The popular films above cover political narratives and can sustain or challenge mainstream political narratives. Throughout the New Order regime, the political narratives of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia positioned these individuals as outsiders (i.e., as non-native citizens who do not have equal opportunities in Indonesia). There was blatant discrimination toward ethnic Chinese during the Soeharto regime. For instance, Chinese Indonesians had to have a Certificate of Citizenship (SKBRI) to prove they were Indonesian citizens.

Literature Review

Academic research on Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia is consistently carried out through various approaches and theories. However, almost all such research is related to politics and society in Indonesia; few studies have discussed this topic from the perspective of popular cinema. Leo Suryadinata is one of the most productive and prominent researchers of

Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia. He has written dozens of articles on Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia since the late 1970s. Charlotte Setijadi also often raises issues of Chinese ethnicity in her academic writings. Another noteworthy researcher in this area is Thung Ju Lan. Wu-Ling Chong, a Chinese writer, has also written several articles on politics and the treatment of ethnic Chinese in the post-New Order era.

However, only a few academic articles have considered the political identity of Chinese Indonesians from the point of view of popular films. Examples include Heryanto's (2008) article "Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics" on citizenship and Chinese Indonesians in post-1998 films, Teo's (2018) dissertation *Recuperation and Fragmented Identity: Chinese Stories in Contemporary Indonesian Film* on the use of Chinese stories in contemporary Indonesian cinema, and Zamzamy and Kusuma's (2017) analysis of "Transformation of Chinese Ethnic Culture Identity in Indonesian Film Post-Reformation (Narrative Analysis Studies of Film *Ngenest* and *Cek Toko Sejual* by Ernest Prakasa)." None of these articles extensively discuss the four films considered in this study. In doing so, this study tries to contribute to the diversity of writings on Chinese Indonesians, especially within the discourse on the political identity of the ethnic Chinese.

This article is entitled "Chinese Indonesians in action: Political identity representation in Contemporary Indonesian popular films," which focuses on how the Chinese ethnic community in Indonesia is represented in the context of political identity through four popular contemporary Indonesian films.

Materials and Methods

This qualitative research study analyses various films while considering ethnicity theory and the concept of political identity. It also focuses on the cinematography and *mise-en-scène* of the films. The data are obtained through multiple screenings of the films, followed by data analysis. In this study, the concepts of ethnicity, considered "socially constructed continually...through social interaction, by both elites and ordinary people" (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016, p. 126), and political identity are used to help interpret the visual data obtained from the films.

Results

The second decade of the 21st century has presented an increasing trend of Chinese Indonesians' appearances in contemporary mainstream cinema. This shows that in a more relaxed and approving atmosphere, Chinese Indonesians attempt to define their identity, which was previously rarely exposed (or misrepresented) in Indonesian cinema.

Discussion

The discussion will focus on how and why films have represented Chinese Indonesians in such ways. The four films considered in this study will be discussed chronologically to show how they relate (either directly or indirectly) to certain historical events or film trends during their production.

The 47-minute-long *Fang Yin's Handkerchief* (2012) is based on a poem essay by Denny J.A., directed by Hanung Bramantyo, that focuses on the struggle of Fang Yin, an ethnic Chinese woman who is one of the rape victims during the 1998 riots. The film explicitly mentions in the opening scene that the 1998 riot inspires it. The film combines narration from the poem with some horrifying re-enactments of the 1998 riots. The visuals cause the audience to experience the horrors faced by ethnic Chinese at that time, some of who, in the face of trauma, fled the country to live abroad, as Fang Yin and her family do. They sell all they have and move to the U.S. The film depicts how ethnic Chinese in Indonesia are constructed as the "other" and are always marginalised, discriminated against, and targeted.

Fang Yin has difficulty making peace with herself and Indonesia, which had betrayed her. Her statement that Indonesian laws are corrupt reflects a truth experienced by most ethnic Chinese. The physical and economic conditions of Fang Yin and her family are stereotypical: they have slanted eyes, light skin, and are wealthy. However, Fang Yin is also depicted as a sociable character who cares about homeless children, and she has a noble plan to create a social foundation to help these children. However, her dream is destroyed by the 1998 riots, which ruin her life forever. Only after 13 years of countless struggles and conflicts does she eventually return to Indonesia and make peace with herself and Indonesia.

Cinematographically, the film is shot in a series of different tones: the opening scene is dark, only lit by some candles with the focus on Fang Yin's sad face which suggests the dark and uncertain future of Fang Yin after the 1998 riot (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Fang Yin and her handkerchief in the opening scene

The scene is accompanied by a voice-over of a narrator informing the audience about who Fang Yin is. The scene then suddenly changes into a bright sky of Jakarta, where the audience can see Fang Yin doing social work educating street children. She is seen to be an optimist, cheerful and sociable person. Then the tone changes again when the film gets into the event of 1998. Some found footage of the events is inserted into the film to add a realistic feeling of what happened (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Found footage of the 1998 riot used in the film

The film ends with a brighter tone where Fang Yin finally gathers courage to return to Indonesia after living for years in the U.S. The ending scene shows Fang Yin in a medium shot with a background of blue sky. She smiles, suggesting she still has hope and a future living in Indonesia as a Chinese-Indonesian (Figure 3). The changing tones throughout the film, in a way, represent the active life of Chinese Indonesians living in Indonesia: they face discrimination and persecution, but at the same time, they also realise that Indonesia is the homeland that they love, a place they call home.

The portrayal of Fang Yin as a sociable person close to the indigenous homeless children is non-stereotypical. Stereotypically, young and rich Chinese-Indonesian persons, let alone women, are often seen as an exclusive group who mostly mingle with their kind. It does not mean there are no Chinese-Indonesians like Fang Yin, but their film depiction is usually based on stereotypes. Thus, the depiction of the sociable and caring Fang Yin in this film, especially to the indigenous homeless children, is an attempt to show a different face of Chinese-Indonesian who cares about others regardless of their ethnicity, economic or educational background. The fact that she returns to Indonesia at the end of the film, despite her unthinkable trauma, suggests a strong nationalistic message that no matter how bad fellow citizens treat them in the past, they are still willing to live side by side with them because to Chinese-Indonesians, they are always a part of Indonesia and Indonesia is their home country. The film's ending, as seen in Figure 3, clearly suggests hope and a bright future, as seen in the shiny white sky next to Fang Yin, who is shot from a low angle to emphasize that she has the power to overcome her trauma and determine her future.



Figure 3. Fang Yin finally decides to return to her homeland

In 2015, a Chinese-Indonesian artist, Ernest Prakasa, directed a comedy entitled *Ngenest*, which is adapted from his book that reflects his own experience as a Chinese Indonesian. This topic that raises issues faced by the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia has never before been openly explored in mainstream popular film, thus making this film the first to do so. The film receives good reviews and becomes the sixth most-watched film in 2015 with almost 800.000 audiences (Situmorang, 2019).

The main characters are Ernest (the protagonist) and his best friend, Patrick. They are stereotypically portrayed as ethnic Chinese, both physically and non-physically: they have slanted eyes, and light skin, are wealthy and have fathers who own businesses (Figure 4). However, Ernest and Patrick have opposite views about their ethnicity and relationships with the locals. Ernest was bullied since he was small and is determined to blend in with native Indonesians, thinking that it will stop the bullying. Meanwhile, Patrick thinks that being exclusive is the best way to prevent bullying.



Figure 4. Patrick (left) and Ernest (right).

The movie shows how teenage Ernest, in his attempt to be accepted by his native friends, was financially exploited by them. Although the bullies and Ernest reconcile, later on, the movie shows – both in funny and touching ways – that the grown-up Ernest is so traumatised by his experiences that he is determined to marry a native Indonesian, hoping that their children will look less Chinese and, thus, will not be bullied. As superficial as it sounds, Ernest’s determination to marry a native Indonesian just because he wants their children to not look like him, shows how physical factor is one big issue faced by the ethnic Chinese: they are bullied and discriminated against because they look different. In reality, not all ethnic Chinese in Indonesia has a fair complexion and slanted eyes, and accordingly, not all native Indonesians have a dark complexion and big eyes. Through the character of Ernest, the film wants to criticize people who only judge people by their looks. This is seen through the humor language used in the film which includes satire, ridicule, mockery, and sarcasm (Natanael & Annita, 2022). In this way, Ernest represents an ethnic Chinese who continuously and consciously attempts to

assimilate into the majority by diluting his physical Chinese-ness by marrying a native Indonesian. In the end, Ernest manages to marry a native woman (despite the initial prejudice he faces from his father-in-law, who was once swindled by a Chinese Indonesian) (Figure 5). His fear does not end as now he is hesitant about having a child, fearing that the child will look like him and not the mother. Being a comedy film, in the end, Ernest is ready to have a child and the child still looks like him, or in other words, the physical Chinese-ness is passed down. There is a message here that one should embrace and not be ashamed of one's ethnicity as it is part of their identity no matter the consequences of being that person.



Figure 5. Ernest (left), with his native Indonesian girlfriend, Meira (right)

Ernest and Patrick are given contrasting views to show viewers that the stereotypes applied to Chinese Indonesians are not always true. Moreover, the fact that Ernest is different from most Chinese Indonesians makes the locals (represented by his father-in-law and the bullies) realise that Chinese Indonesians are a multi-dimensional ethnic group, just like the natives. Therefore, Chinese-Indonesian stereotypes are contested, both from the perspective of Chinese Indonesians themselves and from that of the locals. Ernest is trapped in the middle because his fellow Chinese friends think he is different, while the locals assume that he is the same as everyone else from his ethnic group.

From the cinematography point of view, the film is mainly shot in a bright and colorful tone, as how a comedy film is generally shot. The casting shows several ethnic Chinese actors and actresses involved in the film to give a realistic portrayal of Chinese Indonesians' lives. *Ngenest* is the first Indonesian film in the 21st century in which as many as eleven ethnic Chinese artists are involved, some of them are fathers and children, such as Brandon Salim (the son of Ferry Salim, who also played Ernest's father), who plays the young Ernest, and Ernest's daughter, Sky Tierra Solana, who plays a small role in the film as Ernest's niece. The involvement of the younger generation of ethnic Chinese artists is another sign of the growing number of Chinese-Indonesians in the entertainment world. Indeed, 21st-century Indonesia offers opportunities for the minority to show and market themselves as public figures including in the film world.

In 2018, Putrama Tuta directed *A Man Called Ahok*, a film based on a book by Rudi Valinka. It depicts the life of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (or Ahok), the former governor of DKI Jakarta and the first Chinese Indonesian to hold that position. The film starts in Ahok's (played by Daniel Mananta) childhood years in Belitung and continues until his rise to the position of governor of DKI Jakarta. The film also focuses on Ahok's relationship with his father, whose values help shape Ahok into the man he becomes (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Ahok (left) played by Daniel Mananta, a Chinese-Indonesian entertainer

The Chinese-Indonesian characters are portrayed stereotypically, as they have light skin and slanted eyes; speak in a Chinese dialect (Khek); are hardworking, diligent, and frugal (if compared to the locals); and come from a wealthy, well-respected family. However, they are also portrayed as having some non-stereotypical characteristics. For instance, Ahok and his family are not exclusive; conversely, they are portrayed as very generous and helpful to those in need, including the locals. They are upright in doing business, which causes conflict with corrupt government officials. Thus, despite the usual stereotypes, Ahok and the other Chinese-Indonesian characters are generally represented positively.

The positive representation of the Chinese-Indonesian characters is interesting considering that the film was released in 2018, one year after Ahok was imprisoned due to being accused of blasphemy. The film directly refers to that particular event by opening and ending with a scene where Ahok is already in jail. The positive representation of the Chinese Indonesians can be seen as a conscious effort to contradict the negative representation of the ethnic Chinese caused by the controversial event. Through this representation, the film aims to show that Chinese Indonesians are an important part of Indonesia that contributes to the betterment of the country.

This film is the second biopic that highlights Chinese-Indonesian activists after the film *Gie* in 2005. However, *A Man Called Ahok* is the first one to tell the story of an ethnic Chinese politician who is still alive and active during the film production. The film is released about a year after Ahok is imprisoned in May 2017, so Ahok is still in jail during the premiere. His case becomes an example of how dirty identity politics is when someone is easily prosecuted by the polarization of his identity as a minority both in belief and ethnicity. His imprisonment is political when his speech during one of his campaigns, which quotes a verse from the Quran, is tweaked and then interpreted as blasphemy. This film wants to show that despite being the minority, Ahok is as nationalistic and moralistic, if not more, than the locals. The film highlights his struggle and effort to become a regent in his birthplace, East Belitung. His desire is driven by the fact that if he becomes a government officer, he will have more authority and money to help the poor rather than being a businessman who can only help so much. The film draws almost one million viewers in 2018 and ranks twelfth in the total number of viewers (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The real Ahok (left) and Daniel Mananta as Ahok (right) in the official uniform (Prasetyo, 2018)

From the cinematography point of view, the film mostly uses close-up shots to create a close distance between the audience and the main characters, especially Ahok, so that the audience can understand why Ahok whom they know becomes what he is today. The dialogue, costumes, and set are designed realistically. The main characters speak in the local dialect and wear costumes that fit the period of the film which spans about 15-20 years from the moment Ahok was a kid to the moment when he became the governor of Jakarta. All these details help create the atmosphere that draws the audience to experience the journey of a Chinese-Indonesian political figure who rises to the top due to his commitment to helping the needy and the poor as a government official. Regarding the timing of the film production that is during the campaign period for the position of Jakarta governor which is smeared by identity politics, Ahok states that the film has a risk of being rejected or worse, causing demonstrations from those who think that Ahok has committed blasphemy. But the fact that the film is watched by over one million audiences in its first thirty days of screening suggests otherwise.

Susi Susanti: Love All is a biopic based on the life of one of the legendary Indonesian badminton players, Susi Susanti. This is the first popular film that depicts an ethnic Chinese female athlete. Indeed, there are not many Indonesian biopic films on athletes, and based on the data, only 4 other such films are produced in the 21st century that cover athletes from various sports: badminton, football, archery, and speed climbing. *Susi Susanti: Love All* tells the story of Susi's life, starting from the time she is given a chance to join a talent scouting program in Jakarta up until she decides to retire in 1998. The film highlights Susanti's career and achievements as an Olympic gold medalist while also depicting the unfair treatment she (and her fellow Indonesian players and coaches of Chinese descent) received during Soeharto's regime. They are ethnically discriminated against and even denied their Indonesian citizenship despite their contribution to Indonesia as athletes (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Susi Susanti in one of the interviews when asked if she still considers herself an Indonesian.

The Chinese-Indonesian characters are Susi Susanti, her family, and other ethnic Chinese badminton players. All of them are portrayed by actors who possess typical Chinese characteristics such as light or fair skin and slanted eyes. However, in terms of their mannerisms, especially in the way they speak, most of them are heavily influenced by local dialects such as Sundanese, Javanese, or Betawi. Meanwhile, in terms of their interactions with the locals—especially as shown by interactions with Susi's family—most of them can blend very well with the locals and do not show exclusivity. The interactions among the Chinese Indonesians are explored in-depth, but most of them share the same concern regarding their citizenship and the fear for their safety during the political turmoil in 1998 (Figure 9).



Figure 9. One of the scenes in the film depicts the 1998 incident that affects the Chinese-Indonesians' lives.

From a social-political perspective, the film shows the restless Chinese Indonesians, represented by the members of the badminton team, who try to gain their certificates of citizenship. During Suharto's regime, all Chinese Indonesians had to have such a certificate to get a passport, register to vote, and get married. Ironically, as depicted in the movie, Susi Susanti's nationalism and that of her teammates are not enough for them to attain citizenship. Nevertheless, the team decides to represent Indonesia in the Thomas dan Uber Cup 1998 in Hong Kong, even though they were allowed to leave the tournament and seek asylum.

From the perspective of cinematography, this film, like *A Man Called Ahok*, dominates by close-up shots that focus either on the main character, Susi, or the sport, badminton. These close-up shots provide intimacy to the audience as well as show clear emotional expressions of the actresses which is important to emphasize their struggles, especially concerning the discriminating atmosphere around the Chinese-Indonesian badminton player. The close-up shot is especially significant in the climax of the film which happens at almost the end of the film when during an interview, a reporter asks Susi whether she considers herself an Indonesian, after what happened during the 1998 incident. In a close-up shot and looking directly at the camera, Susi firmly says, "I am Indonesian, and I will always be" (p. 41). Her firm look and answer seem to conclude the whole point of the film, that regardless of her being a minority and discriminated against, she, like most ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, is Indonesian and will always be an Indonesian. This is a powerful conclusion that shows nationalistic attitude is not judged by one's ethnicity, belief, or race, but by what that person contributes to the nation, just like Susi and her other fellow Chinese-Indonesian badminton players. To this day, badminton is the sport in which many ethnic Chinese players excel and they have contributed to the superiority of Indonesia in the badminton world.

Table 1 summarises how the ethnic Chinese characters are portrayed in the four analysed films.

Table 1. Summary of the portrayal of ethnic Chinese in the four films.

| No. | Film title | Stereotypes | Non-stereotypes | Context |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 1. | <i>Sapu Tangan Fang Yin</i> (2012) | Light skin, slanted eyes, wealthy | Sociable, traumatised by the 1998 riots | Through Fang Yin, the film explicitly addresses the unreconciled 1998 trauma and the effect it has had on the ethnic Chinese, especially women. |
| 2. | <i>Ngenest</i> (2015) | With slanted eyes, light skin, and wealth, the father owns a business. | Marriage to a local Indonesian, rejection of Chinese-ness | Ernest represents a new face of Chinese Indonesians as he attempts to blend in and be more open with the locals. |
| 3. | <i>A Man Called Ahok</i> (2018) | Light skin, slanted eyes, speaking in a Chinese dialect, hardworking, diligent, frugal, wealthy | Not exclusive, generous, upright when doing business | The film represents Chinese Indonesians positively, thus contradicting the negative stereotypes that might be caused by the real Ahok's blasphemy case and imprisonment. |
| 4. | <i>Susi Susanti: Love All</i> (2019) | Slanted eyes, light skin | Not exclusive, middle-class status, nationalist | The film focuses on the struggle of an ethnic Chinese athlete who wishes to gain acknowledgment from the government. |

Table 1 shows how the ethnic Chinese population is represented in popular cinema. The physical Chineseness (e.g., slanted eyes and light skin) of all the major characters in the four films remain stereotypical even though not all ethnic Chinese possess such traits, suggesting that such traits are still important as the primary visual distinction in portraying Chinese Indonesians in films. Indeed, since the three films discussed are based on true stories, their physical appearances are adjusted to the accurate personas who stereotypically look like Chinese Indonesians. The character of Fang Yin also has a stereotypical physical appearance to fit the tragic historical account when the mobs were targetting women who physically look like Chinese Indonesians. It can be concluded that stereotypical physical appearance in Indonesian films will remain significant in distinguishing ethnic Chinese and other ethnicities.

Despite the persevering appearance of stereotypical ethnic Chinese in films, this study shows the variety of their non-stereotypical portrayals, which indicates that progress is being made regarding how this ethnic population is depicted. Most non-stereotypical portrayals are non-physical such as being nationalistic and caring for others, as shown through the character of Ahok, Susi, and Fang Yin, not being exclusive and attempting to blend with the indigenous people, as seen through the character of Ernest. The included films portray ethnic Chinese as a multi-dimensional group with challenges, problems, and traits, unlike films depicting ethnic Chinese from previous decades.

Conclusion

This paper examined four films about the lives of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and their struggles as a minority. Generally, the films show progress has been made in how Chinese-Indonesian characters are depicted. Despite the persevering physical stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese characters in all four films, they bring different perspectives of this population's culture and lives, which had not been explored before the turn of the 21st century. In other words, the films challenge cultural stereotypes in Indonesian society. Thus, the films help the audience understand the ethnic Chinese population's political identity and cultural struggles. This is done to reinforce the collective existence of the political identity of the ethnic Chinese and make the native majority more aware and understanding of the ethnic Chinese.

In addition, three films are biopics of famous ethnic-Chinese public figures: a politician (*Ahok*) and an athlete (*Susi Susanti: Love for All*). There is an apparent effort to produce new meanings of the ethnic Chinese political representation through these biopic films, which resonates with Haryanto's argument about the nature of post-Soeharto-regime biopic films (Haryanto, 2018).

In conclusion, contemporary ethnic Chinese representation in popular films reveals a significant positive shift driven

by a more accessible political atmosphere, better government policies, growing activism among the ethnic Chinese in popular cinema, and the awareness and openness of the general audience to accept diversity. Based on the findings, it is expected that the ethnic Chinese's roles in Indonesian cinema will continue to become more significant. The ethnic Chinese have been an inseparable part of Indonesian film since before Indonesia gained independence.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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