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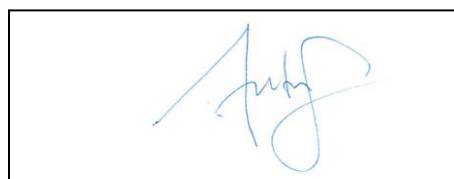
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Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in *Ca Bau Kan* in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism

ABSTRACT

The object of this research is Nia Dinata's film, *Ca Bau Kan*, which was adapted from Remy Sylado's novel. The research focuses on the representation of Chinese-Indonesians which pertains to the context of the maritime spice trade route and the concept of nationalism. Set in Batavia in three different decades, namely the 1930s, 1940s, and 1960s, the film depicts the journey of a Chinese-Indonesian character from the Dutch colonial era and the Japanese colonial era to the era of the independence revolution. The research method used is a qualitative method through the theory of film studies, which is juxtaposed with the historical approach to see how Chinese-Indonesians are represented in the film. The findings show that the film attempts to represent the Chinese-Indonesians accurately, albeit with the continuous presence of inaccurate stereotypes. The findings show Chinese-Indonesians' economic contribution that reflects the history of the spice trade maritime route in Indonesia.

Keywords: Film Studies, *Ca Bau Kan*, Representation, Chinese-Indonesians, Spice Trading

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the 2002 film *Ca Bau Kan* against the background of the maritime trading history between Nusantara (Indonesia) and China in the context of the representation of Chinese-Indonesians in the film. Historically, Chinese-Indonesians were skilful and talented merchants, and they played an important role in maritime trading history. By identifying how and why the film represents them against the backdrop of this historical event, this research wants to show that popular film can also serve as a medium of telling and preserving historical information more entertainingly. The novelty of this research lies in the fact that there has never been a similar topic discussion on the film *Ca Bau Kan*. What's more, the current Chinese government's initiative of One Belt One Road that includes the reference to the 21st century Maritime Silk Road makes this research more significant as it offers a popular culture perspective on the historical context of the initiative.

Ca Bau Kan is chosen for several reasons, firstly, the film was the first film where an ethnic

Chinese becomes the main character. Before *Ca Bau Kan*, Chinese-Indonesians did not appear much on-screen due to the New Order regime policy on them. When they appear on-screen, their depiction is superficial and stereotypical. Secondly, adapted from a novel under the same title, the film talks about the life of the Chinese-Indonesian major character that covers three different periods: the Dutch colonial time, Japanese colonial time, and the revolution time towards Indonesian independence. Being inspired by true historical events, this film provides interesting visuals that can bring a deeper understanding of the role of Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesian history through their trading skills. Lastly, the fact that some ethnic Chinese artists played in the film makes it more authentic and fascinating to watch.

Recent scholarly articles on the film or the novel include Botara (2015) who discusses the film from the perspective of Christian mystical theology. Sutandio (2014) discusses how the film attempts to centralize the marginalized ethnic Chinese. Herleni (2018) discusses the novel with the topic of life attitudes of the ethnic Chinese using a sociological approach. Asmarani (2015) also discusses the novel through the cultural deconstruction approach in the context of power. Meutia (2017) also focuses on the character Tinung in the film version, using a gender approach. Sholehuddin's (2013) bachelor thesis discusses the original novel from the perspective of literary anthropology and educational values. Sabakti (2013) discusses the narrative structure of the novel as a semiotic analysis. Raditiyanto (2018) discusses the novel from the perspective of an intertextual semiotic approach in the context of prostitution history in the novel. Hendiawan and Rahmansyah (2019) look at the film's landscape as a cultural identity. There are more scholarly articles both on the novel and the film version, however, none of them discusses the film in the context of maritime trading, which makes this research is necessary to do to offer a fresh perspective on the film.

Since the birth of cinema in the late 19th century, filmmaking has never been separated from the concept of representation. Film has its language that produces visual representation through

various kinds of media. For instance, the first publicly screened short recording by Lumiere's brother *Workers Leaving the Lumiere's Factory* (1895) shows the factory workers going home at the end of the day. Lumiere simply puts the camera in front of the factory gate and recorded the flow of the workers leaving the factory. The 45-second film shows a partial representation of the workers' daily activity. In another instance, many of Sergei Eisenstein's films represent the socialist society as a reflection of his Marxist Soviet Union ideological framework. In France, the filmmaker Godard represents the French bourgeois society in many of his films as a reflection of his cultural framework (Kiernan, 1990, p. 93). There are many other instances of how films represent certain societies, groups of people, or ideologies.

In the era of the internet, film as one of the most widely available media that people can access today can be a powerful tool of empowerment, but at the same time also disempowerment. Representation can both challenge and support the status quo. In the context of ethnicity, film as one media of representation always faces challenges when it comes to representing certain ethnic as there are many variables involved in constructing the representation, such as who makes it, when it is produced, what the purpose is, who the target audience is, and who plays in the film. The recent popularity of Jordan Peele's films such as *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) that represent the African-Americans differently compared to other popular Hollywood films are a good example of how powerful the effect of representation in empowering the minority and challenging the status quo. In the context of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, *Ca Bau Kan* becomes the first film that exclusively showcases an ethnic Chinese as the main character.

This nature of filmmaking to construct and give meaning to representation becomes even more significant within a multi-ethnic nation like Indonesia. Indonesia has "...over 700 ethnic groups with distinct languages (not dialects) and traditions..." (Yuwanto, 2012, p. 117). Among those ethnicities, Chinese-Indonesians are one ethnic that have been experiencing different treatments throughout Indonesian history. Urban (2013, p. 1) argues that "The construction of

identity among the ethnic Chinese populations in Indonesia has been a complex process. The temporal and spatial formulation of identity has allowed for continual change in which marginalization and discrimination have resulted.” The long history of discrimination and repression of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia can be rooted in the Dutch colonialization period when the colonials apply the “*divide et impera*” policy to segregate ethnics in Indonesia so that they will not form a union. The ethnic Chinese, being good at trading, have a better position in the hierarchical structure constructed by the colonials. The indigenous becomes the lowest in the structure and this condition creates sentiment that perpetuates to this day, especially by the New Order regime of Soeharto (1966-1998) for their political ends.

In the context of film, Sutandio (2019, p. 276) argues that “Chinese descendants have been and are still an important part of the development of the national cinema” although their roles are mostly behind the screen as producers or production house. Not until the 21st century that numbers of ethnic Chinese emerge as artists on screen that represent the Chinese ethnic. The representation of Chinese-Indonesians on screen has always been stereotypical, displaying mostly their obvious physical or verbal traits, which are not reflecting their true identity.

Ca Bau Kan is the first popular film since the independence of Indonesia in 1945 that specifically depicts a Chinese-Indonesian as its major character. It is “the first Indonesian film to reconfigure and relive the long-abandoned ‘realistic’ portrayal of Chinese-Indonesians after 32 years of ‘hibernation’” (Sutandio, 2014, p. 264). In Indonesian popular films from 1945 to 2002, Chinese-Indonesian characters rarely have significant positions on-screen other than an ethnic display. The discourse in *Ca Bau Kan* relates to the lives of Chinese-Indonesians in pre-independent Indonesia, and thus the audience should frame the meaning of their representation within that period with all their specific characteristics, although it should be understood that the role of director is also significant in the construction of meaning.

The film revolves around the lives of the two major characters, Sri Noerhajati or Tinung, a

poor native Indonesian woman, and Tan Peng Liang, a wealthy Chinese-Indonesian from Semarang who comes to Batavia. Tinung, who is treated as a sexual object almost throughout her young life, meets Tan Peng Liang in Batavia during a folk festival. Peng Liang adores her dancing and singing skill called “cokek” (a social dance) and is willing to double her pay so she can sing and dance privately for him. Gradually, Peng Liang falls in love with Tinung and marries her despite Peng Liang’s married status. Peng Liang’s wife is bedridden and that becomes his excuse to marry Tinung. Throughout the film, Tinung has to fight to get her freedom as a woman and to release herself from the stigma of being a *ca bau kan* (courtesan/prostitute), while Peng Liang has to fight against fellow Chinese-Indonesian businessmen to realize his agenda of defeating the colonizers through economic superiority, and later helping the revolutionary group to fight the Japanese.

Regarding the account of the Chinese-immigrant’s arrival in Indonesia, one should return to the maritime trading history between China and Indonesia which was initiated by the Sriwijaya Kingdom. The Sriwijaya Kingdom was established in the 7th century and fell in the 13th century. Its center is in Palembang city and its surrounding today (in Sumatra island). The kingdom spanned through almost all the Sumatra island, especially on the east coast of Sumatra, West Java (through the artifacts found in Cirebon), East Java (through an inscription found in the city of Tegal), Malayan Peninsula, Thailand, and all through Cambodia today. The Sriwijaya ruler put special attention to maritime trading to develop its economic and political power (Poelinggomang, 2016). The Sriwijaya Kingdom took some important steps to establish its influence, one of which was by making Sriwijaya the only trading transit port especially for spices and sandalwood which were exported to China. They strengthened the trade shipping routes by consolidating the trading and political relationship with the surrounding regions, and China was one of the important partners. The Sriwijaya-China close relationship was proven by the reciprocal visit of representatives from both regions. In the 13th century, Sriwijaya succeeded in controlling trading nodes points such as P’eng-F’eng (Pahang), Theng-ya-nung (Trengganu), Ling-ya-ssu-chia (Langkasuka) Chi-lan-tan

(Kelantan), Fo-lo-an (Kuala berang), Tan-ma-ling (Tambralingga), Ligor, Chia-lo-si (Grahi), Teluk Brandon, and Sin-t'o (Sunda). In finding a safe trading point with China, Sriwijaya was willing to admit China as a great country and giving them an offering. The act was also done to gain trust from China and to prevent China's military from expanding their territory that had reached Vietnam by that time. Also, Sriwijaya's ships would receive proper treatment in China's ports. It shows that Sriwijaya had strategized to survive and expand its power.

Besides Sriwijaya, China also established relationships with other Javanese kingdoms. History recorded that the port Kambang Putih in Tuban, East Java that belonged to king Airlangga of Kahuripan kingdom, was one of the transit ports for Chinese ships. The kingdom was established in the early 11th century and lasted through the mid of the 11th century before it collapsed. It was located in East Java (Surabaya and Sidoarjo today). In the 12th century, China also established a relationship with the Kediri kingdom that ruled East Java to Maluku. The kingdom, located in the Kediri region, was established in the early 12th century and lasted until the beginning of the 13th century. According to the Chinese' historical account, Kediri was a well-organized kingdom, proven by the existence of a maritime position that equals to an admiral today. The existence of this position in the structure of Kediri kingdom suggests that the kingdom had a good maritime force (Sulistiyono, 2016). The maritime activities during the Majapahit kingdom were also intense. Being one of the vastest kingdoms, Majapahit was established at the end of the 13th century and lasted through the 16th century. Its central government was in Trowulan (around Mojokerto and Jombang in East Java today). According to the Negarakertagama script, the kingdom's territory included today's Indonesia's territory and spanned through Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines. The book of Pararaton and Negarakertagama also recorded that there were 98 Majapahit vassal countries besides numbers of friendly countries such as Siam, Burma, Champa, Vietnam, China, Bengala which established economic relationship with Majapahit. During the Ming dynasty, Cheng Ho Admiral undertook 7 expeditions and most of which he transited in

Indonesia's regions such as Sumatera and the northern shore of Java.

The Chinese maritime expeditions and relationships with number of kingdoms in Indonesia that started in the 11th century also opened the migration channel from China to Indonesia. Initially, they were visiting *Nusantara* (Indonesia) for a short transit. They decided to migrate for several reasons such as economical, natural disasters, and social unrest. The largest migration occurred after 1850 which was triggered by the deteriorating foundation of Chinese economics. The migrants were dominated by people from the south of China mainland such as Hokkian, Teochiu, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainan (Dahana, 2000, p. 56). The numbers of Chinese immigrants increased when the Dutch colonial introduced a cultivation system (*cultuurstelsel*) that opened many plantation and farming areas in Sumatra, Borneo, and Sulawesi, and tin mining in Bangka and Belitung (Dahana, 2000). Meanwhile, in Java, the Chinese immigrants were concentrated in Batavia, Semarang, and the northern coast of Java (Utama, 2012).

METHOD

This research is qualitative and interdisciplinary research that combines film studies and a historical approach. The elements of film studies in focus are the cinematography and *misè-en-scene*. Cinematography is simply defined as camerawork that refers to how and where the camera and the lighting are positioned to create certain effects or emphasize certain conditions. *Misè-en-scene* refers to everything that the audience sees on-screen, for instance, costumes, make-up, actors, sound, dialogue, or special effects. The historical approach refers to data drawn from historical events in the context of ethnic Chinese history in Indonesia and the general history of maritime trade between China and Indonesia.

The research begins with multiple screenings of the film to collect visual data from the cinematography and *misè-en-scene* that relate to the topic. After that, the visual data are put against the historical facts to be interpreted. The historical reference includes the maritime trade history, the

history of the Chinese migrants to Nusantara, historical places in Batavia, and the history of the ethnic Chinese's lives in Batavia at a certain period. Those historical references are then compared with the visual data to check the accuracy and discrepancy found in the film. The findings are used to interpret how and why the Chinese-Indonesians are portrayed in such a way in the film.

DISCUSSION

Ca Bau Kan is the first post-New Order regime film that puts Indonesian Chinese ethnicity as its main characters. Never before, at least since the birth year of Indonesian cinema in 1950, the ethnic Chinese is put in the spotlight in a film. Most of the time, their portrayal in films is merely ornamental and stereotypical. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan* still depicts certain stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, but they also show different aspects of the ethnic Chinese's lives that are never seen before. That way, the audience is exposed to a more dynamic representation of them instead of the static and stereotypical ones. In doing so, the film takes certain historical accounts of Chinese-Indonesians particularly between the year 1933 to 1960 in Batavia. The discussion of the film is divided into two parts, the setting of place and the Chinese-Indonesian characters.

Setting of Place

The film's period is from 1933 to 1960, covering the Dutch colonization period (1930-1942), Japanese occupation (1942-1945), and independence period (1945-1960). Historically, the 1930s marks the peak of Chinese immigrants that reached more than half a million people and many of them settled in big cities in Java such as Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya. The film particularly shows three significant historical places in Batavia related to the Chinese-Indonesians: Glodok, Kalijodo (Kali Angke), and Sunda Kalapa. Other important places outside Batavia are Srigunting in Kudus and Sam Poo Kong in Semarang. The film also mentions Peng Liang's house in Chaulan Street, Batavia. Chaulan street today is Gadjah Mada street in Glodok area. This small detail shows

the film's attempt to be as accurate as possible with the history. Those places are closely related to the history of Chinese-Indonesians especially in the context of the tobacco business that the film shows.

Since the mid-18th century, the ethnic Chinese live close together as a community in a Chinatown (*pecinan*) located in Glodok area, Batavia. Today, Glodok is still the hub for Chinese-Indonesian businesses and is also known as the center of electronic goods in today's Jakarta. The film shows this explicitly through dialogues and visualization. Peng Liang's and Boen Hiap's tobacco warehouses are both located in Glodok (see figure 1 and 2), almost stands side by side. This shows that Glodok has always been an important business place for the ethnic Chinese. Historically, it is the Dutch colonial that localized the ethnic Chinese in Glodok area after the 1740 massacre by the VOC so that they can have easier control and surveillance of the ethnic Chinese (Fatimah, 2014, p. 129). During one scene, Boen Hiap mentions his high-quality tobacco that comes from Sumatra. Historically, a large-scale tobacco plantation in Indonesia was initiated by a Dutch named J. Nienhujs in East Sumatra in the 19th century. At first, the involvement of the ethnic Chinese in the plantation is as workers who are brought from Penang island and mainland China (Wibowo, 2015). The high-quality Sumatra tobacco, as Boen Hiap mentions, is for export and local market, so what Boen Hiap mentions is aligned with the history. One time, Peng Liang buys Boen Hiap's high-quality tobacco under a different name, sending the tobacco to his warehouse in Srigoenting, Kudus, and from there the tobacco is shipped back to Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok. His strategy makes Boen Hiap furious that leads him to burn Peng Liang's warehouse during the Chinese New Year. Their dynamic shows that fierce competition sometimes occurs between ethnic Chinese businessmen.

Figure 1. Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:40:27

Figure 2. Boen Hiap's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:38:31

In terms of the development of Batavia/Jakarta, the era is part of the period of modern Jakarta development (1920-2009). Glodok is located in the southern part of the Dutch colonial fort, and the reason why the ethnic Chinese are allowed to occupy the region is that the VOC Governor-General at that time, Jan Pieterszoon Coen believes that the ethnic Chinese are “a resilient and hardworking ethnic...there's no better ethnic group that suits our purpose or that can be deployed just as easily as the Chinese ethnic” (Matanasi, 2017).

The second important place is Kalijodo (Kali Angke). Kalijodo, which literally means “river of lover,” is not a name of a certain region, it derives from the ethnic Chinese tradition, *Peh Cun*. During that celebration, the Chinese migrants in Batavia come to the riverbank of Kali Angke (the actual name of Kalijodo) to sing and recite poems on decorated boats. The boats are occupied by either men or women and when some of them are attracted to each other, they show it by

throwing a cake made of flour and beans, wrapped in banana leaves (*bacang*) to each other (Permanasari & Lientino, 2018, p. 14). In its development, Kalijodo becomes a prostitution place for the Chinese migrants who are longing for sexual intimacy. The film shows this visually through the scene at Kalijodi at night when there are many boats along the river which function as the “rooms” for the prostitutes and their customers (see figure 3). Kalijodo is also the place where Peng Liang meets Tinung, who at that time unwillingly, due to her poor condition, becomes a prostitute. It is from this place that the term *ca bau kan* emerges, which is roughly translated as a courtesan, or mistress to rich Chinese men. Kalijodo remains a site for illegal prostitution until 2016 when the Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, transformed the 15.000 square meter area into a Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space (Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak/RPTRA) as seen in image 4. (Simatupang, 2017, p. 47).

Figure 3. The Kalijodo scene
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:05:27

Figure 4. Kalijodo today
Source: Tobing, 2017

The third place is Sunda Kalapa harbor, the first important harbor in Batavia, which is located just about 5 km away from Glodok area.

“In the 9th century, the Sunda kingdom emerged as one of Srivijaya’s vassals; in this period the name Kalapa (Sundanese for ‘coconut’) started to be known as one of Sunda’s port cities on the north coast of West Java. Sailors and traders from China, India, East, and Europe frequented Kalapa as part of their trading routes to the Spice Islands in the east and also to Banten and other ports on Sumatra’s coastline” (Gultom, 2018, p. 2).

Sunda Kalapa harbor has a very significant role in creating what we know as Jakarta today. It is also an important part of the history of silk route trading. Although today it is no longer functions as the main harbor, its history remains important today, especially as the entry point of many Chinese migrants to Batavia which occurred between the 10th and 13th century. The film shows this during a scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia (see figure 5) after years of running away from the Dutch authority after he is found guilty of money counterfeiting. He is shown to be very emotional when he finally returns to the place that he is familiar with.

Figure 5. The scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 1:22:19

The Chinese-Indonesian characters

The discussion of the characters will be divided into two parts: the surnames and the characteristics. Both are interesting to discuss as they represent the multidimensional aspects of the ethnic Chinese that have never been seen before in the popular Indonesian film before *Ca Bau Kan*. The discussion of the ethnic Chinese characters' surnames is particularly done to crosscheck the film's accuracy in choosing those names to the history of the Chinese migrants to Indonesia, particularly Batavia.

There are 13 main ethnic Chinese characters, Tan's family: Tan Peng Liang, Tan Giok Lan (Peng Liang's daughter), Tan Kim Hok and Tan Kim San (Peng Liang's sons), and Tan Soen Bie (Peng Liang's right-hand man). Then there are the members of the Batavia Kong Koan (*Gongguan*) Assembly: Thio Boen Hiap, Oey Eng Goan, Liem Kiem Jang, Lie Kok Pien, Kwee Tjwie Sien, and Timothy Wu. The other two characters are Njoo Tek Hong, a musician who owns a *cokek* dance troupe, and Tjia Wan Sen, a lone young ethnic Chinese who also likes Tinung. Apart from Tan's family, the other characters have different surnames. Like many cultures in the world, the ethnic Chinese also believe that one's name can determine one's fortune or misfortune. Historically,

“The four predominant groups who migrated to Indonesia were the Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu, and Cantonese—each of them with a distinct language, economy, and culture. Due to their distinct specializations, each group populated different areas and islands in Indonesia.

The Hakka migrated to West Kalimantan, the Hokkien located to Java and Sumatra, the Teochiu lived in Java, Sumatra, and the Riau Islands, and the Cantonese spread across the archipelago” (Urban, 2013, p. 2).

The majority of the Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia is coming from three provinces in China: Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan and most of them who come to Java (Hokkien) is coming from Fujian. Based on the data from the Chinese-Indonesian Social Clan Association (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia), almost all of the surnames mentioned above are in the top ten of Chinese-Indonesian surnames (Britto, 2020): Tan (Hànzi: 陈, hànǚ pīnyīn: Chén), Thio (Hànzi 张, hànǚ pīnyīn: Zhāng), Oey (Hànzi: 黄, hànǚ pīnyīn: Huáng), Liem (Hànzi: 林, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lín), Lie (Hànzi: 李, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lǐ), Tjia (Hànzi: 谢, hànǚ pīnyīn: Xiè), and Wú (Hanzi: 吴). In China itself, the family name “Lie” is “the second most common surname in China, shared by over 100 million people worldwide” (Lie & Bailey, 2017, p. 82), with Wang as the first most common surname. However, the surnames Wang or Ong in Indonesia are not as many as those surnames mentioned above. Thus, it can be concluded that the surnames chosen for those fictional characters are aligned with the actual history of the Chinese migrants’ families who come to Indonesia.

Apart from the surnames, the film also mentions the existence of Kong Kuan (Gongguan) Council in Batavia. The Chinese Council, known also as the Kong Koan, was

“a semi-autonomous ethnic organization that collaborated with the Dutch colonial government in administering the Chinese community by collecting taxes, explaining, and passing on government rules, and settling disputes. Other activities included the supervision and coordination of social and religious matters, including education, marriage registration, cemeteries, public ceremonies, and temple management” (Erkelens, 2013, p. 25).

These councils can be found in big cities such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang from the 18th century to the 20th century. They are chosen by the Dutch governor-general, and usually consist of

wealthy Chinese businessmen, but they still have to submit to the higher authority and laws, that is the Dutch colonials. The film depicts the Kong Kuan's members as rich people from the way they look and from how they stand out and are respected by other characters. They also have a headquarter where they regularly meet (see figure 6). Since they regulate everything within their community, the arrival of the arrogant and rich Peng Liang from Semarang is a matter for them. They dislike Peng Liang's attitude and they want to get rid of him.

Figure 6. The Kong Kuan member in their headquarter
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:17:25

Peng Liang's presence in Batavia draws attention from the local Kong Kuan council that looks at him as a competitor and a threat to their business and pride. Peng Liang's arrogance in showing off his wealth and his attempt to get close to the Dutch authority rises the Kong Kuan council's anger as he is seen to be overstepping the boundary. Peng Liang's wealth turns out to be coming from counterfeiting money. The tobacco business is just a cover for his illegal business although he claims that his action is a form of resistance against the Dutch colonial. He believes that the natives will not win against the colonizers through a war with guns, but it can be won through economic war. Thus, Peng Lian faces two battlefronts, one against the Dutch colonizers and the other against the envious fellow Chinese businessmen. At the end of the story that occurs in 1960, Peng Liang meets his tragic end when he is poisoned by one of the Kong Koan council members. The existence

of the Kong Koan council in the film provides another historical fact from where the audience can learn that there is a strong bond among the ethnic Chinese within a community and at the same time one can see a sense of competition when it comes to business and a newcomer to the area.

The second part is the portrayal of the ethnic Chinese characters. The discussion will be divided into two parts, the physical and psychological (inner) characteristics. The physical discussion relates to their appearance, what they wear and what they do (ritual/tradition). Physically, all ethnic Chinese characters in the film are portrayed stereotypically: fair-skinned with slanted eyes (see figure 7). Some of them have a traditional queue hairstyle that is traditionally worn by male subjects of the Qing dynasty along with the typical hat that goes with the hairstyle, as seen from the characters Tan Peng Liang from Tamim (there are two characters named Tan Peng Liang, both fall in love with Tinung) (see figure 7) and Tjia Wan Sen (see figure 8).

Figure 7. Tan Peng Liam Tamim
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:08:05

Figure 8. Tjia Wan Sen
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:11:47

Most of the ethnic Chinese characters are wearing the traditional Chinese clothing *dagua* (as seen in figures 8 and 9) and some wear a western suit, such as the character Timothy Wu in image 8 (the second character from the left) and Peng Liang. Throughout the film the character Timothy Wu is depicted wearing a western suit and a hat.

Figure 9. The Kong Kuan council members wearing *dagua*,
except for Timothy Wu
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54

As the major character, Peng Liang's physical appearance is more varied, he sometimes wears *dagua* but most of the time he wears a western suit and a hat, which suggests that he is a person who can adapt easily to the situation he is in (see figure 10).

Figure 10. Tan Peng Liang in Batavia (left) and in Semarang with his mother (right)
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54 and 0:33:57

The film also mentions at least four traditions/rituals of the ethnic Chinese, namely the Chinese New Year, Cioko Festival, visiting the parents' tomb, and the tradition of giving *hungpao* (money in a red envelope). All these traditions once are not allowed to be openly celebrated in Indonesia since 1966 (except for visiting the parents' tomb which is a private event), and not until the year 2000 that the Chinese-Indonesians are allowed to celebrate them again. The film is released in 2001, thus it indirectly serves as a celebration of regaining their freedom, expressing their Chinese-ness, and showcasing the multidimensional aspect of the Chinese-Indonesians.

The tradition of giving *hungpao* during the Chinese New Year is highlighted in the film as an opportunity for the Chinese-Indonesians to bribe the authority without making it look like obvious bribery. For instance, in two separate occasions, Tan Peng Liang is depicted to be giving a *hungpao* to a Dutch authority after an incident that causes his tobacco warehouse to be burnt down (see figure 11). The second one is when he gives the *hungpao* to some journalists with the hope that they will not write anything bad about him.

Figure 11. Peng Liang attempts to bribe a Dutch authority by offering him a *hungpao*
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:45:30

On both occasions, he argues that giving *hungpao* is a normal thing to do during the Chinese New Year and that rejecting it will be considered an offense to the Chinese-Indonesians. This *hungpao*

tradition, although a part of the Chinese New Year tradition, is highlighted in the film as a means by Peng Liang to collude with the powerful. In a way, the action suggests two other stereotypes of the Chinese-Indonesians: being wealthy and cunning in doing business. One may understand why they do this because living as migrants and minorities in another country means they have to be smart and resourceful to guarantee their survival and safety.

Apart from the stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters, the film offers a different portrayal that has never been depicted before regarding the Chinese-Indonesian. First, not all of them are wealthy, as can be seen in the character Tjia Wan Sen, who is good at fighting (which is another stereotype of ethnic Chinese). The film does not explain his job or background, only that he is in love with Tinung and he wants Tinung to live with him. His role in the film is important when he collaborates with the native journalist to reveal Peng Liang's illegal business. His motive is love and revenge, which makes him a romantic, just like Peng Liang. Being romantic is another non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesian characters. In the end, Wan Sen realizes that he is targeting a wrong person as there is another character with the same name.

The character Njoo Tek Hong offers another non-typical Chinese-Indonesian: he is an artist (musician and dancer) and is depicted as a sissy person (see figure 12). Tek Hong is the character who trains Tinung to become a popular *cokek* dancer and singer. His unique characteristic is refreshing in a way it adds another dimension to the general portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters.

Figure 12. The sissy character Njoo Tek Hong plays a musical instrument
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:18:28

Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians is that some of them are portrayed as a womanizer. Tan Peng Liang, Peng Liang from Tamim, and Tjia Wan Sen are three characters, among other minor characters, who do not treat women respectfully. All of them like Tinung but before they all fall in love with her, they only see and treat her as a courtesan/prostitute. This negative stereotype is never seen in other films depicting Chinese-Indonesian characters before, thus it is interesting to discuss why this stereotype appears in the film. Historically, Chinese culture, like many other cultures in the world, is patriarchal, based on the Confucian patriarchal system that privileges the masculine over the feminine. “Confucianism requires women to be obedient to men, not to receive education, not to get paid work, to carry on the family line as a mission, and to honor this observance for the entirety of their respective lifetimes” (Chang, 2020, p. 1). That is also why when Peng Liang’s wife can no longer give him sexual satisfaction, Peng Liang makes it an excuse to find another woman, and even his mother cannot forbid him from doing so. Besides, there are no significant female Chinese characters in the film. There are only three scenes where they appear: the first one is Peng Liang’s bedridden wife who surrenders with the situation, the second one is the scene when Peng Liang returns to Semarang and meets his mother, and the third one is the scene when Boen Hiap is in court accompanied by his wife. They are all portrayed to be submissive and passive, in contrast with the male characters. Another reason for their portrayal as a womanizer because historically, many Chinese migrants who come to Batavia are

single or married men who leave their family back in China, thus to fulfill their sexual drive, they look for prostitute (*ca bau kan*) which leads them to womanize the native prostitute and sometimes make them their mistress just what both Peng Liang does in the film. Albeit downgrading the Chinese-Indonesians' portrayal, the film tries to be as accurate as possible with the history no matter how bad it is.

The Chinese-Indonesian characters in the film, especially the Kong Koan council and Peng Liang, are also depicted to be political, in contrast with the stereotype of contemporary Chinese-Indonesians who are usually apolitical. The way the Kong Koan council is established, their relationship with the authority, and how they regulate the community are all political. They use their position to gain power and trust from the authority which in the end guarantees their safety and survival. Peng Liang does the same, once he arrives in Batavia, he approaches the Dutch authority to gain their trust and it is the right move considering that he has a hidden agenda against the Dutch. The portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters' being political is fresh as it signifies the involvement of Chinese-Indonesians in the fight for independence and later in the revolutionary war against the allied who want to re-colonize Indonesia. Later in 2005, a film titled *Gie* is released to commemorate a Chinese-Indonesian activist, Soe Hok Gie, who is active during the tumultuous time in the mid of 1960s.

The last non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesians regarding their inner quality is being nationalistic, which is represented by Tan Peng Liang. Being a shady, cunning businessperson and a romantic womanizer, Peng Liang is also depicted as an ethnic Chinese who want to see East Indies free from colonization. His illegal business counterfeiting money to fight the Dutch from the economic front and his weapon smuggling business to defeat the Japanese occupation show that Peng Liang is patriotic although the nation Indonesia does not exist yet. He has a strong attachment to the East Indies and wants to see it stand on its foot. Her love for Tinung, a native, becomes the realization of his love for the nation. Peng Liang also shows changes after he

returns to East Indies from years of living abroad to avoid being recaptured by the Dutch authority. He is no longer depicted as a womanizer, once he returns to East Indies, he looks for Tinung who becomes *jugun ianfu* (military comfort woman) during the Japanese occupation. One may think that Peng Liang will forget Tinung and move on with his life, yet he searches for her and finds her in a hospital. Peng Liang helps Tinung regain her confidence and they live together until Peng Liang's tragic death. In one scene he says that he only wants to live peacefully and he achieves his dream near the end of the film before he is poisoned in his own house by one of the Kong Koan members, Eng Goan. Historically, the ethnic Chinese has been politically active in fighting for the Independence of the East Indies. Hapsari (2016) argues that Chinese nationalism is already seen in the 1920s when several ethnic Chinese join the Indonesian national movement for independence. From the journalistic side, the daily Sin Po became the first newspaper to broadcast the Indonesia Raya anthem in November 1928 and Sin Po also spread the name Indonesia to change the name Dutch East Indies. The ethnic Chinese was also active in politics when they founded the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) on September 25, 1932. Also, one ethnic Chinese, Jap Tjwan Bing, was involved in formalizing the 1945 Constitution. The last two characteristics of Peng Liang—being political and having a nationalistic spirit—are the most significant as they become an eye-opener to the general audience who most likely are unaware of the contribution of Chinese-Indonesians in the struggle for independence from colonization. Although Peng Liang is a fictional character, his portrayal brings a new and fresh understanding of the ethnic Chinese and their multidimensional characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that the film, although fictional, manages to depict the dynamic lives of the ethnic Chinese against the historical background as accurate as it can be through the portrayal of the characters, their traits, appearance, and traditions. By portraying the characters stereotypically

and non-stereotypically, the film offers new insights to the audience on the ethnic Chinese's lives in general. This is progress compared to other popular films that depict Chinese-Indonesians before *Ca Bau Kan*. The inner quality stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese that the film depicts are being exclusive, as seen from how they live and regulate their community under the Kong Koan council; hardworking, industrious but frugal, as represented by Peng Liang and Boen Hiap who have a tobacco business; wealthy, as seen from most of the Chinese-Indonesians' characters; and cunning, especially in doing business, as seen from how Peng Liang approaches the authority and the press by subtly bribing them with *hungpao*, and from Peng Liang's illegal money counterfeiting and weapon smuggling business. Physically, the film portrays all the ethnic Chinese characters according to the mainstream belief: fair skin, slanted eyes, dressed in certain costumes, and speak both Mandarin and Bahasa with a certain accent, although not all of the artists are of ethnic Chinese. The film also depicts a stereotypical tradition of the ethnic Chinese such as the Chinese New Year celebration and the *hungpao* tradition.

However, the film also offers a non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians. Before, the ethnic Chinese's portrayal on-screen is always shown as a homogenous group. However, *Ca Bau Kan* shows that the ethnic Chinese are heterogenous, for instance, the ethnic Chinese in Batavia represented by the Kong Koan council does not warmly welcome Peng Liang from Semarang. Besides, they all have different surnames which are an important aspect of the ethnic Chinese's identity and ancestry. One can also see the harsh rivalry among the ethnic Chinese that leads to the tragic end for Peng Liang that emphasizes that they are not a homogenous group. The film also depicts the ethnic Chinese, especially the male, to be womanizers, while the female to be submissive and passive. This situation is aligned with the history of the ethnic Chinese in Batavia and with the patriarchal system that is still held strongly by the ethnic Chinese community, even to this day. Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the ethnic Chinese is that they are political and having a nationalistic spirit, as represented by Tan Peng Liang. Overall, the relationship

dynamic the film shows through the conflicts between the ethnic Chinese characters, their competition, their strategy in winning the heart of the authority, their stereotypical and non-stereotypical characteristics, and the nationalistic side of the ethnic Chinese as seen from Peng Liang's action is a refreshing perspective of the ethnic Chinese's portrayal in a popular film.

Regarding the spice trading history, the film shows it through the setting of the place. Firstly, it mentions the tobacco business owned by Peng Liang from Semarang and Boen Hiap from Batavia. In one of Boen Hiap's dialogues, he mentions his tobacco plantation in Sumatra. This tobacco business narrative is aligned with the historical account, that the best tobacco at that time comes from Sumatra and is exported to Europe and the East Indies. History also records that the ethnic Chinese dominate the tobacco business in Indonesia after the Dutch colonials are driven out of Indonesia. The reference to Srigunting in Kudus reminds the audience of Djarum Kudus, one of the biggest tobacco companies in Indonesia today. The film also depicts some historical sites in Batavia, such as Glodok, Kalijodo, and Sunda Kalapa harbor. All these places are important sites in the history of spice trading in the East Indies that involve the ethnic Chinese.

In conclusion, Tan Peng Liang and the other ethnic Chinese characters bring a fresh and new dimension of the ethnic Chinese characters that have never been seen before in Indonesian popular films. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan*, albeit a fictional story, becomes a trailblazer film that opens a new front of exploration of the Chinese-Indonesians' lives on screen. Eventually, Peng Liang's ultimate dream may reflect the dream of all ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia, that is to live peacefully in the place and with the woman he loves.

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Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in *Ca Bau Kan* in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism

ABSTRACT

The object of this research is Nia Dinata's film, *Ca Bau Kan*, which was adapted from Remy Sylado's novel. The research focuses on the representation of Chinese-Indonesians which pertains to the context of the maritime spice trade route and the concept of nationalism. Set in Batavia in three different decades, namely the 1930s, 1940s, and 1960s, the film depicts the journey of a Chinese-Indonesian character from the Dutch colonial era and the Japanese colonial era to the era of the independence revolution. The research method used is a qualitative method through the theory of film studies, which is juxtaposed with the historical approach to see how Chinese-Indonesians are represented in the film. The findings show that the film attempts to represent the Chinese-Indonesians accurately, albeit with the continuous presence of inaccurate stereotypes. The findings show Chinese-Indonesians' economic contribution that reflects the history of the spice trade maritime route in Indonesia.

Keywords: Film Studies, *Ca Bau Kan*, Representation, Chinese-Indonesians, Spice Trading

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the 2002 film *Ca Bau Kan* against the background of the maritime trading history between Nusantara (Indonesia) and China in the context of the representation of Chinese-Indonesians in the film. Historically, Chinese-Indonesians were skilful and talented merchants, and they played an important role in maritime trading history. By identifying how and why the film represents them against the backdrop of this historical event, this research wants to show that popular film can also serve as a medium of telling and preserving historical information more entertainingly. The novelty of this research lies in the fact that there has never been a similar topic discussion on the film *Ca Bau Kan*. What's more, the current Chinese government's initiative of One Belt One Road that includes the reference to the 21st century Maritime Silk Road makes this research more significant as it offers a popular culture perspective on the historical context of the initiative.

Ca Bau Kan is chosen for several reasons, firstly, the film was the first film where an ethnic

Chinese becomes the main character. Before *Ca Bau Kan*, Chinese-Indonesians did not appear much on-screen due to the New Order regime policy on them. When they appear on-screen, their depiction is superficial and stereotypical. Secondly, adapted from a novel under the same title, the film talks about the life of the Chinese-Indonesian major character that covers three different periods: the Dutch colonial time, Japanese colonial time, and the revolution time towards Indonesian independence. Being inspired by true historical events, this film provides interesting visuals that can bring a deeper understanding of the role of Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesian history through their trading skills. Lastly, the fact that some ethnic Chinese artists played in the film makes it more authentic and fascinating to watch.

Recent scholarly articles on the film or the novel include Botara (2015) who discusses the film from the perspective of Christian mystical theology. Sutandio (2014) discusses how the film attempts to centralize the marginalized ethnic Chinese. Herleni (2018) discusses the novel with the topic of life attitudes of the ethnic Chinese using a sociological approach. Asmarani (2015) also discusses the novel through the cultural deconstruction approach in the context of power. Meutia (2017) also focuses on the character Tinung in the film version, using a gender approach. Sholehuddin's (2013) bachelor thesis discusses the original novel from the perspective of literary anthropology and educational values. Sabakti (2013) discusses the narrative structure of the novel as a semiotic analysis. Raditiyanto (2018) discusses the novel from the perspective of an intertextual semiotic approach in the context of prostitution history in the novel. Hendiawan and Rahmansyah (2019) look at the film's landscape as a cultural identity. There are more scholarly articles both on the novel and the film version, however, none of them discusses the film in the context of maritime trading, which makes this research is necessary to do to offer a fresh perspective on the film.

Since the birth of cinema in the late 19th century, filmmaking has never been separated from the concept of representation. Film has its language that produces visual representation through

various kinds of media. For instance, the first publicly screened short recording by Lumiere's brother *Workers Leaving the Lumiere's Factory* (1895) shows the factory workers going home at the end of the day. Lumiere simply puts the camera in front of the factory gate and recorded the flow of the workers leaving the factory. The 45-second film shows a partial representation of the workers' daily activity. In another instance, many of Sergei Eisenstein's films represent the socialist society as a reflection of his Marxist Soviet Union ideological framework. In France, the filmmaker Godard represents the French bourgeois society in many of his films as a reflection of his cultural framework (Kiernan, 1990, p. 93). There are many other instances of how films represent certain societies, groups of people, or ideologies.

In the era of the internet, film as one of the most widely available media that people can access today can be a powerful tool of empowerment, but at the same time also disempowerment. Representation can both challenge and support the status quo. In the context of ethnicity, film as one media of representation always faces challenges when it comes to representing certain ethnic as there are many variables involved in constructing the representation, such as who makes it, when it is produced, what the purpose is, who the target audience is, and who plays in the film. The recent popularity of Jordan Peele's films such as *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) that represent the African-Americans differently compared to other popular Hollywood films are a good example of how powerful the effect of representation in empowering the minority and challenging the status quo. In the context of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, *Ca Bau Kan* becomes the first film that exclusively showcases an ethnic Chinese as the main character.

This nature of filmmaking to construct and give meaning to representation becomes even more significant within a multi-ethnic nation like Indonesia. Indonesia has "...over 700 ethnic groups with distinct languages (not dialects) and traditions..." (Yuwanto, 2012, p. 117). Among those ethnicities, Chinese-Indonesians are one ethnic that have been experiencing different treatments throughout Indonesian history. Urban (2013, p. 1) argues that "The construction of

identity among the ethnic Chinese populations in Indonesia has been a complex process. The temporal and spatial formulation of identity has allowed for continual change in which marginalization and discrimination have resulted.” The long history of discrimination and repression of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia can be rooted in the Dutch colonialization period when the colonials apply the “*divide et impera*” policy to segregate ethnics in Indonesia so that they will not form a union. The ethnic Chinese, being good at trading, have a better position in the hierarchical structure constructed by the colonials. The indigenous becomes the lowest in the structure and this condition creates sentiment that perpetuates to this day, especially by the New Order regime of Soeharto (1966-1998) for their political ends.

In the context of film, Sutandio (2019, p. 276) argues that “Chinese descendants have been and are still an important part of the development of the national cinema” although their roles are mostly behind the screen as producers or production house. Not until the 21st century that numbers of ethnic Chinese emerge as artists on screen that represent the Chinese ethnic. The representation of Chinese-Indonesians on screen has always been stereotypical, displaying mostly their obvious physical or verbal traits, which are not reflecting their true identity.

Ca Bau Kan is the first popular film since the independence of Indonesia in 1945 that specifically depicts a Chinese-Indonesian as its major character. It is “the first Indonesian film to reconfigure and relive the long-abandoned ‘realistic’ portrayal of Chinese-Indonesians after 32 years of ‘hibernation’” (Sutandio, 2014, p. 264). In Indonesian popular films from 1945 to 2002, Chinese-Indonesian characters rarely have significant positions on-screen other than an ethnic display. The discourse in *Ca Bau Kan* relates to the lives of Chinese-Indonesians in pre-independent Indonesia, and thus the audience should frame the meaning of their representation within that period with all their specific characteristics, although it should be understood that the role of director is also significant in the construction of meaning.

The film revolves around the lives of the two major characters, Sri Noerhajati or Tinung, a

poor native Indonesian woman, and Tan Peng Liang, a wealthy Chinese-Indonesian from Semarang who comes to Batavia. Tinung, who is treated as a sexual object almost throughout her young life, meets Tan Peng Liang in Batavia during a folk festival. Peng Liang adores her dancing and singing skill called “cokek” (a social dance) and is willing to double her pay so she can sing and dance privately for him. Gradually, Peng Liang falls in love with Tinung and marries her despite Peng Liang’s married status. Peng Liang’s wife is bedridden and that becomes his excuse to marry Tinung. Throughout the film, Tinung has to fight to get her freedom as a woman and to release herself from the stigma of being a *ca bau kan* (courtesan/prostitute), while Peng Liang has to fight against fellow Chinese-Indonesian businessmen to realize his agenda of defeating the colonizers through economic superiority, and later helping the revolutionary group to fight the Japanese.

Regarding the account of the Chinese-immigrant’s arrival in Indonesia, one should return to the maritime trading history between China and Indonesia which was initiated by the Sriwijaya Kingdom. The Sriwijaya Kingdom was established in the 7th century and fell in the 13th century. Its center is in Palembang city and its surrounding today (in Sumatra island). The kingdom spanned through almost all the Sumatra island, especially on the east coast of Sumatra, West Java (through the artifacts found in Cirebon), East Java (through an inscription found in the city of Tegal), Malayan Peninsula, Thailand, and all through Cambodia today. The Sriwijaya ruler put special attention to maritime trading to develop its economic and political power (Poelinggomang, 2016). The Sriwijaya Kingdom took some important steps to establish its influence, one of which was by making Sriwijaya the only trading transit port especially for spices and sandalwood which were exported to China. They strengthened the trade shipping routes by consolidating the trading and political relationship with the surrounding regions, and China was one of the important partners. The Sriwijaya-China close relationship was proven by the reciprocal visit of representatives from both regions. In the 13th century, Sriwijaya succeeded in controlling trading nodes points such as P’eng-F’eng (Pahang), Theng-ya-nung (Trengganu), Ling-ya-ssu-chia (Langkasuka) Chi-lan-tan

(Kelantan), Fo-lo-an (Kuala berang), Tan-ma-ling (Tambralingga), Ligor, Chia-lo-si (Grahi), Teluk Brandon, and Sin-t'o (Sunda). In finding a safe trading point with China, Sriwijaya was willing to admit China as a great country and giving them an offering. The act was also done to gain trust from China and to prevent China's military from expanding their territory that had reached Vietnam by that time. Also, Sriwijaya's ships would receive proper treatment in China's ports. It shows that Sriwijaya had strategized to survive and expand its power.

Besides Sriwijaya, China also established relationships with other Javanese kingdoms. History recorded that the port Kambang Putih in Tuban, East Java that belonged to king Airlangga of Kahuripan kingdom, was one of the transit ports for Chinese ships. The kingdom was established in the early 11th century and lasted through the mid of the 11th century before it collapsed. It was located in East Java (Surabaya and Sidoarjo today). In the 12th century, China also established a relationship with the Kediri kingdom that ruled East Java to Maluku. The kingdom, located in the Kediri region, was established in the early 12th century and lasted until the beginning of the 13th century. According to the Chinese' historical account, Kediri was a well-organized kingdom, proven by the existence of a maritime position that equals to an admiral today. The existence of this position in the structure of Kediri kingdom suggests that the kingdom had a good maritime force (Sulistiyono, 2016). The maritime activities during the Majapahit kingdom were also intense. Being one of the vastest kingdoms, Majapahit was established at the end of the 13th century and lasted through the 16th century. Its central government was in Trowulan (around Mojokerto and Jombang in East Java today). According to the Negarakertagama script, the kingdom's territory included today's Indonesia's territory and spanned through Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines. The book of Pararaton and Negarakertagama also recorded that there were 98 Majapahit vassal countries besides numbers of friendly countries such as Siam, Burma, Champa, Vietnam, China, Bengala which established economic relationship with Majapahit. During the Ming dynasty, Cheng Ho Admiral undertook 7 expeditions and most of which he transited in

Indonesia's regions such as Sumatera and the northern shore of Java.

The Chinese maritime expeditions and relationships with number of kingdoms in Indonesia that started in the 11th century also opened the migration channel from China to Indonesia. Initially, they were visiting *Nusantara* (Indonesia) for a short transit. They decided to migrate for several reasons such as economical, natural disasters, and social unrest. The largest migration occurred after 1850 which was triggered by the deteriorating foundation of Chinese economics. The migrants were dominated by people from the south of China mainland such as Hokkian, Teochiu, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainan (Dahana, 2000, p. 56). The numbers of Chinese immigrants increased when the Dutch colonial introduced a cultivation system (*cultuurstelsel*) that opened many plantation and farming areas in Sumatra, Borneo, and Sulawesi, and tin mining in Bangka and Belitung (Dahana, 2000). Meanwhile, in Java, the Chinese immigrants were concentrated in Batavia, Semarang, and the northern coast of Java (Utama, 2012).

METHOD

This research is qualitative and interdisciplinary research that combines film studies and a historical approach. The elements of film studies in focus are the cinematography and *misè-en-scene*. Cinematography is simply defined as camerawork that refers to how and where the camera and the lighting are positioned to create certain effects or emphasize certain conditions. *Misè-en-scene* refers to everything that the audience sees on-screen, for instance, costumes, make-up, actors, sound, dialogue, or special effects. The historical approach refers to data drawn from historical events in the context of ethnic Chinese history in Indonesia and the general history of maritime trade between China and Indonesia.

The research begins with multiple screenings of the film to collect visual data from the cinematography and *misè-en-scene* that relate to the topic. After that, the visual data are put against the historical facts to be interpreted. The historical reference includes the maritime trade history, the

history of the Chinese migrants to Nusantara, historical places in Batavia, and the history of the ethnic Chinese's lives in Batavia at a certain period. Those historical references are then compared with the visual data to check the accuracy and discrepancy found in the film. The findings are used to interpret how and why the Chinese-Indonesians are portrayed in such a way in the film.

DISCUSSION

Ca Bau Kan is the first post-New Order regime film that puts Indonesian Chinese ethnicity as its main characters. Never before, at least since the birth year of Indonesian cinema in 1950, the ethnic Chinese is put in the spotlight in a film. Most of the time, their portrayal in films is merely ornamental and stereotypical. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan* still depicts certain stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, but they also show different aspects of the ethnic Chinese's lives that are never seen before. That way, the audience is exposed to a more dynamic representation of them instead of the static and stereotypical ones. In doing so, the film takes certain historical accounts of Chinese-Indonesians particularly between the year 1933 to 1960 in Batavia. The discussion of the film is divided into two parts, the setting of place and the Chinese-Indonesian characters.

Setting of Place

The film's period is from 1933 to 1960, covering the Dutch colonization period (1930-1942), Japanese occupation (1942-1945), and independence period (1945-1960). Historically, the 1930s marks the peak of Chinese immigrants that reached more than half a million people and many of them settled in big cities in Java such as Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya. The film particularly shows three significant historical places in Batavia related to the Chinese-Indonesians: Glodok, Kalijodo (Kali Angke), and Sunda Kalapa. Other important places outside Batavia are Srigunting in Kudus and Sam Poo Kong in Semarang. The film also mentions Peng Liang's house in Chaulan Street, Batavia. Chaulan street today is Gadjah Mada street in Glodok area. This small detail shows

the film's attempt to be as accurate as possible with the history. Those places are closely related to the history of Chinese-Indonesians especially in the context of the tobacco business that the film shows.

Since the mid-18th century, the ethnic Chinese live close together as a community in a Chinatown (*pecinan*) located in Glodok area, Batavia. Today, Glodok is still the hub for Chinese-Indonesian businesses and is also known as the center of electronic goods in today's Jakarta. The film shows this explicitly through dialogues and visualization. Peng Liang's and Boen Hiap's tobacco warehouses are both located in Glodok (see figure 1 and 2), almost stands side by side. This shows that Glodok has always been an important business place for the ethnic Chinese. Historically, it is the Dutch colonial that localized the ethnic Chinese in Glodok area after the 1740 massacre by the VOC so that they can have easier control and surveillance of the ethnic Chinese (Fatimah, 2014, p. 129). During one scene, Boen Hiap mentions his high-quality tobacco that comes from Sumatra. Historically, a large-scale tobacco plantation in Indonesia was initiated by a Dutch named J. Nienhujs in East Sumatra in the 19th century. At first, the involvement of the ethnic Chinese in the plantation is as workers who are brought from Penang island and mainland China (Wibowo, 2015). The high-quality Sumatra tobacco, as Boen Hiap mentions, is for export and local market, so what Boen Hiap mentions is aligned with the history. One time, Peng Liang buys Boen Hiap's high-quality tobacco under a different name, sending the tobacco to his warehouse in Srigoenting, Kudus, and from there the tobacco is shipped back to Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok. His strategy makes Boen Hiap furious that leads him to burn Peng Liang's warehouse during the Chinese New Year. Their dynamic shows that fierce competition sometimes occurs between ethnic Chinese businessmen.



Figure 1. Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:40:27



Figure 2. Boen Hiap's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:38:31

In terms of the development of Batavia/Jakarta, the era is part of the period of modern Jakarta development (1920-2009). Glodok is located in the southern part of the Dutch colonial fort, and the reason why the ethnic Chinese are allowed to occupy the region is that the VOC Governor-General at that time, Jan Pieterszoon Coen believes that the ethnic Chinese are “a resilient and hardworking ethnic...there’s no better ethnic group that suits our purpose or that can be deployed just as easily as the Chinese ethnic” (Matanasi, 2017).

The second important place is Kalijodo (Kali Angke). Kalijodo, which literally means “river of lover,” is not a name of a certain region, it derives from the ethnic Chinese tradition, *Peh Cun*. During that celebration, the Chinese migrants in Batavia come to the riverbank of Kali Angke (the actual name of Kalijodo) to sing and recite poems on decorated boats. The boats are occupied by either men or women and when some of them are attracted to each other, they show it by

throwing a cake made of flour and beans, wrapped in banana leaves (*bacang*) to each other (Permanasari & Lientino, 2018, p. 14). In its development, Kalijodo becomes a prostitution place for the Chinese migrants who are longing for sexual intimacy. The film shows this visually through the scene at Kalijodi at night when there are many boats along the river which function as the “rooms” for the prostitutes and their customers (see figure 3). Kalijodo is also the place where Peng Liang meets Tinung, who at that time unwillingly, due to her poor condition, becomes a prostitute. It is from this place that the term *ca bau kan* emerges, which is roughly translated as a courtesan, or mistress to rich Chinese men. Kalijodo remains a site for illegal prostitution until 2016 when the Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, transformed the 15.000 square meter area into a Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space (Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak/RPTRA) as seen in image 4. (Simatupang, 2017, p. 47).



Kalijodo, Batavia, 1933
Figure 3. The Kalijodo scene
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:05:27



Figure 4. Kalijodo today
Source: Tobing, 2017

The third place is Sunda Kalapa harbor, the first important harbor in Batavia, which is located just about 5 km away from Glodok area.

“In the 9th century, the Sunda kingdom emerged as one of Srivijaya’s vassals; in this period the name Kalapa (Sundanese for ‘coconut’) started to be known as one of Sunda’s port cities on the north coast of West Java. Sailors and traders from China, India, East, and Europe frequented Kalapa as part of their trading routes to the Spice Islands in the east and also to Banten and other ports on Sumatra’s coastline” (Gultom, 2018, p. 2).

Sunda Kalapa harbor has a very significant role in creating what we know as Jakarta today. It is also an important part of the history of silk route trading. Although today it is no longer functions as the main harbor, its history remains important today, especially as the entry point of many Chinese migrants to Batavia which occurred between the 10th and 13th century. The film shows this during a scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia (see figure 5) after years of running away from the Dutch authority after he is found guilty of money counterfeiting. He is shown to be very emotional when he finally returns to the place that he is familiar with.



Figure 5. The scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 1:22:19

The Chinese-Indonesian characters

The discussion of the characters will be divided into two parts: the surnames and the characteristics. Both are interesting to discuss as they represent the multidimensional aspects of the ethnic Chinese that have never been seen before in the popular Indonesian film before *Ca Bau Kan*. The discussion of the ethnic Chinese characters' surnames is particularly done to crosscheck the film's accuracy in choosing those names to the history of the Chinese migrants to Indonesia, particularly Batavia.

There are 13 main ethnic Chinese characters, Tan's family: Tan Peng Liang, Tan Giok Lan (Peng Liang's daughter), Tan Kim Hok and Tan Kim San (Peng Liang's sons), and Tan Soen Bie (Peng Liang's right-hand man). Then there are the members of the Batavia Kong Koan (*Gongguan*) Assembly: Thio Boen Hiap, Oey Eng Goan, Liem Kiem Jang, Lie Kok Pien, Kwee Tjwie Sien, and Timothy Wu. The other two characters are Njoo Tek Hong, a musician who owns a *cokek* dance troupe, and Tjia Wan Sen, a lone young ethnic Chinese who also likes Tinung. Apart from Tan's family, the other characters have different surnames. Like many cultures in the world, the ethnic Chinese also believe that one's name can determine one's fortune or misfortune. Historically,

“The four predominant groups who migrated to Indonesia were the Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu, and Cantonese—each of them with a distinct language, economy, and culture. Due to their distinct specializations, each group populated different areas and islands in Indonesia.

The Hakka migrated to West Kalimantan, the Hokkien located to Java and Sumatra, the Teochiu lived in Java, Sumatra, and the Riau Islands, and the Cantonese spread across the archipelago” (Urban, 2013, p. 2).

The majority of the Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia is coming from three provinces in China: Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan and most of them who come to Java (Hokkien) is coming from Fujian. Based on the data from the Chinese-Indonesian Social Clan Association (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia), almost all of the surnames mentioned above are in the top ten of Chinese-Indonesian surnames (Britto, 2020): Tan (Hànzi: 陈, hànǚ pīnyīn: Chén), Thio (Hànzi 张, hànǚ pīnyīn: Zhāng), Oey (Hànzi: 黄, hànǚ pīnyīn: Huáng), Liem (Hànzi: 林, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lín), Lie (Hànzi: 李, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lǐ), Tjia (Hànzi: 谢, hànǚ pīnyīn: Xiè), and Wú (Hanzi: 吴). In China itself, the family name “Lie” is “the second most common surname in China, shared by over 100 million people worldwide” (Lie & Bailey, 2017, p. 82), with Wang as the first most common surname. However, the surnames Wang or Ong in Indonesia are not as many as those surnames mentioned above. Thus, it can be concluded that the surnames chosen for those fictional characters are aligned with the actual history of the Chinese migrants’ families who come to Indonesia.

Apart from the surnames, the film also mentions the existence of Kong Kuan (Gongguan) Council in Batavia. The Chinese Council, known also as the Kong Koan, was

“a semi-autonomous ethnic organization that collaborated with the Dutch colonial government in administering the Chinese community by collecting taxes, explaining, and passing on government rules, and settling disputes. Other activities included the supervision and coordination of social and religious matters, including education, marriage registration, cemeteries, public ceremonies, and temple management” (Erkelens, 2013, p. 25).

These councils can be found in big cities such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang from the 18th century to the 20th century. They are chosen by the Dutch governor-general, and usually consist of

wealthy Chinese businessmen, but they still have to submit to the higher authority and laws, that is the Dutch colonials. The film depicts the Kong Kuan's members as rich people from the way they look and from how they stand out and are respected by other characters. They also have a headquarter where they regularly meet (see figure 6). Since they regulate everything within their community, the arrival of the arrogant and rich Peng Liang from Semarang is a matter for them. They dislike Peng Liang's attitude and they want to get rid of him.



Figure 6. The Kong Kuan member in their headquarter
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:17:25

Peng Liang's presence in Batavia draws attention from the local Kong Kuan council that looks at him as a competitor and a threat to their business and pride. Peng Liang's arrogance in showing off his wealth and his attempt to get close to the Dutch authority rises the Kong Kuan council's anger as he is seen to be overstepping the boundary. Peng Liang's wealth turns out to be coming from counterfeiting money. The tobacco business is just a cover for his illegal business although he claims that his action is a form of resistance against the Dutch colonial. He believes that the natives will not win against the colonizers through a war with guns, but it can be won through economic war. Thus, Peng Lian faces two battlefronts, one against the Dutch colonizers and the other against the envious fellow Chinese businessmen. At the end of the story that occurs in 1960, Peng Liang meets his tragic end when he is poisoned by one of the Kong Koan council members. The existence

of the Kong Koan council in the film provides another historical fact from where the audience can learn that there is a strong bond among the ethnic Chinese within a community and at the same time one can see a sense of competition when it comes to business and a newcomer to the area.

The second part is the portrayal of the ethnic Chinese characters. The discussion will be divided into two parts, the physical and psychological (inner) characteristics. The physical discussion relates to their appearance, what they wear and what they do (ritual/tradition). Physically, all ethnic Chinese characters in the film are portrayed stereotypically: fair-skinned with slanted eyes (see figure 7). Some of them have a traditional queue hairstyle that is traditionally worn by male subjects of the Qing dynasty along with the typical hat that goes with the hairstyle, as seen from the characters Tan Peng Liang from Tamim (there are two characters named Tan Peng Liang, both fall in love with Tinung) (see figure 7) and Tjia Wan Sen (see figure 8).



Figure 7. Tan Peng Liam Tamim
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:08:05



Figure 8. Tjia Wan Sen
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:11:47

Most of the ethnic Chinese characters are wearing the traditional Chinese clothing *dagua* (as seen in figures 8 and 9) and some wear a western suit, such as the character Timothy Wu in image 8 (the second character from the left) and Peng Liang. Throughout the film the character Timothy Wu is depicted wearing a western suit and a hat.



Figure 9. The Kong Kuan council members wearing *dagua*, except for Timothy Wu
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54

As the major character, Peng Liang's physical appearance is more varied, he sometimes wears *dagua* but most of the time he wears a western suit and a hat, which suggests that he is a person who can adapt easily to the situation he is in (see figure 10).



Figure 10. Tan Peng Liang in Batavia (left) and in Semarang with his mother (right)
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54 and 0:33:57

The film also mentions at least four traditions/rituals of the ethnic Chinese, namely the Chinese New Year, Cioko Festival, visiting the parents' tomb, and the tradition of giving *hungpao* (money in a red envelope). All these traditions once are not allowed to be openly celebrated in Indonesia since 1966 (except for visiting the parents' tomb which is a private event), and not until the year 2000 that the Chinese-Indonesians are allowed to celebrate them again. The film is released in 2001, thus it indirectly serves as a celebration of regaining their freedom, expressing their Chinese-ness, and showcasing the multidimensional aspect of the Chinese-Indonesians.

The tradition of giving *hungpao* during the Chinese New Year is highlighted in the film as an opportunity for the Chinese-Indonesians to bribe the authority without making it look like obvious bribery. For instance, in two separate occasions, Tan Peng Liang is depicted to be giving a *hungpao* to a Dutch authority after an incident that causes his tobacco warehouse to be burnt down (see figure 11). The second one is when he gives the *hungpao* to some journalists with the hope that they will not write anything bad about him.



Figure 11. Peng Liang attempts to bribe a Dutch authority by offering him a *hungpao*
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:45:30

On both occasions, he argues that giving *hungpao* is a normal thing to do during the Chinese New Year and that rejecting it will be considered an offense to the Chinese-Indonesians. This *hungpao*

tradition, although a part of the Chinese New Year tradition, is highlighted in the film as a means by Peng Liang to collude with the powerful. In a way, the action suggests two other stereotypes of the Chinese-Indonesians: being wealthy and cunning in doing business. One may understand why they do this because living as migrants and minorities in another country means they have to be smart and resourceful to guarantee their survival and safety.

Apart from the stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters, the film offers a different portrayal that has never been depicted before regarding the Chinese-Indonesian. First, not all of them are wealthy, as can be seen in the character Tjia Wan Sen, who is good at fighting (which is another stereotype of ethnic Chinese). The film does not explain his job or background, only that he is in love with Tinung and he wants Tinung to live with him. His role in the film is important when he collaborates with the native journalist to reveal Peng Liang's illegal business. His motive is love and revenge, which makes him a romantic, just like Peng Liang. Being romantic is another non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesian characters. In the end, Wan Sen realizes that he is targeting a wrong person as there is another character with the same name.

The character Njoo Tek Hong offers another non-typical Chinese-Indonesian: he is an artist (musician and dancer) and is depicted as a sissy person (see figure 12). Tek Hong is the character who trains Tinung to become a popular *cokek* dancer and singer. His unique characteristic is refreshing in a way it adds another dimension to the general portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters.



Figure 12. The sissy character Njoo Tek Hong plays a musical instrument
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:18:28

Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians is that some of them are portrayed as a womanizer. Tan Peng Liang, Peng Liang from Tamim, and Tjia Wan Sen are three characters, among other minor characters, who do not treat women respectfully. All of them like Tinung but before they all fall in love with her, they only see and treat her as a courtesan/prostitute. This negative stereotype is never seen in other films depicting Chinese-Indonesian characters before, thus it is interesting to discuss why this stereotype appears in the film. Historically, Chinese culture, like many other cultures in the world, is patriarchal, based on the Confucian patriarchal system that privileges the masculine over the feminine. “Confucianism requires women to be obedient to men, not to receive education, not to get paid work, to carry on the family line as a mission, and to honor this observance for the entirety of their respective lifetimes” (Chang, 2020, p. 1). That is also why when Peng Liang’s wife can no longer give him sexual satisfaction, Peng Liang makes it an excuse to find another woman, and even his mother cannot forbid him from doing so. Besides, there are no significant female Chinese characters in the film. There are only three scenes where they appear: the first one is Peng Liang’s bedridden wife who surrenders with the situation, the second one is the scene when Peng Liang returns to Semarang and meets his mother, and the third one is the scene when Boen Hiap is in court accompanied by his wife. They are all portrayed to be submissive and passive, in contrast with the male characters. Another reason for their portrayal as a womanizer because historically, many Chinese migrants who come to Batavia are

single or married men who leave their family back in China, thus to fulfill their sexual drive, they look for prostitute (*ca bau kan*) which leads them to womanize the native prostitute and sometimes make them their mistress just what both Peng Liang does in the film. Albeit downgrading the Chinese-Indonesians' portrayal, the film tries to be as accurate as possible with the history no matter how bad it is.

The Chinese-Indonesian characters in the film, especially the Kong Koan council and Peng Liang, are also depicted to be political, in contrast with the stereotype of contemporary Chinese-Indonesians who are usually apolitical. The way the Kong Koan council is established, their relationship with the authority, and how they regulate the community are all political. They use their position to gain power and trust from the authority which in the end guarantees their safety and survival. Peng Liang does the same, once he arrives in Batavia, he approaches the Dutch authority to gain their trust and it is the right move considering that he has a hidden agenda against the Dutch. The portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters' being political is fresh as it signifies the involvement of Chinese-Indonesians in the fight for independence and later in the revolutionary war against the allied who want to re-colonize Indonesia. Later in 2005, a film titled *Gie* is released to commemorate a Chinese-Indonesian activist, Soe Hok Gie, who is active during the tumultuous time in the mid of 1960s.

The last non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesians regarding their inner quality is being nationalistic, which is represented by Tan Peng Liang. Being a shady, cunning businessperson and a romantic womanizer, Peng Liang is also depicted as an ethnic Chinese who want to see East Indies free from colonization. His illegal business counterfeiting money to fight the Dutch from the economic front and his weapon smuggling business to defeat the Japanese occupation show that Peng Liang is patriotic although the nation Indonesia does not exist yet. He has a strong attachment to the East Indies and wants to see it stand on its foot. Her love for Tinung, a native, becomes the realization of his love for the nation. Peng Liang also shows changes after he

returns to East Indies from years of living abroad to avoid being recaptured by the Dutch authority. He is no longer depicted as a womanizer, once he returns to East Indies, he looks for Tinung who becomes *jugun ianfu* (military comfort woman) during the Japanese occupation. One may think that Peng Liang will forget Tinung and move on with his life, yet he searches for her and finds her in a hospital. Peng Liang helps Tinung regain her confidence and they live together until Peng Liang's tragic death. In one scene he says that he only wants to live peacefully and he achieves his dream near the end of the film before he is poisoned in his own house by one of the Kong Koan members, Eng Goan. Historically, the ethnic Chinese has been politically active in fighting for the Independence of the East Indies. Hapsari (2016) argues that Chinese nationalism is already seen in the 1920s when several ethnic Chinese join the Indonesian national movement for independence. From the journalistic side, the daily Sin Po became the first newspaper to broadcast the Indonesia Raya anthem in November 1928 and Sin Po also spread the name Indonesia to change the name Dutch East Indies. The ethnic Chinese was also active in politics when they founded the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) on September 25, 1932. Also, one ethnic Chinese, Jap Tjwan Bing, was involved in formalizing the 1945 Constitution. The last two characteristics of Peng Liang—being political and having a nationalistic spirit—are the most significant as they become an eye-opener to the general audience who most likely are unaware of the contribution of Chinese-Indonesians in the struggle for independence from colonization. Although Peng Liang is a fictional character, his portrayal brings a new and fresh understanding of the ethnic Chinese and their multidimensional characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that the film, although fictional, manages to depict the dynamic lives of the ethnic Chinese against the historical background as accurate as it can be through the portrayal of the characters, their traits, appearance, and traditions. By portraying the characters stereotypically

and non-stereotypically, the film offers new insights to the audience on the ethnic Chinese's lives in general. This is progress compared to other popular films that depict Chinese-Indonesians before *Ca Bau Kan*. The inner quality stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese that the film depicts are being exclusive, as seen from how they live and regulate their community under the Kong Koan council; hardworking, industrious but frugal, as represented by Peng Liang and Boen Hiap who have a tobacco business; wealthy, as seen from most of the Chinese-Indonesians' characters; and cunning, especially in doing business, as seen from how Peng Liang approaches the authority and the press by subtly bribing them with *hungpao*, and from Peng Liang's illegal money counterfeiting and weapon smuggling business. Physically, the film portrays all the ethnic Chinese characters according to the mainstream belief: fair skin, slanted eyes, dressed in certain costumes, and speak both Mandarin and Bahasa with a certain accent, although not all of the artists are of ethnic Chinese. The film also depicts a stereotypical tradition of the ethnic Chinese such as the Chinese New Year celebration and the *hungpao* tradition.

However, the film also offers a non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians. Before, the ethnic Chinese's portrayal on-screen is always shown as a homogenous group. However, *Ca Bau Kan* shows that the ethnic Chinese are heterogenous, for instance, the ethnic Chinese in Batavia represented by the Kong Koan council does not warmly welcome Peng Liang from Semarang. Besides, they all have different surnames which are an important aspect of the ethnic Chinese's identity and ancestry. One can also see the harsh rivalry among the ethnic Chinese that leads to the tragic end for Peng Liang that emphasizes that they are not a homogenous group. The film also depicts the ethnic Chinese, especially the male, to be womanizers, while the female to be submissive and passive. This situation is aligned with the history of the ethnic Chinese in Batavia and with the patriarchal system that is still held strongly by the ethnic Chinese community, even to this day. Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the ethnic Chinese is that they are political and having a nationalistic spirit, as represented by Tan Peng Liang. Overall, the relationship

dynamic the film shows through the conflicts between the ethnic Chinese characters, their competition, their strategy in winning the heart of the authority, their stereotypical and non-stereotypical characteristics, and the nationalistic side of the ethnic Chinese as seen from Peng Liang's action is a refreshing perspective of the ethnic Chinese's portrayal in a popular film.

Regarding the spice trading history, the film shows it through the setting of the place. Firstly, it mentions the tobacco business owned by Peng Liang from Semarang and Boen Hiap from Batavia. In one of Boen Hiap's dialogues, he mentions his tobacco plantation in Sumatra. This tobacco business narrative is aligned with the historical account, that the best tobacco at that time comes from Sumatra and is exported to Europe and the East Indies. History also records that the ethnic Chinese dominate the tobacco business in Indonesia after the Dutch colonials are driven out of Indonesia. The reference to Srigunting in Kudus reminds the audience of Djarum Kudus, one of the biggest tobacco companies in Indonesia today. The film also depicts some historical sites in Batavia, such as Glodok, Kalijodo, and Sunda Kalapa harbor. All these places are important sites in the history of spice trading in the East Indies that involve the ethnic Chinese.

In conclusion, Tan Peng Liang and the other ethnic Chinese characters bring a fresh and new dimension of the ethnic Chinese characters that have never been seen before in Indonesian popular films. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan*, albeit a fictional story, becomes a trailblazer film that opens a new front of exploration of the Chinese-Indonesians' lives on screen. Eventually, Peng Liang's ultimate dream may reflect the dream of all ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia, that is to live peacefully in the place and with the woman he loves.

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2. Bukti surel dari reviewer dan masukan
Dari reviewer (1 Sep 2022)

Notifications

**[kata] Editor Decision (revision)**

01-09-2022 10:22 AM

Dear, Dr. Anton Sutandio, Mr. Yohan Yusuf Arifin:

We have reached a decision regarding your submission to k@ta, "Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in Ca Bau Kan in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism".

Our decision is to: revise your manuscript

Your manuscript, entitled "Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in Ca Bau Kan in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism," which you submitted to k@ta: A Biannual Publication on the Study of Language and Literature, has been reviewed.

After discussing the reviewers' comments, the editorial committee has recommended revisions to your manuscript. Therefore, I invite you to respond to the reviewers' comments and revise your manuscript.

The reviews are attached to this email.

Please highlight your revision to make it easier for the reviewers to examine your alterations. Furthermore, we would appreciate it if you could return the manuscript within one month from the date of this email (September 30, 2022) so that we may look it over one more time.

Sincerely,
Fransisca Fortunata
Assistant Editor
Petra Christian University
kata@petra.ac.id

Reviewer A:

Notifications

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2022-09-01 10:22 AM

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Sincerely,
Fransisca Fortunata
Assistant Editor
Petra Christian University
kata@petra.ac.id

Reviewer A:

Is the topic appropriate for publication in this journal?

Yes

Is the coverage of the topic sufficiently comprehensive and balanced?

Yes

How would you describe the scientific depth of the paper?

Suitable for the non-specialist

How would you rate the orthographic and grammatical style of the represented material?

Satisfactory

General Feedback and Comments (for Author):

The article, titled "Representation of Chinese Indonesians in Ca Bau Kan in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism" is a good article. It is written well enough and provides interesting insights. I like the way the author shows how the film contest but at the same time reproduce the stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians.

However, there are some points that I think the author needs to address:

1. The author announces in the beginning of the article that the author's research becomes more significant in the light of China's OBOR initiative. Nonetheless, I don't think there is an effort by the author in the article to show how the article relates significantly to the initiative. In my view, the author should show the relevance of the above statement.

2. The author claims that there has been no research that discuss how the film pictures the Indonesian ethnic Chinese. But what about Ariel Heryanto's 2008 work, which discuss Ca Bao Kan and Gie more than a decade ago?

3. The article provides a historical account which it traces back to the Sriwijaya era after telling Tan Peng Liang's story to the readers. In my view, the presence of these historical passages potentially disturb the flow of the article. I will suggest the author to write a section which discuss the history of Chinese Indonesian separately. I also suggest the author to provide the readers with a picture of Jakarta and the ethnic Chinese of the city in the past.

4. The author should be careful with the statement that the Chinese Indonesian were skilful and talented merchants. While I agree that many of them were and are, saying that they all were and are skilful and talented merchants may reproduce the stereotype that the author and perhaps many scholars on Chinese Indonesians often identify.

Reviewer B:

Is the topic appropriate for publication in this journal?

Yes

Is the coverage of the topic sufficiently comprehensive and balanced?

Yes

How would you describe the scientific depth of the paper?

Appropriate for the generally knowledgeable individual working in the field

How would you rate the orthographic and grammatical style of the represented material?

Satisfactory

General Feedback and Comments (for Author):

The issues raised in this manuscript are relevant to the written objectives of the journal and are analysed comprehensively. The author demonstrates a sound familiarity with the film and the history of Chinese Indonesian society. This manuscript is very well written and presents interesting and illuminating connections between the film *Ca Bau Kan* and historical data on Chinese Indonesians.

However, this article still needs a more solid theoretical framework to further deepen the existing analysis. "Representation" in this article is still interpreted in general terms and this makes its existence less meaningful in the introduction and the analysis. The same thing happens with the so-called "historical approach" and "film theory". Historical approach in literary and film studies has quite a specific meaning and, in many cases, is more than relating the film and historical data. "Mise en scene" and "cinematography" are not film theories per se although they may be an important part of Formalism film theory.

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2. Does the author display a sound familiarity with the subject matter?
3. Is the topic well-analysed?
4. Does the manuscript represent an original contribution of knowledge to the field or an insightful restructuring of existing knowledge?
5. If experimental research is reported, is the methodology and statistical treatment of results appropriate? Are the conclusions justified by the data?
6. Is the manuscript well-organised?
7. Is the manuscript written in formal academic English?
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Comments and questions about the article may be written directly in the manuscript, and the general feedback and your recommendation can be written in the following form. Since your comments and feedback will be forwarded to the author, please ensure that your comments are anonymous and collegial.

Thank you very much.

Reviewer's Feedback and Recommendation

Article Title:

Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in Ca Bau Kan in the Context of Spice Trading and

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Date: 1 September 2022

Recommendation:

_____ published as it is

X published with revisions

_____ revised and resubmitted for further consideration

_____ rejected

k@ta

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Reviewer's Feedback and Recommendation

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Date: 14 August 22

Recommendation:

_____ published as it is

V _____ published with revisions

_____ revised and resubmitted for further consideration

_____ rejected

Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in *Ca Bau Kan* in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism

ABSTRACT

The object of this research is Nia Dinata's film, *Ca Bau Kan*, which was adapted from Remy Sylado's novel. The research focuses on the representation of Chinese-Indonesians which pertains to the context of the maritime spice trade route and the concept of nationalism. Set in Batavia in three different decades, namely the 1930s, 1940s, and 1960s, the film depicts the journey of a Chinese-Indonesian character from the Dutch colonial era and the Japanese colonial era to the era of the independence revolution. The research method used is a qualitative method through the theory of film studies, which is juxtaposed with the historical approach to see how Chinese-Indonesians are represented in the film. The findings show that the film attempts to represent the Chinese-Indonesians accurately, albeit with the continuous presence of inaccurate stereotypes. The findings show Chinese-Indonesians' economic contribution that reflects the history of the spice trade maritime route in Indonesia.

Keywords: Film Studies, *Ca Bau Kan*, Representation, Chinese-Indonesians, Spice Trading

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the 2002 film *Ca Bau Kan* against the background of the maritime trading history between Nusantara (Indonesia) and China in the context of the representation of Chinese-Indonesians in the film. Historically, Chinese-Indonesians were skilful and talented merchants, and they played an important role in maritime trading history. By identifying how and why the film represents them against the backdrop of this historical event, this research wants to show that popular film can also serve as a medium of telling and preserving historical information more entertainingly. The novelty of this research lies in the fact that there has never been a similar topic discussion on the film *Ca Bau Kan*. What's more, the current Chinese government's initiative of One Belt One Road that includes the reference to the 21st century Maritime Silk Road makes this research more significant as it offers a popular culture perspective on the historical context of the initiative.

Ca Bau Kan is chosen for several reasons, firstly, the film was the first film where an ethnic

Commented [A1]: Isn't this statement based on stereotype, and too generalizing?

Commented [A2]: What about Ariel Heryanto's 2008 work which also discusses *Ca Bao Kan* 2002 film?

Commented [A3]: In which way are they related?

Chinese becomes the main character. Before *Ca Bau Kan*, Chinese-Indonesians did not appear much on-screen due to the New Order regime policy on them. When they appear on-screen, their depiction is superficial and stereotypical. Secondly, adapted from a novel under the same title, the film talks about the life of the Chinese-Indonesian major character that covers three different periods: the Dutch colonial time, Japanese colonial time, and the revolution time towards Indonesian independence. Being inspired by true historical events, this film provides interesting visuals that can bring a deeper understanding of the role of Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesian history through their trading skills. Lastly, the fact that some ethnic Chinese artists played in the film makes it more authentic and fascinating to watch.

Recent scholarly articles on the film or the novel include Botara (2015) who discusses the film from the perspective of Christian mystical theology. Sutandio (2014) discusses how the film attempts to centralize the marginalized ethnic Chinese. Herleni (2018) discusses the novel with the topic of life attitudes of the ethnic Chinese using a sociological approach. Asmarani (2015) also discusses the novel through the cultural deconstruction approach in the context of power. Meutia (2017) also focuses on the character Tinung in the film version, using a gender approach. Sholehuddin's (2013) bachelor thesis discusses the original novel from the perspective of literary anthropology and educational values. Sabakti (2013) discusses the narrative structure of the novel as a semiotic analysis. Radityanto (2018) discusses the novel from the perspective of an intertextual semiotic approach in the context of prostitution history in the novel. Hendiawan and Rahmansyah (2019) look at the film's landscape as a cultural identity. There are more scholarly articles both on the novel and the film version, however, none of them discusses the film in the context of maritime trading, which makes this research is necessary to do to offer a fresh perspective on the film.

Since the birth of cinema in the late 19th century, filmmaking has never been separated from the concept of representation. Film has its language that produces visual representation through

various kinds of media. For instance, the first publicly screened short recording by Lumiere's brother *Workers Leaving the Lumiere's Factory* (1895) shows the factory workers going home at the end of the day. Lumiere simply puts the camera in front of the factory gate and recorded the flow of the workers leaving the factory. The 45-second film shows a partial representation of the workers' daily activity. In another instance, many of Sergei Eisenstein's films represent the socialist society as a reflection of his Marxist Soviet Union ideological framework. In France, the filmmaker Godard represents the French bourgeois society in many of his films as a reflection of his cultural framework (Kiernan, 1990, p. 93). There are many other instances of how films represent certain societies, groups of people, or ideologies.

In the era of the internet, film as one of the most widely available media that people can access today can be a powerful tool of empowerment, but at the same time also disempowerment. Representation can both challenge and support the status quo. In the context of ethnicity, film as one media of representation always faces challenges when it comes to representing certain ethnic as there are many variables involved in constructing the representation, such as who makes it, when it is produced, what the purpose is, who the target audience is, and who plays in the film. The recent popularity of Jordan Peele's films such as *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) that represent the African-Americans differently compared to other popular Hollywood films are a good example of how powerful the effect of representation in empowering the minority and challenging the status quo. In the context of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, *Ca Bau Kan* becomes the first film that exclusively showcases an ethnic Chinese as the main character.

This nature of filmmaking to construct and give meaning to representation becomes even more significant within a multi-ethnic nation like Indonesia. Indonesia has "...over 700 ethnic groups with distinct languages (not dialects) and traditions..." (Yuwanto, 2012, p. 117). Among those ethnicities, Chinese-Indonesians are one ethnic that have been experiencing different treatments throughout Indonesian history. Urban (2013, p. 1) argues that "The construction of

identity among the ethnic Chinese populations in Indonesia has been a complex process. The temporal and spatial formulation of identity has allowed for continual change in which marginalization and discrimination have resulted.” The long history of discrimination and repression of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia can be rooted in the Dutch colonialization period when the colonials apply the “*divide et impera*” policy to segregate ethnics in Indonesia so that they will not form a union. The ethnic Chinese, being good at trading, have a better position in the hierarchical structure constructed by the colonials. The indigenous becomes the lowest in the structure and this condition creates sentiment that perpetuates to this day, especially by the New Order regime of Soeharto (1966-1998) for their political ends.

In the context of film, Sutandio (2019, p. 276) argues that “Chinese descendants have been and are still an important part of the development of the national cinema” although their roles are mostly behind the screen as producers or production house. Not until the 21st century that numbers of ethnic Chinese emerge as artists on screen that represent the Chinese ethnic. The representation of Chinese-Indonesians on screen has always been stereotypical, displaying mostly their obvious physical or verbal traits, which are not reflecting their true identity.

Ca Bau Kan is the first popular film since the independence of Indonesia in 1945 that specifically depicts a Chinese-Indonesian as its major character. It is “the first Indonesian film to reconfigure and relive the long-abandoned ‘realistic’ portrayal of Chinese-Indonesians after 32 years of ‘hibernation’” (Sutandio, 2014, p. 264). In Indonesian popular films from 1945 to 2002, Chinese-Indonesian characters rarely have significant positions on-screen other than an ethnic display. The discourse in *Ca Bau Kan* relates to the lives of Chinese-Indonesians in pre-independent Indonesia, and thus the audience should frame the meaning of their representation within that period with all their specific characteristics, although it should be understood that the role of director is also significant in the construction of meaning.

The film revolves around the lives of the two major characters, Sri Noerhajati or Tinung, a

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poor native Indonesian woman, and Tan Peng Liang, a wealthy Chinese-Indonesian from Semarang who comes to Batavia. Tinung, who is treated as a sexual object almost throughout her young life, meets Tan Peng Liang in Batavia during a folk festival. Peng Liang adores her dancing and singing skill called “cokek” (a social dance) and is willing to double her pay so she can sing and dance privately for him. Gradually, Peng Liang falls in love with Tinung and marries her despite Peng Liang’s married status. Peng Liang’s wife is bedridden and that becomes his excuse to marry Tinung. Throughout the film, Tinung has to fight to get her freedom as a woman and to release herself from the stigma of being a *ca bau kan* (courtesan/prostitute), while Peng Liang has to fight against fellow Chinese-Indonesian businessmen to realize his agenda of defeating the colonizers through economic superiority, and later helping the revolutionary group to fight the Japanese.

Regarding the account of the Chinese-immigrant’s arrival in Indonesia, one should return to the maritime trading history between China and Indonesia which was initiated by the Sriwijaya Kingdom. The Sriwijaya Kingdom was established in the 7th century and fell in the 13th century. Its center is in Palembang city and its surrounding today (in Sumatra island). The kingdom spanned through almost all the Sumatra island, especially on the east coast of Sumatra, West Java (through the artifacts found in Cirebon), East Java (through an inscription found in the city of Tegal), Malayan Peninsula, Thailand, and all through Cambodia today. The Sriwijaya ruler put special attention to maritime trading to develop its economic and political power (Poelinggomang, 2016). The Sriwijaya Kingdom took some important steps to establish its influence, one of which was by making Sriwijaya the only trading transit port especially for spices and sandalwood which were exported to China. They strengthened the trade shipping routes by consolidating the trading and political relationship with the surrounding regions, and China was one of the important partners. The Sriwijaya-China close relationship was proven by the reciprocal visit of representatives from both regions. In the 13th century, Sriwijaya succeeded in controlling trading nodes points such as P’eng-F’eng (Pahang), Theng-ya-nung (Trengganu), Ling-ya-ssu-chia (Langkasuka) Chi-lan-tan

(Kelantan), Fo-lo-an (Kuala berang), Tan-ma-ling (Tambralingga), Ligor, Chia-lo-si (Grahi), Teluk Brandon, and Sin-t'o (Sunda). In finding a safe trading point with China, Sriwijaya was willing to admit China as a great country and giving them an offering. The act was also done to gain trust from China and to prevent China's military from expanding their territory that had reached Vietnam by that time. Also, Sriwijaya's ships would receive proper treatment in China's ports. It shows that Sriwijaya had strategized to survive and expand its power.

Besides Sriwijaya, China also established relationships with other Javanese kingdoms. History recorded that the port Kambang Putih in Tuban, East Java that belonged to king Airlangga of Kahuripan kingdom, was one of the transit ports for Chinese ships. The kingdom was established in the early 11th century and lasted through the mid of the 11th century before it collapsed. It was located in East Java (Surabaya and Sidoarjo today). In the 12th century, China also established a relationship with the Kediri kingdom that ruled East Java to Maluku. The kingdom, located in the Kediri region, was established in the early 12th century and lasted until the beginning of the 13th century. According to the Chinese' historical account, Kediri was a well-organized kingdom, proven by the existence of a maritime position that equals to an admiral today. The existence of this position in the structure of Kediri kingdom suggests that the kingdom had a good maritime force (Sulistiyono, 2016). The maritime activities during the Majapahit kingdom were also intense. Being one of the vastest kingdoms, Majapahit was established at the end of the 13th century and lasted through the 16th century. Its central government was in Trowulan (around Mojokerto and Jombang in East Java today). According to the Negarakertagama script, the kingdom's territory included today's Indonesia's territory and spanned through Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Southern Thailand, and the southern Philippines. The book of Pararaton and Negarakertagama also recorded that there were 98 Majapahit vassal countries besides numbers of friendly countries such as Siam, Burma, Champa, Vietnam, China, Bengala which established economic relationship with Majapahit. During the Ming dynasty, Cheng Ho Admiral undertook 7 expeditions and most of which he transited in

Indonesia's regions such as Sumatera and the northern shore of Java.

The Chinese maritime expeditions and relationships with number of kingdoms in Indonesia that started in the 11th century also opened the migration channel from China to Indonesia. Initially, they were visiting *Nusantara* (Indonesia) for a short transit. They decided to migrate for several reasons such as economical, natural disasters, and social unrest. The largest migration occurred after 1850 which was triggered by the deteriorating foundation of Chinese economics. The migrants were dominated by people from the south of China mainland such as Hokkian, Teochiu, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainan (Dahana, 2000, p. 56). The numbers of Chinese immigrants increased when the Dutch colonial introduced a cultivation system (*cultuurstelsel*) that opened many plantation and farming areas in Sumatra, Borneo, and Sulawesi, and tin mining in Bangka and Belitung (Dahana, 2000). Meanwhile, in Java, the Chinese immigrants were concentrated in Batavia, Semarang, and the northern coast of Java (Utama, 2012).

METHOD

This research is qualitative and interdisciplinary research that combines film studies and a historical approach. The elements of film studies in focus are the cinematography and *misè-en-scene*. Cinematography is simply defined as camerawork that refers to how and where the camera and the lighting are positioned to create certain effects or emphasize certain conditions. *Misè-en-scene* refers to everything that the audience sees on-screen, for instance, costumes, make-up, actors, sound, dialogue, or special effects. The historical approach refers to data drawn from historical events in the context of ethnic Chinese history in Indonesia and the general history of maritime trade between China and Indonesia.

The research begins with multiple screenings of the film to collect visual data from the cinematography and *misè-en-scene* that relate to the topic. After that, the visual data are put against the historical facts to be interpreted. The historical reference includes the maritime trade history, the

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history of the Chinese migrants to Nusantara, historical places in Batavia, and the history of the ethnic Chinese's lives in Batavia at a certain period. Those historical references are then compared with the visual data to check the accuracy and discrepancy found in the film. The findings are used to interpret how and why the Chinese-Indonesians are portrayed in such a way in the film.

DISCUSSION

Ca Bau Kan is the first post-New Order regime film that puts Indonesian Chinese ethnicity as its main characters. Never before, at least since the birth year of Indonesian cinema in 1950, the ethnic Chinese is put in the spotlight in a film. Most of the time, their portrayal in films is merely ornamental and stereotypical. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan* still depicts certain stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, but they also show different aspects of the ethnic Chinese's lives that are never seen before. That way, the audience is exposed to a more dynamic representation of them instead of the static and stereotypical ones. In doing so, the film takes certain historical accounts of Chinese-Indonesians particularly between the year 1933 to 1960 in Batavia. The discussion of the film is divided into two parts, the setting of place and the Chinese-Indonesian characters.

Setting of Place

The film's period is from 1933 to 1960, covering the Dutch colonization period (1930-1942), Japanese occupation (1942-1945), and independence period (1945-1960). Historically, the 1930s marks the peak of Chinese immigrants that reached more than half a million people and many of them settled in big cities in Java such as Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya. The film particularly shows three significant historical places in Batavia related to the Chinese-Indonesians: Glodok, Kalijodo (Kali Angke), and Sunda Kalapa. Other important places outside Batavia are Srigunting in Kudus and Sam Poo Kong in Semarang. The film also mentions Peng Liang's house in Chaulan Street, Batavia. Chaulan street today is Gajah Mada street in Glodok area. This small detail shows

the film's attempt to be as accurate as possible with the history. Those places are closely related to the history of Chinese-Indonesians especially in the context of the tobacco business that the film shows.

Since the mid-18th century, the ethnic Chinese live close together as a community in a Chinatown (*pecinan*) located in Glodok area, Batavia. Today, Glodok is still the hub for Chinese-Indonesian businesses and is also known as the center of electronic goods in today's Jakarta. The film shows this explicitly through dialogues and visualization. Peng Liang's and Boen Hiap's tobacco warehouses are both located in Glodok (see figure 1 and 2), almost stands side by side. This shows that Glodok has always been an important business place for the ethnic Chinese. Historically, it is the Dutch colonial that localized the ethnic Chinese in Glodok area after the 1740 massacre by the VOC so that they can have easier control and surveillance of the ethnic Chinese (Fatimah, 2014, p. 129). During one scene, Boen Hiap mentions his high-quality tobacco that comes from Sumatra. Historically, a large-scale tobacco plantation in Indonesia was initiated by a Dutch named J. Nienhujs in East Sumatra in the 19th century. At first, the involvement of the ethnic Chinese in the plantation is as workers who are brought from Penang island and mainland China (Wibowo, 2015). The high-quality Sumatra tobacco, as Boen Hiap mentions, is for export and local market, so what Boen Hiap mentions is aligned with the history. One time, Peng Liang buys Boen Hiap's high-quality tobacco under a different name, sending the tobacco to his warehouse in Srigoenting, Kudus, and from there the tobacco is shipped back to Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok. His strategy makes Boen Hiap furious that leads him to burn Peng Liang's warehouse during the Chinese New Year. Their dynamic shows that fierce competition sometimes occurs between ethnic Chinese businessmen.



Figure 1. Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:40:27



Figure 2. Boen Hiap's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:38:31

In terms of the development of Batavia/Jakarta, the era is part of the period of modern Jakarta development (1920-2009). Glodok is located in the southern part of the Dutch colonial fort, and the reason why the ethnic Chinese are allowed to occupy the region is that the VOC Governor-General at that time, Jan Pieterszoon Coen believes that the ethnic Chinese are “a resilient and hardworking ethnic...there’s no better ethnic group that suits our purpose or that can be deployed just as easily as the Chinese ethnic” (Matanasi, 2017).

The second important place is Kalijodo (Kali Angke). Kalijodo, which literally means “river of lover,” is not a name of a certain region, it derives from the ethnic Chinese tradition, *Peh Cun*. During that celebration, the Chinese migrants in Batavia come to the riverbank of Kali Angke (the actual name of Kalijodo) to sing and recite poems on decorated boats. The boats are occupied by either men or women and when some of them are attracted to each other, they show it by

throwing a cake made of flour and beans, wrapped in banana leaves (*bacang*) to each other (Permanasari & Lientino, 2018, p. 14). In its development, Kalijodo becomes a prostitution place for the Chinese migrants who are longing for sexual intimacy. The film shows this visually through the scene at Kalijodi at night when there are many boats along the river which function as the “rooms” for the prostitutes and their customers (see figure 3). Kalijodo is also the place where Peng Liang meets Tinung, who at that time unwillingly, due to her poor condition, becomes a prostitute. It is from this place that the term *ca bau kan* emerges, which is roughly translated as a courtesan, or mistress to rich Chinese men. Kalijodo remains a site for illegal prostitution until 2016 when the Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, transformed the 15.000 square meter area into a Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space (Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak/RPTRA) as seen in image 4. (Simatupang, 2017, p. 47).



Kalijodo, Batavia, 1933
Figure 3. The Kalijodo scene
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:05:27



Figure 4. Kalijodo today
Source: Tobing, 2017

The third place is Sunda Kalapa harbor, the first important harbor in Batavia, which is located just about 5 km away from Glodok area.

“In the 9th century, the Sunda kingdom emerged as one of Srivijaya’s vassals; in this period the name Kalapa (Sundanese for ‘coconut’) started to be known as one of Sunda’s port cities on the north coast of West Java. Sailors and traders from China, India, East, and Europe frequented Kalapa as part of their trading routes to the Spice Islands in the east and also to Banten and other ports on Sumatra’s coastline” (Gultom, 2018, p. 2).

Sunda Kalapa harbor has a very significant role in creating what we know as Jakarta today. It is also an important part of the history of silk route trading. Although today it is no longer functions as the main harbor, its history remains important today, especially as the entry point of many Chinese migrants to Batavia which occurred between the 10th and 13th century. The film shows this during a scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia (see figure 5) after years of running away from the Dutch authority after he is found guilty of money counterfeiting. He is shown to be very emotional when he finally returns to the place that he is familiar with.



Figure 5. The scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 1:22:19

The Chinese-Indonesian characters

The discussion of the characters will be divided into two parts: the surnames and the characteristics. Both are interesting to discuss as they represent the multidimensional aspects of the ethnic Chinese that have never been seen before in the popular Indonesian film before *Ca Bau Kan*. The discussion of the ethnic Chinese characters' surnames is particularly done to crosscheck the film's accuracy in choosing those names to the history of the Chinese migrants to Indonesia, particularly Batavia.

There are 13 main ethnic Chinese characters, Tan's family: Tan Peng Liang, Tan Giok Lan (Peng Liang's daughter), Tan Kim Hok and Tan Kim San (Peng Liang's sons), and Tan Soen Bie (Peng Liang's right-hand man). Then there are the members of the Batavia Kong Koan (*Gongguan*) Assembly: Thio Boen Hiap, Oey Eng Goan, Liem Kiem Jang, Lie Kok Pien, Kwee Tjwie Sien, and Timothy Wu. The other two characters are Njoo Tek Hong, a musician who owns a *cokek* dance troupe, and Tjia Wan Sen, a lone young ethnic Chinese who also likes Tinung. Apart from Tan's family, the other characters have different surnames. Like many cultures in the world, the ethnic Chinese also believe that one's name can determine one's fortune or misfortune. Historically,

“The four predominant groups who migrated to Indonesia were the Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu, and Cantonese—each of them with a distinct language, economy, and culture. Due to their distinct specializations, each group populated different areas and islands in Indonesia.

The Hakka migrated to West Kalimantan, the Hokkien located to Java and Sumatra, the Teochiu lived in Java, Sumatra, and the Riau Islands, and the Cantonese spread across the archipelago” (Urban, 2013, p. 2).

The majority of the Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia is coming from three provinces in China: Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan and most of them who come to Java (Hokkien) is coming from Fujian. Based on the data from the Chinese-Indonesian Social Clan Association (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia), almost all of the surnames mentioned above are in the top ten of Chinese-Indonesian surnames (Britto, 2020): Tan (Hànzi: 陈, hànǚ pīnyīn: Chén), Thio (Hànzi 张, hànǚ pīnyīn: Zhāng), Oey (Hànzi: 黄, hànǚ pīnyīn: Huáng, Liem (Hànzi: 林, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lín), Lie (Hànzi: 李, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lǐ), Tjia (Hànzi: 谢, hànǚ pīnyīn: Xiè), and Wú (Hanzi: 吴). In China itself, the family name “Lie” is “the second most common surname in China, shared by over 100 million people worldwide” (Lie & Bailey, 2017, p. 82), with Wang as the first most common surname. However, the surnames Wang or Ong in Indonesia are not as many as those surnames mentioned above. Thus, it can be concluded that the surnames chosen for those fictional characters are aligned with the actual history of the Chinese migrants’ families who come to Indonesia.

Apart from the surnames, the film also mentions the existence of Kong Kuan (Gongguan) Council in Batavia. The Chinese Council, known also as the Kong Koan, was

“a semi-autonomous ethnic organization that collaborated with the Dutch colonial government in administering the Chinese community by collecting taxes, explaining, and passing on government rules, and settling disputes. Other activities included the supervision and coordination of social and religious matters, including education, marriage registration, cemeteries, public ceremonies, and temple management” (Erkelens, 2013, p. 25).

These councils can be found in big cities such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang from the 18th century to the 20th century. They are chosen by the Dutch governor-general, and usually consist of

wealthy Chinese businessmen, but they still have to submit to the higher authority and laws, that is the Dutch colonials. The film depicts the Kong Kuan's members as rich people from the way they look and from how they stand out and are respected by other characters. They also have a headquarter where they regularly meet (see figure 6). Since they regulate everything within their community, the arrival of the arrogant and rich Peng Liang from Semarang is a matter for them. They dislike Peng Liang's attitude and they want to get rid of him.



Figure 6. The Kong Kuan member in their headquarter
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:17:25

Peng Liang's presence in Batavia draws attention from the local Kong Kuan council that looks at him as a competitor and a threat to their business and pride. Peng Liang's arrogance in showing off his wealth and his attempt to get close to the Dutch authority rises the Kong Kuan council's anger as he is seen to be overstepping the boundary. Peng Liang's wealth turns out to be coming from counterfeiting money. The tobacco business is just a cover for his illegal business although he claims that his action is a form of resistance against the Dutch colonial. He believes that the natives will not win against the colonizers through a war with guns, but it can be won through economic war. Thus, Peng Lian faces two battlefronts, one against the Dutch colonizers and the other against the envious fellow Chinese businessmen. At the end of the story that occurs in 1960, Peng Liang meets his tragic end when he is poisoned by one of the Kong Koan council members. The existence

of the Kong Koan council in the film provides another historical fact from where the audience can learn that there is a strong bond among the ethnic Chinese within a community and at the same time one can see a sense of competition when it comes to business and a newcomer to the area.

The second part is the portrayal of the ethnic Chinese characters. The discussion will be divided into two parts, the physical and psychological (inner) characteristics. The physical discussion relates to their appearance, what they wear and what they do (ritual/tradition). Physically, all ethnic Chinese characters in the film are portrayed stereotypically: fair-skinned with slanted eyes (see figure 7). Some of them have a traditional queue hairstyle that is traditionally worn by male subjects of the Qing dynasty along with the typical hat that goes with the hairstyle, as seen from the characters Tan Peng Liang from Tamim (there are two characters named Tan Peng Liang, both fall in love with Tinung) (see figure 7) and Tjia Wan Sen (see figure 8).



Figure 7. Tan Peng Liam Tamim
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:08:05



Figure 8. Tjia Wan Sen
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:11:47

Most of the ethnic Chinese characters are wearing the traditional Chinese clothing *dagua* (as seen in figures 8 and 9) and some wear a western suit, such as the character Timothy Wu in image 8 (the second character from the left) and Peng Liang. Throughout the film the character Timothy Wu is depicted wearing a western suit and a hat.



Figure 9. The Kong Kuan council members wearing dagua, except for Timothy Wu
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54

As the major character, Peng Liang's physical appearance is more varied, he sometimes wears dagua but most of the time he wears a western suit and a hat, which suggests that he is a person who can adapt easily to the situation he is in (see figure 10).



Figure 10. Tan Peng Liang in Batavia (left) and in Semarang with his mother (right)
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54 and 0:33:57

The film also mentions at least four traditions/rituals of the ethnic Chinese, namely the Chinese New Year, Cioko Festival, visiting the parents' tomb, and the tradition of giving *hungpao* (money in a red envelope). All these traditions once are not allowed to be openly celebrated in Indonesia since 1966 (except for visiting the parents' tomb which is a private event), and not until the year 2000 that the Chinese-Indonesians are allowed to celebrate them again. The film is released in 2001, thus it indirectly serves as a celebration of regaining their freedom, expressing their Chinese-ness, and showcasing the multidimensional aspect of the Chinese-Indonesians.

The tradition of giving *hungpao* during the Chinese New Year is highlighted in the film as an opportunity for the Chinese-Indonesians to bribe the authority without making it look like obvious bribery. For instance, in two separate occasions, Tan Peng Liang is depicted to be giving a *hungpao* to a Dutch authority after an incident that causes his tobacco warehouse to be burnt down (see figure 11). The second one is when he gives the *hungpao* to some journalists with the hope that they will not write anything bad about him.



Figure 11. Peng Liang attempts to bribe a Dutch authority by offering him a *hungpao*
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:45:30

On both occasions, he argues that giving *hungpao* is a normal thing to do during the Chinese New Year and that rejecting it will be considered an offense to the Chinese-Indonesians. This *hungpao*

tradition, although a part of the Chinese New Year tradition, is highlighted in the film as a means by Peng Liang to collude with the powerful. In a way, the action suggests two other stereotypes of the Chinese-Indonesians: being wealthy and cunning in doing business. One may understand why they do this because living as migrants and minorities in another country means they have to be smart and resourceful to guarantee their survival and safety.

Apart from the stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters, the film offers a different portrayal that has never been depicted before regarding the Chinese-Indonesian. First, not all of them are wealthy, as can be seen in the character Tjia Wan Sen, who is good at fighting (which is another stereotype of ethnic Chinese). The film does not explain his job or background, only that he is in love with Tinung and he wants Tinung to live with him. His role in the film is important when he collaborates with the native journalist to reveal Peng Liang's illegal business. His motive is love and revenge, which makes him a romantic, just like Peng Liang. Being romantic is another non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesian characters. In the end, Wan Sen realizes that he is targeting a wrong person as there is another character with the same name.

The character Njoo Tek Hong offers another non-typical Chinese-Indonesian: he is an artist (musician and dancer) and is depicted as a sissy person (see figure 12). Tek Hong is the character who trains Tinung to become a popular *cokek* dancer and singer. His unique characteristic is refreshing in a way it adds another dimension to the general portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters.



Figure 12. The sissy character Njoo Tek Hong plays a musical instrument
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:18:28

Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians is that some of them are portrayed as a womanizer. Tan Peng Liang, Peng Liang from Tamim, and Tjia Wan Sen are three characters, among other minor characters, who do not treat women respectfully. All of them like Tinung but before they all fall in love with her, they only see and treat her as a courtesan/prostitute. This negative stereotype is never seen in other films depicting Chinese-Indonesian characters before, thus it is interesting to discuss why this stereotype appears in the film. Historically, Chinese culture, like many other cultures in the world, is patriarchal, based on the Confucian patriarchal system that privileges the masculine over the feminine. “Confucianism requires women to be obedient to men, not to receive education, not to get paid work, to carry on the family line as a mission, and to honor this observance for the entirety of their respective lifetimes” (Chang, 2020, p. 1). That is also why when Peng Liang’s wife can no longer give him sexual satisfaction, Peng Liang makes it an excuse to find another woman, and even his mother cannot forbid him from doing so. Besides, there are no significant female Chinese characters in the film. There are only three scenes where they appear: the first one is Peng Liang’s bedridden wife who surrenders with the situation, the second one is the scene when Peng Liang returns to Semarang and meets his mother, and the third one is the scene when Boen Hiap is in court accompanied by his wife. They are all portrayed to be submissive and passive, in contrast with the male characters. Another reason for their portrayal as a womanizer because historically, many Chinese migrants who come to Batavia are

single or married men who leave their family back in China, thus to fulfill their sexual drive, they look for prostitute (*ca bau kan*) which leads them to womanize the native prostitute and sometimes make them their mistress just what both Peng Liang does in the film. Albeit downgrading the Chinese-Indonesians' portrayal, the film tries to be as accurate as possible with the history no matter how bad it is.

The Chinese-Indonesian characters in the film, especially the Kong Koan council and Peng Liang, are also depicted to be political, in contrast with the stereotype of contemporary Chinese-Indonesians who are usually apolitical. The way the Kong Koan council is established, their relationship with the authority, and how they regulate the community are all political. They use their position to gain power and trust from the authority which in the end guarantees their safety and survival. Peng Liang does the same, once he arrives in Batavia, he approaches the Dutch authority to gain their trust and it is the right move considering that he has a hidden agenda against the Dutch. The portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters' being political is fresh as it signifies the involvement of Chinese-Indonesians in the fight for independence and later in the revolutionary war against the allied who want to re-colonize Indonesia. Later in 2005, a film titled *Gie* is released to commemorate a Chinese-Indonesian activist, Soe Hok Gie, who is active during the tumultuous time in the mid of 1960s.

The last non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesians regarding their inner quality is being nationalistic, which is represented by Tan Peng Liang. Being a shady, cunning businessperson and a romantic womanizer, Peng Liang is also depicted as an ethnic Chinese who want to see East Indies free from colonization. His illegal business counterfeiting money to fight the Dutch from the economic front and his weapon smuggling business to defeat the Japanese occupation show that Peng Liang is patriotic although the nation Indonesia does not exist yet. He has a strong attachment to the East Indies and wants to see it stand on its foot. Her love for Tinung, a native, becomes the realization of his love for the nation. Peng Liang also shows changes after he

returns to East Indies from years of living abroad to avoid being recaptured by the Dutch authority. He is no longer depicted as a womanizer, once he returns to East Indies, he looks for Tinung who becomes *jugun ianfu* (military comfort woman) during the Japanese occupation. One may think that Peng Liang will forget Tinung and move on with his life, yet he searches for her and finds her in a hospital. Peng Liang helps Tinung regain her confidence and they live together until Peng Liang's tragic death. In one scene he says that he only wants to live peacefully and he achieves his dream near the end of the film before he is poisoned in his own house by one of the Kong Koan members, Eng Goan. Historically, the ethnic Chinese has been politically active in fighting for the Independence of the East Indies. Hapsari (2016) argues that Chinese nationalism is already seen in the 1920s when several ethnic Chinese join the Indonesian national movement for independence. From the journalistic side, the daily Sin Po became the first newspaper to broadcast the Indonesia Raya anthem in November 1928 and Sin Po also spread the name Indonesia to change the name Dutch East Indies. The ethnic Chinese was also active in politics when they founded the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) on September 25, 1932. Also, one ethnic Chinese, Jap Tjwan Bing, was involved in formalizing the 1945 Constitution. The last two characteristics of Peng Liang—being political and having a nationalistic spirit—are the most significant as they become an eye-opener to the general audience who most likely are unaware of the contribution of Chinese-Indonesians in the struggle for independence from colonization. Although Peng Liang is a fictional character, his portrayal brings a new and fresh understanding of the ethnic Chinese and their multidimensional characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that the film, although fictional, manages to depict the dynamic lives of the ethnic Chinese against the historical background as accurate as it can be through the portrayal of the characters, their traits, appearance, and traditions. By portraying the characters stereotypically

and non-stereotypically, the film offers new insights to the audience on the ethnic Chinese's lives in general. This is progress compared to other popular films that depict Chinese-Indonesians before *Ca Bau Kan*. The inner quality stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese that the film depicts are being exclusive, as seen from how they live and regulate their community under the Kong Koan council; hardworking, industrious but frugal, as represented by Peng Liang and Boen Hiap who have a tobacco business; wealthy, as seen from most of the Chinese-Indonesians' characters; and cunning, especially in doing business, as seen from how Peng Liang approaches the authority and the press by subtly bribing them with *hungpao*, and from Peng Liang's illegal money counterfeiting and weapon smuggling business. Physically, the film portrays all the ethnic Chinese characters according to the mainstream belief: fair skin, slanted eyes, dressed in certain costumes, and speak both Mandarin and Bahasa with a certain accent, although not all of the artists are of ethnic Chinese. The film also depicts a stereotypical tradition of the ethnic Chinese such as the Chinese New Year celebration and the *hungpao* tradition.

However, the film also offers a non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians. Before, the ethnic Chinese's portrayal on-screen is always shown as a homogenous group. However, *Ca Bau Kan* shows that the ethnic Chinese are heterogenous, for instance, the ethnic Chinese in Batavia represented by the Kong Koan council does not warmly welcome Peng Liang from Semarang. Besides, they all have different surnames which are an important aspect of the ethnic Chinese's identity and ancestry. One can also see the harsh rivalry among the ethnic Chinese that leads to the tragic end for Peng Liang that emphasizes that they are not a homogenous group. The film also depicts the ethnic Chinese, especially the male, to be womanizers, while the female to be submissive and passive. This situation is aligned with the history of the ethnic Chinese in Batavia and with the patriarchal system that is still held strongly by the ethnic Chinese community, even to this day. Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the ethnic Chinese is that they are political and having a nationalistic spirit, as represented by Tan Peng Liang. Overall, the relationship

dynamic the film shows through the conflicts between the ethnic Chinese characters, their competition, their strategy in winning the heart of the authority, their stereotypical and non-stereotypical characteristics, and the nationalistic side of the ethnic Chinese as seen from Peng Liang's action is a refreshing perspective of the ethnic Chinese's portrayal in a popular film.

Regarding the spice trading history, the film shows it through the setting of the place. Firstly, it mentions the tobacco business owned by Peng Liang from Semarang and Boen Hiap from Batavia. In one of Boen Hiap's dialogues, he mentions his tobacco plantation in Sumatra. This tobacco business narrative is aligned with the historical account, that the best tobacco at that time comes from Sumatra and is exported to Europe and the East Indies. History also records that the ethnic Chinese dominate the tobacco business in Indonesia after the Dutch colonials are driven out of Indonesia. The reference to Srigunting in Kudus reminds the audience of Djarum Kudus, one of the biggest tobacco companies in Indonesia today. The film also depicts some historical sites in Batavia, such as Glodok, Kalijodo, and Sunda Kalapa harbor. All these places are important sites in the history of spice trading in the East Indies that involve the ethnic Chinese.

In conclusion, Tan Peng Liang and the other ethnic Chinese characters bring a fresh and new dimension of the ethnic Chinese characters that have never been seen before in Indonesian popular films. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan*, albeit a fictional story, becomes a trailblazer film that opens a new front of exploration of the Chinese-Indonesians' lives on screen. Eventually, Peng Liang's ultimate dream may reflect the dream of all ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia, that is to live peacefully in the place and with the woman he loves.

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Cultural Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in *Ca Bau Kan* in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism

ABSTRACT

The object of this research is Nia Dinata's film, *Ca Bau Kan*, which was adapted from Remy Sylado's novel. The research focuses on the **cultural representation of Chinese-Indonesians** which pertains to the context of the maritime spice trade route and the concept of nationalism. Set in Batavia in three different decades, namely the 1930s, 1940s, and 1960s, the film depicts the journey of a Chinese-Indonesian character from the Dutch colonial era and the Japanese colonial era to the era of the independence revolution. The research method used is a qualitative method through film studies, which is **juxtaposed with the semiotic approach** to see how Chinese-Indonesians are represented in the film. The findings show that the film attempts to represent the Chinese-Indonesians accurately, albeit with the continuous presence of inaccurate stereotypes. The findings show Chinese-Indonesians' economic contribution that reflects the history of the spice trade maritime route in Indonesia.

Keywords: Film Studies, *Ca Bau Kan*, Cultural Representation, Chinese-Indonesians, Spice Trading

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the 2002 film *Ca Bau Kan* against the background of the maritime trading history between Nusantara (Indonesia) and China in the context of the cultural representation of Chinese-Indonesians in the film. **History has recorded that Chinese migrants played a significant part in maritime trading, including in the South East Asia region. The Chinese merchants had been collaborating with kingdoms in Nusantara since the 11th century including with Sriwijaya, Kahuripan, Kediri, and Majapahit kingdoms. The Chinese maritime expeditions and relationships with a number of kingdoms in Indonesia also opened the migration channel from China to Indonesia. Initially, they were visiting Nusantara (Indonesia) for a short transit. They decided to migrate for several reasons such as economical, natural disasters, and social unrest.** By identifying how and why the film represents the ethnic Chinese against the backdrop of this historical event, this research wants to show that popular film can also serve as a medium of telling

and preserving historical information more entertainingly.

Ca Bau Kan is chosen for several reasons, firstly, the film was the first film where an ethnic Chinese becomes the main character. Before *Ca Bau Kan*, Chinese-Indonesians did not appear much on-screen due to the New Order regime policy on them. When they appear on-screen, their depiction is superficial and stereotypical. Secondly, adapted from a novel under the same title, the film talks about the life of the Chinese-Indonesian major character that covers three different periods: the Dutch colonial time, Japanese colonial time, and the revolution time towards Indonesian independence. Being inspired by true historical events, this film provides interesting visuals that can bring a deeper understanding of the role of Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesian history through their trading skills. Lastly, the fact that some ethnic Chinese artists played in the film makes it more authentic and fascinating to watch.

The novelty of this research lies in the fact that there has never been a similar topic discussion on the film *Ca Bau Kan*. There are some discussions on the film, for example, Heryanto's comment on *Ca Bau Kan* based on Sen's analysis suggests that the politics of representation of Chinese-Indonesian in Indonesian cinema is much more complex than Sen stated. However, Heryanto does not specifically and in detail analyze the film and its characters from the perspective of maritime trading. Another publication looks at the film from the theological point of view, in particular the Christian view (Botara, 2015). The article focuses more on Giok Lan's characteristic which is forgiving those who rape her mother and kill her father. Other scholarly articles on the film or the novel include Sutandio (2014) discusses how the film attempts to centralize the marginalized ethnic Chinese. Herleni (2018) discusses the novel with the topic of life attitudes of the ethnic Chinese using a sociological approach. Asmarani (2015) also discusses the novel through the cultural deconstruction approach in the context of power. Meutia (2017) also focuses on the character Tinung in the film version, using a gender approach. Sholehuddin's (2013) bachelor thesis discusses the original novel from the perspective of literary anthropology and

educational values. Sabakti (2013) discusses the narrative structure of the novel as a semiotic analysis. Raditiyanto (2018) discusses the novel from the perspective of an intertextual semiotic approach in the context of prostitution history in the novel. Hendiawan and Rahmansyah (2019) look at the film's landscape as a cultural identity. There are more scholarly articles both on the novel and the film version, however, none of them discusses the film in the context of maritime trading, which makes this research is necessary to do to offer a fresh perspective on the film.

Since the birth of cinema in the late 19th century, filmmaking has never been separated from the concept of cultural representation. Film has its language that produces visual representation through various kinds of media. For instance, the first publicly screened short recording by Lumiere's brother *Workers Leaving the Lumiere's Factory* (1895) shows the factory workers going home at the end of the day. Lumiere simply puts the camera in front of the factory gate and recorded the flow of the workers leaving the factory. The 45-second film shows a partial representation of the workers' daily activity. In another instance, many of Sergei Eisenstein's films represent the socialist society as a reflection of his Marxist Soviet Union ideological framework. In France, the filmmaker Godard represents the French bourgeois society in many of his films as a reflection of his cultural framework (Kiernan, 1990, p. 93). There are many other instances of how films represent certain societies, groups of people, or ideologies.

In the era of the internet, film as one of the most widely available media that people can access today can be a powerful tool of empowerment, but at the same time also disempowerment. Cultural representation can both challenge and support the status quo. In the context of ethnicity, film as one media of cultural representation always faces challenges when it comes to representing certain ethnic as there are many variables involved in constructing the representation, such as who makes it, when it is produced, what the purpose is, who the target audience is, and who plays in the film. The recent popularity of Jordan Peele's films such as *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) that represent the African-Americans culture differently compared to other popular Hollywood films are

a good example of how powerful the effect of cultural representation in empowering the minority and challenging the status quo. In the context of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, *Ca Bau Kan* becomes the first film that exclusively showcases an ethnic Chinese as the main character.

This nature of filmmaking to construct and give meaning to cultural representation becomes even more significant within a multi-ethnic nation like Indonesia. Indonesia has "...over 700 ethnic groups with distinct languages (not dialects) and traditions..." (Yuwanto, 2012, p. 117). Among those ethnicities, Chinese-Indonesians are one ethnic that have been experiencing different treatments throughout Indonesian history. Urban (2013, p. 1) argues that "The construction of identity among the ethnic Chinese populations in Indonesia has been a complex process. The temporal and spatial formulation of identity has allowed for continual change in which marginalization and discrimination have resulted." The long history of discrimination and repression of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia can be rooted in the Dutch colonialization period when the colonials apply the "*divide et impera*" policy to segregate ethnics in Indonesia so that they will not form a union. The ethnic Chinese, being good at trading, have a better position in the hierarchical structure constructed by the colonials. The indigenous becomes the lowest in the structure and this condition creates sentiment that perpetuates to this day, especially by the New Order regime of Soeharto (1966-1998) for their political ends.

In the context of film, Sutandio (2019, p. 276) argues that "Chinese descendants have been and are still an important part of the development of the national cinema" although their roles are mostly behind the screen as producers or production house. Not until the 21st century that numbers of ethnic Chinese emerge as artists on screen that represent the Chinese ethnic. The cultural representation of Chinese-Indonesians on screen has always been stereotypical, displaying mostly their obvious physical or verbal traits, which are not reflecting their true identity.

Ca Bau Kan is "the first Indonesian film to reconfigure and relive the long-abandoned 'realistic' portrayal of Chinese-Indonesians after 32 years of 'hibernation'" (Sutandio, 2014, p.

264). In Indonesian popular films from 1945 to 2002, Chinese-Indonesian characters rarely have significant positions on-screen other than an ethnic display. The discourse in *Ca Bau Kan* relates to the lives of Chinese-Indonesians in pre-independent Indonesia, and thus the audience should frame the meaning of their cultural representation within that period with all their specific characteristics, although it should be understood that the role of director is also significant in the construction of meaning.

The film revolves around the lives of the two major characters, Sri Noerhajati or Tinung, a poor native Indonesian woman, and Tan Peng Liang, a wealthy Chinese-Indonesian from Semarang who comes to Batavia. Tinung, who is treated as a sexual object almost throughout her young life, meets Tan Peng Liang in Batavia during a folk festival. Peng Liang adores her dancing and singing skill called “cokek” (a social dance) and is willing to double her pay so she can sing and dance privately for him. Gradually, Peng Liang falls in love with Tinung and marries her despite Peng Liang’s married status. Peng Liang’s wife is bedridden and that becomes his excuse to marry Tinung. Throughout the film, Tinung has to fight to get her freedom as a woman and to release herself from the stigma of being a *ca bau kan* (courtesan/prostitute), while Peng Liang has to fight against fellow Chinese-Indonesian businessmen to realize his agenda of defeating the colonizers through economic superiority, and later helping the revolutionary group to fight the Japanese.

METHOD

This research is qualitative and interdisciplinary research that combines film studies and semiotic approach. The elements of film studies in focus are the cinematography and *misè-en-scene*. Cinematography is simply defined as camerawork that refers to how and where the camera and the lighting are positioned to create certain effects or emphasize certain conditions. *Misè-en-scene* refers to everything that the audience sees on-screen, for instance, costumes, make-up, actors, sound, dialogue, or special effects. Semiotic approach is applied to interpret the underlying meaning

of signs or symbols that the film shows through its visualization. The research begins with multiple screenings of the film to collect visual data from the cinematography and *misè-en-scene* that relate to the topic. After that, the visual data are put against the semiotic approach to be interpreted so that the meanings produced can be drawn. The findings provide understanding on how and why the Chinese-Indonesians are represented in such a way in the film.

DISCUSSION

Ca Bau Kan is the first post-New Order regime film that puts Indonesian Chinese ethnicity as its main characters. Never before, at least since the birth year of Indonesian cinema in 1950, the ethnic Chinese is put in the spotlight in a film. Most of the time, their portrayal in films is merely ornamental and stereotypical. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan* still depicts certain stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, but they also show different aspects of the ethnic Chinese's lives that are never seen before. That way, the audience is exposed to a more dynamic representation of them instead of the static and stereotypical ones. In doing so, the film takes certain historical accounts of Chinese-Indonesians particularly between the year 1933 to 1960 in Batavia. The discussion of the film is divided into two parts, the setting of place and the Chinese-Indonesian characters.

Setting of Place

The film's period is from 1933 to 1960, covering the Dutch colonization period (1930-1942), Japanese occupation (1942-1945), and independence period (1945-1960). Historically, the 1930s marks the peak of Chinese immigrants that reached more than half a million people and many of them settled in big cities in Java such as Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya. The film particularly shows three significant historical places in Batavia related to the Chinese-Indonesians: Glodok, Kalijodo (Kali Angke), and Sunda Kalapa. Other important places outside Batavia are Srigunting in Kudus and Sam Poo Kong in Semarang. The film also mentions Peng Liang's house in Chaulan

Street, Batavia. Chaulan street today is Gadjah Mada street in Glodok area. This small detail shows the film's attempt to be as accurate as possible with the history. Those places are closely related to the history of Chinese-Indonesians especially in the context of the tobacco business that the film shows.

Since the mid-18th century, the ethnic Chinese live close together as a community in a Chinatown (*pecinan*) located in Glodok area, Batavia. Today, Glodok is still the hub for Chinese-Indonesian businesses and is also known as the center of electronic goods in today's Jakarta. The film shows this explicitly through dialogues and visualization. Peng Liang's and Boen Hiap's tobacco warehouses are both located in Glodok (see figure 1 and 2), almost stands side by side. This shows that Glodok has always been an important business place for the ethnic Chinese. Historically, it is the Dutch colonial that localized the ethnic Chinese in Glodok area after the 1740 massacre by the VOC so that they can have easier control and surveillance of the ethnic Chinese (Fatimah, 2014, p. 129). During one scene, Boen Hiap mentions his high-quality tobacco that comes from Sumatra. Historically, a large-scale tobacco plantation in Indonesia was initiated by a Dutch named J. Nienhujs in East Sumatra in the 19th century. At first, the involvement of the ethnic Chinese in the plantation is as workers who are brought from Penang island and mainland China (Wibowo, 2015). The high-quality Sumatra tobacco, as Boen Hiap mentions, is for export and local market, so what Boen Hiap mentions is aligned with the history. One time, Peng Liang buys Boen Hiap's high-quality tobacco under a different name, sending the tobacco to his warehouse in Srigoenting, Kudus, and from there the tobacco is shipped back to Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok. His strategy makes Boen Hiap furious that leads him to burn Peng Liang's warehouse during the Chinese New Year. Their dynamic shows that fierce competition sometimes occurs between ethnic Chinese businessmen.



Figure 1. Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:40:27



Figure 2. Boen Hiap's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:38:31

In terms of the development of Batavia/Jakarta, the era is part of the period of modern Jakarta development (1920-2009). Glodok is located in the southern part of the Dutch colonial fort, and the reason why the ethnic Chinese are allowed to occupy the region is that the VOC Governor-General at that time, Jan Pieterszoon Coen believes that the ethnic Chinese are “a resilient and hardworking ethnic...there’s no better ethnic group that suits our purpose or that can be deployed just as easily as the Chinese ethnic” (Matanasi, 2017).

The second important place is Kalijodo (Kali Angke). Kalijodo, which literally means “river of lover,” is not a name of a certain region, it derives from the ethnic Chinese tradition, *Peh Cun*. During that celebration, the Chinese migrants in Batavia come to the riverbank of Kali Angke (the actual name of Kalijodo) to sing and recite poems on decorated boats. The boats are occupied by either men or women and when some of them are attracted to each other, they show it by

throwing a cake made of flour and beans, wrapped in banana leaves (*bacang*) to each other (Permanasari & Lientino, 2018, p. 14). In its development, Kalijodo becomes a prostitution place for the Chinese migrants who are longing for sexual intimacy. The film shows this visually through the scene at Kalijodi at night when there are many boats along the river which function as the “rooms” for the prostitutes and their customers (see figure 3). Kalijodo is also the place where Peng Liang meets Tinung, who at that time unwillingly, due to her poor condition, becomes a prostitute. It is from this place that the term *ca bau kan* emerges, which is roughly translated as a courtesan, or mistress to rich Chinese men. Kalijodo remains a site for illegal prostitution until 2016 when the Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, transformed the 15.000 square meter area into a Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space (Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak/RPTRA) as seen in image 4. (Simatupang, 2017, p. 47).



Kalijodo, Batavia, 1933
Figure 3. The Kalijodo scene
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:05:27



Figure 4. Kalijodo today
Source: Tobing, 2017

The third place is Sunda Kalapa harbor, the first important harbor in Batavia, which is located just about 5 km away from Glodok area.

“In the 9th century, the Sunda kingdom emerged as one of Srivijaya’s vassals; in this period the name Kalapa (Sundanese for ‘coconut’) started to be known as one of Sunda’s port cities on the north coast of West Java. Sailors and traders from China, India, East, and Europe frequented Kalapa as part of their trading routes to the Spice Islands in the east and also to Banten and other ports on Sumatra’s coastline” (Gultom, 2018, p. 2).

Sunda Kalapa harbor has a very significant role in creating what we know as Jakarta today. It is also an important part of the history of silk route trading. Although today it is no longer functions as the main harbor, its history remains important today, especially as the entry point of many Chinese migrants to Batavia which occurred between the 10th and 13th century. The film shows this during a scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia (see figure 5) after years of running away from the Dutch authority after he is found guilty of money counterfeiting. He is shown to be very emotional when he finally returns to the place that he is familiar with.



Figure 5. The scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 1:22:19

The Chinese-Indonesian characters

The discussion of the characters will be divided into two parts: the surnames and the characteristics. Both are interesting to discuss as they represent the multidimensional aspects of the ethnic Chinese that have never been seen before in the popular Indonesian film before *Ca Bau Kan*. The discussion of the ethnic Chinese characters' surnames is particularly done to crosscheck the film's accuracy in choosing those names to the history of the Chinese migrants to Indonesia, particularly Batavia.

There are 13 main ethnic Chinese characters, Tan's family: Tan Peng Liang, Tan Giok Lan (Peng Liang's daughter), Tan Kim Hok and Tan Kim San (Peng Liang's sons), and Tan Soen Bie (Peng Liang's right-hand man). Then there are the members of the Batavia Kong Koan (*Gongguan*) Assembly: Thio Boen Hiap, Oey Eng Goan, Liem Kiem Jang, Lie Kok Pien, Kwee Tjwie Sien, and Timothy Wu. The other two characters are Njoo Tek Hong, a musician who owns a *cokek* dance troupe, and Tjia Wan Sen, a lone young ethnic Chinese who also likes Tinung. Apart from Tan's family, the other characters have different surnames. Like many cultures in the world, the ethnic Chinese also believe that one's name can determine one's fortune or misfortune. Historically,

“The four predominant groups who migrated to Indonesia were the Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu, and Cantonese—each of them with a distinct language, economy, and culture. Due to their distinct specializations, each group populated different areas and islands in Indonesia.

The Hakka migrated to West Kalimantan, the Hokkien located to Java and Sumatra, the Teochiu lived in Java, Sumatra, and the Riau Islands, and the Cantonese spread across the archipelago” (Urban, 2013, p. 2).

The majority of the Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia is coming from three provinces in China: Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan and most of them who come to Java (Hokkien) is coming from Fujian. Based on the data from the Chinese-Indonesian Social Clan Association (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia), almost all of the surnames mentioned above are in the top ten of Chinese-Indonesian surnames (Britto, 2020): Tan (Hànzi: 陈, hànǚ pīnyīn: Chén), Thio (Hànzi 张, hànǚ pīnyīn: Zhāng), Oey (Hànzi: 黄, hànǚ pīnyīn: Huáng), Liem (Hànzi: 林, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lín), Lie (Hànzi: 李, hànǚ pīnyīn: Lǐ), Tjia (Hànzi: 谢, hànǚ pīnyīn: Xiè), and Wú (Hanzi: 吴). In China itself, the family name “Lie” is “the second most common surname in China, shared by over 100 million people worldwide” (Lie & Bailey, 2017, p. 82), with Wang as the first most common surname. However, the surnames Wang or Ong in Indonesia are not as many as those surnames mentioned above. Thus, it can be concluded that the surnames chosen for those fictional characters are aligned with the actual history of the Chinese migrants’ families who come to Indonesia.

Apart from the surnames, the film also mentions the existence of Kong Kuan (Gongguan) Council in Batavia. The Chinese Council, known also as the Kong Koan, was

“a semi-autonomous ethnic organization that collaborated with the Dutch colonial government in administering the Chinese community by collecting taxes, explaining, and passing on government rules, and settling disputes. Other activities included the supervision and coordination of social and religious matters, including education, marriage registration, cemeteries, public ceremonies, and temple management” (Erkelens, 2013, p. 25).

These councils can be found in big cities such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang from the 18th century to the 20th century. They are chosen by the Dutch governor-general, and usually consist of

wealthy Chinese businessmen, but they still have to submit to the higher authority and laws, that is the Dutch colonials. The film depicts the Kong Kuan's members as rich people from the way they look and from how they stand out and are respected by other characters. They also have a headquarter where they regularly meet (see figure 6). Since they regulate everything within their community, the arrival of the arrogant and rich Peng Liang from Semarang is a matter for them. They dislike Peng Liang's attitude and they want to get rid of him.



Figure 6. The Kong Kuan member in their headquarter
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:17:25

Peng Liang's presence in Batavia draws attention from the local Kong Kuan council that looks at him as a competitor and a threat to their business and pride. Peng Liang's arrogance in showing off his wealth and his attempt to get close to the Dutch authority rises the Kong Kuan council's anger as he is seen to be overstepping the boundary. Peng Liang's wealth turns out to be coming from counterfeiting money. The tobacco business is just a cover for his illegal business although he claims that his action is a form of resistance against the Dutch colonial. He believes that the natives will not win against the colonizers through a war with guns, but it can be won through economic war. Thus, Peng Lian faces two battlefronts, one against the Dutch colonizers and the other against the envious fellow Chinese businessmen. At the end of the story that occurs in 1960, Peng Liang meets his tragic end when he is poisoned by one of the Kong Koan council members. The existence

of the Kong Koan council in the film provides another historical fact from where the audience can learn that there is a strong bond among the ethnic Chinese within a community and at the same time one can see a sense of competition when it comes to business and a newcomer to the area.

The second part is the portrayal of the ethnic Chinese characters. The discussion will be divided into two parts, the physical and psychological (inner) characteristics. The physical discussion relates to their appearance, what they wear and what they do (ritual/tradition). Physically, all ethnic Chinese characters in the film are portrayed stereotypically: fair-skinned with slanted eyes (see figure 7). Some of them have a traditional queue hairstyle that is traditionally worn by male subjects of the Qing dynasty along with the typical hat that goes with the hairstyle, as seen from the characters Tan Peng Liang from Tamim (there are two characters named Tan Peng Liang, both fall in love with Tinung) (see figure 7) and Tjia Wan Sen (see figure 8).



Figure 7. Tan Peng Liam Tamim
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:08:05



Figure 8. Tjia Wan Sen
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:11:47

Most of the ethnic Chinese characters are wearing the traditional Chinese clothing *dagua* (as seen in figures 8 and 9) and some wear a western suit, such as the character Timothy Wu in image 8 (the second character from the left) and Peng Liang. Throughout the film the character Timothy Wu is depicted wearing a western suit and a hat.



Figure 9. The Kong Kuan council members wearing *dagua*, except for Timothy Wu
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54

As the major character, Peng Liang's physical appearance is more varied, he sometimes wears *dagua* but most of the time he wears a western suit and a hat, which suggests that he is a person who can adapt easily to the situation he is in (see figure 10).



Figure 10. Tan Peng Liang in Batavia (left) and in Semarang with his mother (right)
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54 and 0:33:57

The film also mentions at least four traditions/rituals of the ethnic Chinese, namely the Chinese New Year, Cioko Festival, visiting the parents' tomb, and the tradition of giving *hungpao* (money in a red envelope). All these traditions once are not allowed to be openly celebrated in Indonesia since 1966 (except for visiting the parents' tomb which is a private event), and not until the year 2000 that the Chinese-Indonesians are allowed to celebrate them again. The film is released in 2001, thus it indirectly serves as a celebration of regaining their freedom, expressing their Chinese-ness, and showcasing the multidimensional aspect of the Chinese-Indonesians.

The tradition of giving *hungpao* during the Chinese New Year is highlighted in the film as an opportunity for the Chinese-Indonesians to bribe the authority without making it look like obvious bribery. For instance, in two separate occasions, Tan Peng Liang is depicted to be giving a *hungpao* to a Dutch authority after an incident that causes his tobacco warehouse to be burnt down (see figure 11). The second one is when he gives the *hungpao* to some journalists with the hope that they will not write anything bad about him.



Figure 11. Peng Liang attempts to bribe a Dutch authority by offering him a *hungpao*
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:45:30

On both occasions, he argues that giving *hungpao* is a normal thing to do during the Chinese New Year and that rejecting it will be considered an offense to the Chinese-Indonesians. This *hungpao*

tradition, although a part of the Chinese New Year tradition, is highlighted in the film as a means by Peng Liang to collude with the powerful. In a way, the action suggests two other stereotypes of the Chinese-Indonesians: being wealthy and cunning in doing business. One may understand why they do this because living as migrants and minorities in another country means they have to be smart and resourceful to guarantee their survival and safety.

Apart from the stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters, the film offers a different portrayal that has never been depicted before regarding the Chinese-Indonesian. First, not all of them are wealthy, as can be seen in the character Tjia Wan Sen, who is good at fighting (which is another stereotype of ethnic Chinese). The film does not explain his job or background, only that he is in love with Tinung and he wants Tinung to live with him. His role in the film is important when he collaborates with the native journalist to reveal Peng Liang's illegal business. His motive is love and revenge, which makes him a romantic, just like Peng Liang. Being romantic is another non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesian characters. In the end, Wan Sen realizes that he is targeting a wrong person as there is another character with the same name.

The character Njoo Tek Hong offers another non-typical Chinese-Indonesian: he is an artist (musician and dancer) and is depicted as a sissy person (see figure 12). Tek Hong is the character who trains Tinung to become a popular *cokek* dancer and singer. His unique characteristic is refreshing in a way it adds another dimension to the general portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters.



Figure 12. The sissy character Njoo Tek Hong plays a musical instrument
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:18:28

Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians is that some of them are portrayed as a womanizer. Tan Peng Liang, Peng Liang from Tamim, and Tjia Wan Sen are three characters, among other minor characters, who do not treat women respectfully. All of them like Tinung but before they all fall in love with her, they only see and treat her as a courtesan/prostitute. This negative stereotype is never seen in other films depicting Chinese-Indonesian characters before, thus it is interesting to discuss why this stereotype appears in the film. Historically, Chinese culture, like many other cultures in the world, is patriarchal, based on the Confucian patriarchal system that privileges the masculine over the feminine. “Confucianism requires women to be obedient to men, not to receive education, not to get paid work, to carry on the family line as a mission, and to honor this observance for the entirety of their respective lifetimes” (Chang, 2020, p. 1). That is also why when Peng Liang’s wife can no longer give him sexual satisfaction, Peng Liang makes it an excuse to find another woman, and even his mother cannot forbid him from doing so. Besides, there are no significant female Chinese characters in the film. There are only three scenes where they appear: the first one is Peng Liang’s bedridden wife who surrenders with the situation, the second one is the scene when Peng Liang returns to Semarang and meets his mother, and the third one is the scene when Boen Hiap is in court accompanied by his wife. They are all portrayed to be submissive and passive, in contrast with the male characters. Another reason for their portrayal as a womanizer because historically, many Chinese migrants who come to Batavia are

single or married men who leave their family back in China, thus to fulfill their sexual drive, they look for prostitute (*ca bau kan*) which leads them to womanize the native prostitute and sometimes make them their mistress just what both Peng Liang does in the film. Albeit downgrading the Chinese-Indonesians' portrayal, the film tries to be as accurate as possible with the history no matter how bad it is.

The Chinese-Indonesian characters in the film, especially the Kong Koan council and Peng Liang, are also depicted to be political, in contrast with the stereotype of contemporary Chinese-Indonesians who are usually apolitical. The way the Kong Koan council is established, their relationship with the authority, and how they regulate the community are all political. They use their position to gain power and trust from the authority which in the end guarantees their safety and survival. Peng Liang does the same, once he arrives in Batavia, he approaches the Dutch authority to gain their trust and it is the right move considering that he has a hidden agenda against the Dutch. The portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters' being political is fresh as it signifies the involvement of Chinese-Indonesians in the fight for independence and later in the revolutionary war against the allied who want to re-colonize Indonesia. Later in 2005, a film titled *Gie* is released to commemorate a Chinese-Indonesian activist, Soe Hok Gie, who is active during the tumultuous time in the mid of 1960s.

The last non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesians regarding their inner quality is being nationalistic, which is represented by Tan Peng Liang. Being a shady, cunning businessperson and a romantic womanizer, Peng Liang is also depicted as an ethnic Chinese who want to see East Indies free from colonization. His illegal business counterfeiting money to fight the Dutch from the economic front and his weapon smuggling business to defeat the Japanese occupation show that Peng Liang is patriotic although the nation Indonesia does not exist yet. He has a strong attachment to the East Indies and wants to see it stand on its foot. Her love for Tinung, a native, becomes the realization of his love for the nation. Peng Liang also shows changes after he

returns to East Indies from years of living abroad to avoid being recaptured by the Dutch authority. He is no longer depicted as a womanizer, once he returns to East Indies, he looks for Tinung who becomes *jugun ianfu* (military comfort woman) during the Japanese occupation. One may think that Peng Liang will forget Tinung and move on with his life, yet he searches for her and finds her in a hospital. Peng Liang helps Tinung regain her confidence and they live together until Peng Liang's tragic death. In one scene he says that he only wants to live peacefully and he achieves his dream near the end of the film before he is poisoned in his own house by one of the Kong Koan members, Eng Goan. Historically, the ethnic Chinese has been politically active in fighting for the Independence of the East Indies. Hapsari (2016) argues that Chinese nationalism is already seen in the 1920s when several ethnic Chinese join the Indonesian national movement for independence. From the journalistic side, the daily Sin Po became the first newspaper to broadcast the Indonesia Raya anthem in November 1928 and Sin Po also spread the name Indonesia to change the name Dutch East Indies. The ethnic Chinese was also active in politics when they founded the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) on September 25, 1932. Also, one ethnic Chinese, Jap Tjwan Bing, was involved in formalizing the 1945 Constitution. The last two characteristics of Peng Liang—being political and having a nationalistic spirit—are the most significant as they become an eye-opener to the general audience who most likely are unaware of the contribution of Chinese-Indonesians in the struggle for independence from colonization. Although Peng Liang is a fictional character, his portrayal brings a new and fresh understanding of the ethnic Chinese and their multidimensional characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that the film, although fictional, manages to depict the dynamic lives of the ethnic Chinese against the historical background as accurate as it can be through the portrayal of the characters, their traits, appearance, and traditions. By portraying the characters stereotypically

and non-stereotypically, the film offers new insights to the audience on the ethnic Chinese's lives in general. This is progress compared to other popular films that depict Chinese-Indonesians before *Ca Bau Kan*. The inner quality stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese that the film depicts are being exclusive, as seen from how they live and regulate their community under the Kong Koan council; hardworking, industrious but frugal, as represented by Peng Liang and Boen Hiap who have a tobacco business; wealthy, as seen from most of the Chinese-Indonesians' characters; and cunning, especially in doing business, as seen from how Peng Liang approaches the authority and the press by subtly bribing them with *hungpao*, and from Peng Liang's illegal money counterfeiting and weapon smuggling business. Physically, the film portrays all the ethnic Chinese characters according to the mainstream belief: fair skin, slanted eyes, dressed in certain costumes, and speak both Mandarin and Bahasa with a certain accent, although not all of the artists are of ethnic Chinese. The film also depicts a stereotypical tradition of the ethnic Chinese such as the Chinese New Year celebration and the *hungpao* tradition.

However, the film also offers a non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians. Before, the ethnic Chinese's portrayal on-screen is always shown as a homogenous group. However, *Ca Bau Kan* shows that the ethnic Chinese are heterogenous, for instance, the ethnic Chinese in Batavia represented by the Kong Koan council does not warmly welcome Peng Liang from Semarang. Besides, they all have different surnames which are an important aspect of the ethnic Chinese's identity and ancestry. One can also see the harsh rivalry among the ethnic Chinese that leads to the tragic end for Peng Liang that emphasizes that they are not a homogenous group. The film also depicts the ethnic Chinese, especially the male, to be womanizers, while the female to be submissive and passive. This situation is aligned with the history of the ethnic Chinese in Batavia and with the patriarchal system that is still held strongly by the ethnic Chinese community, even to this day. Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the ethnic Chinese is that they are political and having a nationalistic spirit, as represented by Tan Peng Liang. Overall, the relationship

dynamic the film shows through the conflicts between the ethnic Chinese characters, their competition, their strategy in winning the heart of the authority, their stereotypical and non-stereotypical characteristics, and the nationalistic side of the ethnic Chinese as seen from Peng Liang's action is a refreshing perspective of the ethnic Chinese's portrayal in a popular film.

Regarding the spice trading history, the film shows it through the setting of the place. Firstly, it mentions the tobacco business owned by Peng Liang from Semarang and Boen Hiap from Batavia. In one of Boen Hiap's dialogues, he mentions his tobacco plantation in Sumatra. This tobacco business narrative is aligned with the historical account, that the best tobacco at that time comes from Sumatra and is exported to Europe and the East Indies. History also records that the ethnic Chinese dominate the tobacco business in Indonesia after the Dutch colonials are driven out of Indonesia. The reference to Srigunting in Kudus reminds the audience of Djarum Kudus, one of the biggest tobacco companies in Indonesia today. The film also depicts some historical sites in Batavia, such as Glodok, Kalijodo, and Sunda Kalapa harbor. All these places are important sites in the history of spice trading in the East Indies that involve the ethnic Chinese.

In conclusion, Tan Peng Liang and the other ethnic Chinese characters bring a fresh and new dimension of the ethnic Chinese characters that have never been seen before in Indonesian popular films. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan*, albeit a fictional story, becomes a trailblazer film that opens a new front of exploration of the Chinese-Indonesians' lives on screen. Eventually, Peng Liang's ultimate dream may reflect the dream of all ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia, that is to live peacefully in the place and with the woman he loves.

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4. Bukti artikel sudah diterima (25 Okt 2022)

Notifications**[kata] Editor Decision**

25-10-2022 02:11 AM

Dear Anton Sutandio, Yohan Yusuf Arifin,

We have reached a decision regarding your submission to k@ta, "Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in Ca Bau Kan in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism".

Our decision is to: accept your manuscript

You will be able to see the edition through the website once it is published. Let me know if you may need a letter of acceptance or if you have any questions for the copy-editing process.

Sincerely,
Fransisca Fortunata
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5. Bukti artikel telah terbit (6 Des 2023)

Cultural Representation of Chinese-Indonesians in *Ca Bau Kan (The Courtesan)* in the Context of Spice Trading and Nationalism

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ABSTRACT

The object of this research is Nia Dinata's film, *Ca Bau Kan (The Courtesan)*, which was adapted from Remy Sylado's novel. The research focuses on the cultural representation of Chinese-Indonesians which pertains to the context of the maritime spice trade route and the concept of nationalism. Set in Batavia in three different decades, namely the 1930s, 1940s, and 1960s, the film depicts the journey of a Chinese-Indonesian character from the Dutch colonial era and the Japanese colonial era to the era of the independence revolution. The research method used is a qualitative method through film studies, which is juxtaposed with the semiotic approach to see how Chinese-Indonesians are represented in the film. The findings show that the film attempts to represent the Chinese-Indonesians accurately, albeit with the continuous presence of inaccurate stereotypes. The findings show Chinese-Indonesians' economic contribution that reflects the history of the spice trade maritime route in Indonesia.

Keywords: Film Studies; *Ca Bau Kan*; Cultural Representation; Chinese-Indonesians; Spice Trading.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the 2002 film *Ca Bau Kan* against the background of the maritime trading history between Nusantara (Indonesia) and China in the context of the cultural representation of Chinese-Indonesians in the film. History has recorded that Chinese migrants played a significant part in maritime trading, including in the South East Asia region. The Chinese merchants had been collaborating with kingdoms in Nusantara since the 11th century including with Sriwijaya, Kahuripan, Kediri, and Majapahit kingdoms. The Chinese maritime expeditions and relationships with a number of kingdoms in Indonesia also opened the migration channel from China to Indonesia. Initially, they were visiting Nusantara (Indonesia) for a short transit. They decided to migrate for several reasons such as economical, natural disasters, and social unrest. By identifying how and why the film represents the ethnic Chinese against the backdrop of this historical event, this research wants to show that popular film can also serve as a medium of telling and preserving historical information more entertainingly.

Ca Bau Kan is chosen for several reasons, firstly, the film was the first film where an ethnic Chinese becomes the main character. Before *Ca Bau Kan*,

Chinese-Indonesians did not appear much on-screen due to the New Order regime policy on them. When they appear on-screen, their depiction is superficial and stereotypical. Secondly, adapted from a novel under the same title, the film talks about the life of the Chinese-Indonesian major character that covers three different periods: the Dutch colonial time, Japanese colonial time, and the revolution time towards Indonesian independence. Being inspired by true historical events, this film provides interesting visuals that can bring a deeper understanding of the role of Chinese-Indonesians in Indonesian history through their trading skills. Lastly, the fact that some ethnic Chinese artists played in the film makes it more authentic and fascinating to watch.

The novelty of this research lies in the fact that there has never been a similar topic discussion on the film *Ca Bau Kan*. There are some discussions on the film, for example, Heryanto's comment on *Ca Bau Kan* based on Sen's analysis suggests that the politics of representation of Chinese-Indonesian in Indonesian cinema is much more complex than Sen stated. However, Heryanto does not specifically and in detail analyze the film and its characters from the perspective of maritime trading. Another publication looks at the film from the theological point of view, in particular

the Christian view (Botara, 2015). The article focuses more on Giok Lan's characteristic which is forgiving those who rape her mother and kill her father. Other scholarly articles on the film or the novel include Sutandio (2014) discusses how the film attempts to centralize the marginalized ethnic Chinese. Herleni (2018) discusses the novel with the topic of life attitudes of the ethnic Chinese using a sociological approach. Asmarani (2015) also discusses the novel through the cultural deconstruction approach in the context of power. Meutia (2017) also focuses on the character Tinung in the film version, using a gender approach. Sholehuddin's (2013) bachelor thesis discusses the original novel from the perspective of literary anthropology and educational values. Sabakti (2013) discusses the narrative structure of the novel as a semiotic analysis. Raditianto (2018) discusses the novel from the perspective of an intertextual semiotic approach in the context of prostitution history in the novel. Hendiawan and Rahmansyah (2019) look at the film's landscape as a cultural identity. There are more scholarly articles both on the novel and the film version, however, none of them discusses the film in the context of maritime trading, which makes this research is necessary to do to offer a fresh perspective on the film.

Since the birth of cinema in the late 19th century, filmmaking has never been separated from the concept of cultural representation. Film has its language that produces visual representation through various kinds of media. For instance, the first publicly screened short recording by Lumiere's brother *Workers Leaving the Lumiere's Factory* (1895) shows the factory workers going home at the end of the day. Lumiere simply puts the camera in front of the factory gate and recorded the flow of the workers leaving the factory. The 45-second film shows a partial representation of the workers' daily activity. In another instance, many of Sergei Eisenstein's films represent the socialist society as a reflection of his Marxist Soviet Union ideological framework. In France, the filmmaker Godard represents the French bourgeois society in many of his films as a reflection of his cultural framework (Kiernan, 1990, p. 93). There are many other instances of how films represent certain societies, groups of people, or ideologies.

In the era of the internet, film as one of the most widely available media that people can access today can be a powerful tool of empowerment, but at the same time also disempowerment. Cultural representation can both challenge and support the status quo. In the context of ethnicity, film as one media of cultural representation always faces challenges when it comes to representing certain ethnic as there are many variables involved in constructing the representation,

such as who makes it, when it is produced, what the purpose is, who the target audience is, and who plays in the film. The recent popularity of Jordan Peele's films such as *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019) that represent the African-Americans culture differently compared to other popular Hollywood films are a good example of how powerful the effect of cultural representation in empowering the minority and challenging the status quo. In the context of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, *Ca Bau Kan* becomes the first film that exclusively showcases an ethnic Chinese as the main character.

This nature of filmmaking to construct and give meaning to cultural representation becomes even more significant within a multi-ethnic nation like Indonesia. Indonesia has "...over 700 ethnic groups with distinct languages (not dialects) and traditions..." (Yuwanto, 2012, p. 117). Among those ethnicities, Chinese-Indonesians are one ethnic that have been experiencing different treatments throughout Indonesian history. Urban (2013, p. 1) argues that "The construction of identity among the ethnic Chinese populations in Indonesia has been a complex process. The temporal and spatial formulation of identity has allowed for continual change in which marginalization and discrimination have resulted." The long history of discrimination and repression of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia can be rooted in the Dutch colonialization period when the colonials apply the "*divide et impera*" policy to segregate ethnics in Indonesia so that they will not form a union. The ethnic Chinese, being good at trading, have a better position in the hierarchical structure constructed by the colonials. The indigenous becomes the lowest in the structure and this condition creates sentiment that perpetuates to this day, especially by the New Order regime of Soeharto (1966-1998) for their political ends.

In the context of film, Sutandio (2019, p. 276) argues that "Chinese descendants have been and are still an important part of the development of the national cinema" although their roles are mostly behind the screen as producers or production house. Not until the 21st century that numbers of ethnic Chinese emerge as artists on screen that represent the Chinese ethnic. The cultural representation of Chinese-Indonesians on screen has always been stereotypical, displaying mostly their obvious physical or verbal traits, which are not reflecting their true identity.

Ca Bau Kan is "the first Indonesian film to reconfigure and relive the long-abandoned 'realistic' portrayal of Chinese-Indonesians after 32 years of 'hibernation'" (Sutandio, 2014, p. 264). In Indonesian popular films from 1945 to 2002, Chinese-Indonesian characters rarely have significant positions on-screen other than an ethnic display. The discourse in *Ca Bau Kan* relates

to the lives of Chinese-Indonesians in pre-independent Indonesia, and thus the audience should frame the meaning of their cultural representation within that period with all their specific characteristics, although it should be understood that the role of director is also significant in the construction of meaning.

The film revolves around the lives of the two major characters, Sri Noerhajati or Tinung, a poor native Indonesian woman, and Tan Peng Liang, a wealthy Chinese-Indonesian from Semarang who comes to Batavia. Tinung, who is treated as a sexual object almost throughout her young life, meets Tan Peng Liang in Batavia during a folk festival. Peng Liang adores her dancing and singing skill called “cokek” (a social dance) and is willing to double her pay so she can sing and dance privately for him. Gradually, Peng Liang falls in love with Tinung and marries her despite Peng Liang’s married status. Peng Liang’s wife is bedridden and that becomes his excuse to marry Tinung. Throughout the film, Tinung has to fight to get her freedom as a woman and to release herself from the stigma of being a *ca bau kan* (courtesan/prostitute), while Peng Liang has to fight against fellow Chinese-Indonesian businessmen to realize his agenda of defeating the colonizers through economic superiority, and later helping the revolutionary group to fight the Japanese.

METHOD

This research is qualitative and interdisciplinary research that combines film studies and semiotic approach. The elements of film studies in focus are the cinematography and *misè-en-scène*. Cinematography is simply defined as camerawork that refers to how and where the camera and the lighting are positioned to create certain effects or emphasize certain conditions. *Misè-en-scène* refers to everything that the audience sees on-screen, for instance, costumes, make-up, actors, sound, dialogue, or special effects. Semiotic approach is applied to interpret the underlying meaning of signs or symbols that the film shows through its visualization. The research begins with multiple screenings of the film to collect visual data from the cinematography and *misè-en-scène* that relate to the topic. After that, the visual data are put against the semiotic approach to be interpreted so that the meanings produced can be drawn. The findings provide understanding on how and why the Chinese-Indonesians are represented in such a way in the film.

DISCUSSION

Ca Bau Kan is the first post-New Order regime film that puts Indonesian Chinese ethnicity as its main characters. Never before, at least since the birth year of

Indonesian cinema in 1950, the ethnic Chinese is put in the spotlight in a film. Most of the time, their portrayal in films is merely ornamental and stereotypical. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan* still depicts certain stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, but they also show different aspects of the ethnic Chinese’s lives that are never seen before. That way, the audience is exposed to a more dynamic representation of them instead of the static and stereotypical ones. In doing so, the film takes certain historical accounts of Chinese-Indonesians particularly between the year 1933 to 1960 in Batavia. The discussion of the film is divided into two parts, the setting of place and the Chinese-Indonesian characters.

Setting of Place

The film’s period is from 1933 to 1960, covering the Dutch colonization period (1930-1942), Japanese occupation (1942-1945), and independence period (1945-1960). Historically, the 1930s marks the peak of Chinese immigrants that reached more than half a million people and many of them settled in big cities in Java such as Batavia, Semarang, and Surabaya. The film particularly shows three significant historical places in Batavia related to the Chinese-Indonesians: Glodok, Kalijodo (Kali Angke), and Sunda Kalapa. Other important places outside Batavia are Srigunting in Kudus and Sam Poo Kong in Semarang. The film also mentions Peng Liang’s house in Chaulan Street, Batavia. Chaulan street today is Gadjah Mada street in Glodok area. This small detail shows the film’s attempt to be as accurate as possible with the history. Those places are closely related to the history of Chinese-Indonesians especially in the context of the tobacco business that the film shows.

Since the mid-18th century, the ethnic Chinese live close together as a community in a Chinatown (*pecinan*) located in Glodok area, Batavia. Today, Glodok is still the hub for Chinese-Indonesian businesses and is also known as the center of electronic goods in today’s Jakarta. The film shows this explicitly through dialogues and visualization. Peng Liang’s and Boen Hiap’s tobacco warehouses are both located in Glodok (see figure 1 and 2), almost stands side by side. This shows that Glodok has always been an important business place for the ethnic Chinese. Historically, it is the Dutch colonial that localized the ethnic Chinese in Glodok area after the 1740 massacre by the VOC so that they can have easier control and surveillance of the ethnic Chinese (Fatimah, 2014, p. 129). During one scene, Boen Hiap mentions his high-quality tobacco that comes from Sumatra. Historically, a large-scale tobacco plantation in Indonesia was initiated by a Dutch named J. Nienhujs in East Sumatra in the 19th

century. At first, the involvement of the ethnic Chinese in the plantation is as workers who are brought from Penang island and mainland China (Wibowo, 2015). The high-quality Sumatra tobacco, as Boen Hiap mentions, is for export and local market, so what Boen Hiap mentions is aligned with the history. One time, Peng Liang buys Boen Hiap's high-quality tobacco under a different name, sending the tobacco to his warehouse in Srigoenting, Kudus, and from there the tobacco is shipped back to Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok. His strategy makes Boen Hiap furious that leads him to burn Peng Liang's warehouse during the Chinese New Year. Their dynamic shows that fierce competition sometimes occurs between ethnic Chinese businessmen.



Figure 1. Peng Liang's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:40:27



Figure 2. Boen Hiap's warehouse in Glodok, Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:38:31

In terms of the development of Batavia/Jakarta, the era is part of the period of modern Jakarta development (1920-2009). Glodok is located in the southern part of the Dutch colonial fort, and the reason why the ethnic Chinese are allowed to occupy the region is that the VOC Governor-General at that time, Jan Pieterszoon Coen believes that the ethnic Chinese are "a resilient and hardworking ethnic...there's no better ethnic group that suits our purpose or that can be deployed just as easily as the Chinese ethnic" (Matanasi, 2017).

The second important place is Kalijodo (Kali Angke). Kalijodo, which literally means "river of lover," is not a name of a certain region, it derives from the ethnic

Chinese tradition, *Peh Cun*. During that celebration, the Chinese migrants in Batavia come to the riverbank of Kali Angke (the actual name of Kalijodo) to sing and recite poems on decorated boats. The boats are occupied by either men or women and when some of them are attracted to each other, they show it by throwing a cake made of flour and beans, wrapped in banana leaves (*bacang*) to each other (Permanasari & Lientino, 2018, p. 14). In its development, Kalijodo becomes a prostitution place for the Chinese migrants who are longing for sexual intimacy. The film shows this visually through the scene at Kalijodo at night when there are many boats along the river which function as the "rooms" for the prostitutes and their customers (see figure 3). Kalijodo is also the place where Peng Liang meets Tinung, who at that time unwillingly, due to her poor condition, becomes a prostitute. It is from this place that the term *ca bau kan* emerges, which is roughly translated as a courtesan, or mistress to rich Chinese men. Kalijodo remains a site for illegal prostitution until 2016 when the Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, transformed the 15.000 square meter area into a Child-Friendly Integrated Public Space (Ruang Publik Terpadu Ramah Anak/RPTRA) as seen in image 4. (Simatupang, 2017, p. 47).



Figure 3. The Kalijodo scene
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:05:27



Figure 4. Kalijodo today
Source: Tobing, 2017

The third place is Sunda Kalapa harbor, the first important harbor in Batavia, which is located just about 5 km away from Glodok area.

“In the 9th century, the Sunda kingdom emerged as one of Srivijaya’s vassals; in this period the name Kalapa (Sundanese for ‘coconut’) started to be known as one of Sunda’s port cities on the north coast of West Java. Sailors and traders from China, India, East, and Europe frequented Kalapa as part of their trading routes to the Spice Islands in the east and also to Banten and other ports on Sumatra’s coastline” (Gultom, 2018, p. 2).

Sunda Kalapa harbor has a very significant role in creating what we know as Jakarta today. It is also an important part of the history of silk route trading. Although today it is no longer functions as the main harbor, its history remains important today, especially as the entry point of many Chinese migrants to Batavia which occurred between the 10th and 13th century. The film shows this during a scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia (see figure 5) after years of running away from the Dutch authority after he is found guilty of money counterfeiting. He is shown to be very emotional when he finally returns to the place that he is familiar with.



Figure 5. The scene when Peng Liang returns to Batavia
Source: Dinata, 2002, 1:22:19

The Chinese-Indonesian characters

The discussion of the characters will be divided into two parts: the surnames and the characteristics. Both are interesting to discuss as they represent the multi-dimensional aspects of the ethnic Chinese that have never been seen before in the popular Indonesian film before *Ca Bau Kan*. The discussion of the ethnic Chinese characters’ surnames is particularly done to crosscheck the film’s accuracy in choosing those names to the history of the Chinese migrants to Indonesia, particularly Batavia.

There are 13 main ethnic Chinese characters, Tan’s family: Tan Peng Liang, Tan Giok Lan (Peng Liang’s daughter), Tan Kim Hok and Tan Kim San (Peng

Liang’s sons), and Tan Soen Bie (Peng Liang’s right-hand man). Then there are the members of the Batavia Kong Koan (*Gongguan*) Assembly: Thio Boen Hiap, Oey Eng Goan, Liem Kiem Jang, Lie Kok Pien, Kwee Tjwie Sien, and Timothy Wu. The other two characters are Njoo Tek Hong, a musician who owns a *cokek* dance troupe, and Tjia Wan Sen, a lone young ethnic Chinese who also likes Tinung. Apart from Tan’s family, the other characters have different surnames. Like many cultures in the world, the ethnic Chinese also believe that one’s name can determine one’s fortune or misfortune. Historically,

“The four predominant groups who migrated to Indonesia were the Hokkien, Hakka, Teochiu, and Cantonese—each of them with a distinct language, economy, and culture. Due to their distinct specializations, each group populated different areas and islands in Indonesia. The Hakka migrated to West Kalimantan, the Hokkien located to Java and Sumatra, the Teochiu lived in Java, Sumatra, and the Riau Islands, and the Cantonese spread across the archipelago” (Urban, 2013, p. 2).

The majority of the Chinese migrants to Southeast Asia is coming from three provinces in China: Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan and most of them who come to Java (Hokkien) is coming from Fujian. Based on the data from the Chinese-Indonesian Social Clan Association (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia), almost all of the surnames mentioned above are in the top ten of Chinese-Indonesian surnames (Britto, 2020): Tan (Chen (陈) in Chinese), Thio (Zhang (张)), Oey (Huang (黄)), Liem (Lin (林)), Lie (Li (李)), Tjia (Xie (谢)), and Go (Wú (吴)). In China itself, the family name “Lie” is “the second most common surname in China, shared by over 100 million people worldwide” (Lie & Bailey, 2017, p. 82), with Wang as the first most common surname. However, the surnames Wang or Ong in Indonesia are not as many as those surnames mentioned above. Thus, it can be concluded that the surnames chosen for those fictional characters are aligned with the actual history of the Chinese migrants’ families who come to Indonesia.

Apart from the surnames, the film also mentions the existence of Kong Kuan (Gongguan) Council in Batavia. The Chinese Council, known also as the Kong Koan, was

“a semi-autonomous ethnic organization that collaborated with the Dutch colonial government in administering the Chinese community by collecting taxes, explaining, and passing on government rules, and settling disputes.

Other activities included the supervision and coordination of social and religious matters, including education, marriage registration, cemeteries, public ceremonies, and temple management” (Erkelens, 2013, p. 25).

These councils can be found in big cities such as Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang from the 18th century to the 20th century. They are chosen by the Dutch governor-general, and usually consist of wealthy Chinese businessmen, but they still have to submit to the higher authority and laws, that is the Dutch colonials. The film depicts the Kong Kuan’s members as rich people from the way they look and from how they stand out and are respected by other characters. They also have a headquarter where they regularly meet (see figure 6). Since they regulate everything within their community, the arrival of the arrogant and rich Peng Liang from Semarang is a matter for them. They dislike Peng Liang’s attitude and they want to get rid of him.



Figure 6. The Kong Kuan member in their headquarter
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:17:25

Peng Liang’s presence in Batavia draws attention from the local Kong Kuan council that looks at him as a competitor and a threat to their business and pride. Peng Liang’s arrogance in showing off his wealth and his attempt to get close to the Dutch authority rises the Kong Kuan council’s anger as he is seen to be overstepping the boundary. Peng Liang’s wealth turns out to be coming from counterfeiting money. The tobacco business is just a cover for his illegal business although he claims that his action is a form of resistance against the Dutch colonial. He believes that the natives will not win against the colonizers through a war with guns, but it can be won through economic war. Thus, Peng Lian faces two battlefronts, one against the Dutch colonizers and the other against the envious fellow Chinese businessmen. At the end of the story that occurs in 1960, Peng Liang meets his tragic end when he is poisoned by one of the Kong Koan council members. The existence of the Kong Koan council in the film provides another historical fact from where the audience can learn that there is a strong bond among the ethnic Chinese within a community and at the same time one can see a sense of competition when it comes to business and a newcomer to the area.

The second part is the portrayal of the ethnic Chinese characters. The discussion will be divided into two parts, the physical and psychological (inner) characteristics. The physical discussion relates to their appearance, what they wear and what they do (ritual/tradition). Physically, all ethnic Chinese characters in the film are portrayed stereotypically: fair-skinned with slanted eyes (see figure 7). Some of them have a traditional queue hairstyle that is traditionally worn by male subjects of the Qing dynasty along with the typical hat that goes with the hairstyle, as seen from the characters Tan Peng Liang from Tamim (there are two characters named Tan Peng Liang, both fall in love with Tinung) (see figure 7) and Tjia Wan Sen (see figure 8).



Figure 7. Tan Peng Liam Tamim
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:08:05



Figure 8. Tjia Wan Sen
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:11:47

Most of the ethnic Chinese characters are wearing the traditional Chinese clothing *dagua* (as seen in figures 8 and 9) and some wear a western suit, such as the character Timothy Wu in image 8 (the second character from the left) and Peng Liang. Throughout the film the character Timothy Wu is depicted wearing a western suit and a hat.



Figure 9. The Kong Kuan council members wearing *dagua*, except for Timothy Wu
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54

As the major character, Peng Liang's physical appearance is more varied, he sometimes wears *dagua* but most of the time he wears a western suit and a hat, which suggests that he is a person who can adapt easily to the situation he is in (see figure 10).



Figure 10. Tan Peng Liang in Batavia (left) and in Semarang with his mother (right)

Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:13:54 and 0:33:57

The film also mentions at least four traditions/rituals of the ethnic Chinese, namely the Chinese New Year, Cioko Festival, visiting the parents' tomb, and the tradition of giving *hongbao* (money in a red envelope). All these traditions once are not allowed to be openly celebrated in Indonesia since 1966 (except for visiting the parents' tomb which is a private event), and not until the year 2000 that the Chinese-Indonesians are allowed to celebrate them again. The film is released in 2001, thus it indirectly serves as a celebration of regaining their freedom, expressing their Chinese-ness, and showcasing the multidimensional aspect of the Chinese-Indonesians.

The tradition of giving *hongbao* during the Chinese New Year is highlighted in the film as an opportunity for the Chinese-Indonesians to bribe the authority without making it look like obvious bribery. For instance, in two separate occasions, Tan Peng Liang is depicted to be giving a *hongbao* to a Dutch authority after an incident that causes his tobacco warehouse to be burnt down (see figure 11). The second one is when he gives the *hongbao* to some journalists with the hope that they will not write anything bad about him.



Figure 11. Peng Liang attempts to bribe a Dutch authority by offering him a *hongbao*

Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:45:30

On both occasions, he argues that giving *hongbao* is a normal thing to do during the Chinese New Year and that rejecting it will be considered an offense to the Chinese-Indonesians. This *hongbao* tradition, although a part of the Chinese New Year tradition, is highlighted in the film as a means by Peng Liang to collude with the powerful. In a way, the action suggests two other stereotypes of the Chinese-Indonesians: being wealthy and cunning in doing business. One may understand why they do this because living as migrants and minorities in another country means they have to be smart and resourceful to guarantee their survival and safety.

Apart from the stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters, the film offers a different portrayal that has never been depicted before regarding the Chinese-Indonesian. First, not all of them are wealthy, as can be seen in the character Tjia Wan Sen, who is good at fighting (which is another stereotype of ethnic Chinese). The film does not explain his job or background, only that he is in love with Tinung and he wants Tinung to live with him. His role in the film is important when he collaborates with the native journalist to reveal Peng Liang's illegal business. His motive is love and revenge, which makes him a romantic, just like Peng Liang. Being romantic is another non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesian characters. In the end, Wan Sen realizes that he is targeting a wrong person as there is another character with the same name.

The character Njoo Tek Hong offers another non-typical Chinese-Indonesian: he is an artist (musician and dancer) and is depicted as a sissy person (see figure 12). Tek Hong is the character who trains Tinung to become a popular *cokek* dancer and singer. His unique characteristic is refreshing in a way it adds another dimension to the general portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters.



Figure 12. The sissy character Njoo Tek Hong plays a musical instrument
Source: Dinata, 2002, 0:18:28

Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians is that some of them are portrayed as a womanizer. Tan Peng Liang, Peng Liang from Tamim, and Tjia Wan Sen are three characters, among other minor characters, who do not treat women respectfully. All of them like Tinung but before they all fall in love with her, they only see and treat her as a courtesan/prostitute. This negative stereotype is never seen in other films depicting Chinese-Indonesian characters before, thus it is interesting to discuss why this stereotype appears in the film. Historically, Chinese culture, like many other cultures in the world, is patriarchal, based on the Confucian patriarchal system that privileges the masculine over the feminine. “Confucianism requires women to be obedient to men, not to receive education, not to get paid work, to carry on the family line as a mission, and to honor this observance for the entirety of their respective lifetimes” (Chang, 2020, p. 1). That is also why when Peng Liang’s wife can no longer give him sexual satisfaction, Peng Liang makes it an excuse to find another woman, and even his mother cannot forbid him from doing so. Besides, there are no significant female Chinese characters in the film. There are only three scenes where they appear: the first one is Peng Liang’s bedridden wife who surrenders with the situation, the second one is the scene when Peng Liang returns to Semarang and meets his mother, and the third one is the scene when Boen Hiap is in court accompanied by his wife. They are all portrayed to be submissive and passive, in contrast with the male characters. Another reason for their portrayal as a womanizer because historically, many Chinese migrants who come to Batavia are single or married men who leave their family back in China, thus to fulfill their sexual drive, they look for prostitute (*ca bau kan*) which leads them to womanize the native prostitute and sometimes make them their mistress just what both Peng Liang does in the film. Albeit downgrading the Chinese-Indonesians’ portrayal, the film tries to be as accurate as possible with the history no matter how bad it is.

The Chinese-Indonesian characters in the film, especially the Kong Koan council and Peng Liang, are also

depicted to be political, in contrast with the stereotype of contemporary Chinese-Indonesians who are usually apolitical. The way the Kong Koan council is established, their relationship with the authority, and how they regulate the community are all political. They use their position to gain power and trust from the authority which in the end guarantees their safety and survival. Peng Liang does the same, once he arrives in Batavia, he approaches the Dutch authority to gain their trust and it is the right move considering that he has a hidden agenda against the Dutch. The portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesian characters’ being political is fresh as it signifies the involvement of Chinese-Indonesians in the fight for independence and later in the revolutionary war against the allied who want to re-colonize Indonesia. Later in 2005, a film titled *Gie* is released to commemorate a Chinese-Indonesian activist, Soe Hok Gie, who is active during the tumultuous time in the mid of 1960s.

The last non-stereotypical depiction of the Chinese-Indonesians regarding their inner quality is being nationalistic, which is represented by Tan Peng Liang. Being a shady, cunning businessperson and a romantic womanizer, Peng Liang is also depicted as an ethnic Chinese who want to see East Indies free from colonization. His illegal business counterfeiting money to fight the Dutch from the economic front and his weapon smuggling business to defeat the Japanese occupation show that Peng Liang is patriotic although the nation Indonesia does not exist yet. He has a strong attachment to the East Indies and wants to see it stand on its foot. Her love for Tinung, a native, becomes the realization of his love for the nation. Peng Liang also shows changes after he returns to East Indies from years of living abroad to avoid being recaptured by the Dutch authority. He is no longer depicted as a womanizer, once he returns to East Indies, he looks for Tinung who becomes *jugun ianfu* (military comfort woman) during the Japanese occupation. One may think that Peng Liang will forget Tinung and move on with his life, yet he searches for her and finds her in a hospital. Peng Liang helps Tinung regain her confidence and they live together until Peng Liang’s tragic death. In one scene he says that he only wants to live peacefully and he achieves his dream near the end of the film before he is poisoned in his own house by one of the Kong Koan members, Eng Goan. Historically, the ethnic Chinese has been politically active in fighting for the Independence of the East Indies. Hapsari (2016) argues that Chinese nationalism is already seen in the 1920s when several ethnic Chinese join the Indonesian national movement for independence. From the journalistic side, the daily Sin Po became the first newspaper to broadcast the Indonesia Raya anthem in November 1928 and Sin Po also spread the name Indonesia to change the name Dutch

East Indies. The ethnic Chinese was also active in politics when they founded the Indonesian Chinese Party (PTI) on September 25, 1932. Also, one ethnic Chinese, Jap Tjwan Bing, was involved in formalizing the 1945 Constitution. The last two characteristics of Peng Liang—being political and having a nationalistic spirit—are the most significant as they become an eye-opener to the general audience who most likely are unaware of the contribution of Chinese-Indonesians in the struggle for independence from colonization. Although Peng Liang is a fictional character, his portrayal brings a new and fresh understanding of the ethnic Chinese and their multidimensional characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that the film, although fictional, manages to depict the dynamic lives of the ethnic Chinese against the historical background as accurate as it can be through the portrayal of the characters, their traits, appearance, and traditions. By portraying the characters stereotypically and non-stereotypically, the film offers new insights to the audience on the ethnic Chinese's lives in general. This is progress compared to other popular films that depict Chinese-Indonesians before *Ca Bau Kan*. The inner quality stereotypes of the ethnic Chinese that the film depicts are being exclusive, as seen from how they live and regulate their community under the Kong Koan council; hardworking, industrious but frugal, as represented by Peng Liang and Boen Hiap who have a tobacco business; wealthy, as seen from most of the Chinese-Indonesians' characters; and cunning, especially in doing business, as seen from how Peng Liang approaches the authority and the press by subtly bribing them with *hongbao*, and from Peng Liang's illegal money counterfeiting and weapon smuggling business. Physically, the film portrays all the ethnic Chinese characters according to the mainstream belief: fair skin, slanted eyes, dressed in certain costumes, and speak both Mandarin and Bahasa with a certain accent, although not all of the artists are of ethnic Chinese. The film also depicts a stereotypical tradition of the ethnic Chinese such as the Chinese New Year celebration and the *hongbao* tradition.

However, the film also offers a non-stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese-Indonesians. Before, the ethnic Chinese's portrayal on-screen is always shown as a homogenous group. However, *Ca Bau Kan* shows that the ethnic Chinese are heterogenous, for instance, the ethnic Chinese in Batavia represented by the Kong Koan council does not warmly welcome Peng Liang from Semarang. Besides, they all have different surnames which are an important aspect of the ethnic Chinese's identity and ancestry. One can also see the

harsh rivalry among the ethnic Chinese that leads to the tragic end for Peng Liang that emphasizes that they are not a homogenous group. The film also depicts the ethnic Chinese, especially the male, to be womanizers, while the female to be submissive and passive. This situation is aligned with the history of the ethnic Chinese in Batavia and with the patriarchal system that is still held strongly by the ethnic Chinese community, even to this day. Another non-stereotypical portrayal of the ethnic Chinese is that they are political and having a nationalistic spirit, as represented by Tan Peng Liang. Overall, the relationship dynamic the film shows through the conflicts between the ethnic Chinese characters, their competition, their strategy in winning the heart of the authority, their stereotypical and non-stereotypical characteristics, and the nationalistic side of the ethnic Chinese as seen from Peng Liang's action is a refreshing perspective of the ethnic Chinese's portrayal in a popular film.

Regarding the spice trading history, the film shows it through the setting of the place. Firstly, it mentions the tobacco business owned by Peng Liang from Semarang and Boen Hiap from Batavia. In one of Boen Hiap's dialogues, he mentions his tobacco plantation in Sumatra. This tobacco business narrative is aligned with the historical account, that the best tobacco at that time comes from Sumatra and is exported to Europe and the East Indies. History also records that the ethnic Chinese dominate the tobacco business in Indonesia after the Dutch colonials are driven out of Indonesia. The reference to Srigunting in Kudus reminds the audience of Djarum Kudus, one of the biggest tobacco companies in Indonesia today. The film also depicts some historical sites in Batavia, such as Glodok, Kalijodo, and Sunda Kalapa harbor. All these places are important sites in the history of spice trading in the East Indies that involve the ethnic Chinese.

In conclusion, Tan Peng Liang and the other ethnic Chinese characters bring a fresh and new dimension of the ethnic Chinese characters that have never been seen before in Indonesian popular films. Indeed, *Ca Bau Kan*, albeit a fictional story, becomes a trailblazer film that opens a new front of exploration of the Chinese-Indonesians' lives on screen. Eventually, Peng Liang's ultimate dream may reflect the dream of all ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia, that is to live peacefully in the place and with the woman he loves.

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