

---

# PUGILISTS FROM THE MOUNTAINS: HISTORY, MEMORY, AND THE MAKING OF THE CHINESE-EDUCATED GENERATION IN POST-1998 INDONESIA

Siew-Min Sai

Audience participation ... was overwhelming, very overwhelming ... because this was the first time (in thirty something years) everyone felt that the situation was now more open. Before this nobody dared to say anything, and this was the first time everyone tried as far as possible to say what they were feeling deep in their hearts. At that time, we were calling for those pugilists who had returned to their abodes in the mountains to come down from seclusion ... on the whole, the event was very special because an event on this scale was unprecedented, since we had been banned for more than thirty years ... <sup>1</sup>

This was how Teacher Fu Wenliang, one of the Chinese-language teachers I met and interviewed in Jakarta in 2004, described a workshop on Chinese-language education in the year 2000. I had asked him to describe any event he felt was especially meaningful that had taken place since the downfall of the New Order regime in

---

Additional research and writing for this article was supported by the Singapore Ministry of Education's Academic Research Fund (Tier One), grant number R-110-000-033-112.

<sup>1</sup> Fu Wenliang (pseudo.), interview by author in Jakarta, February, 25, 2004. All interviews for this article were conducted in Chinese, and the Chinese-language transcripts and texts cited here were translated by me. Unless interviewees indicated their willingness to be named in this article, they are identified by pseudonyms.

Indonesia in May 1998. In 2004, Teacher Fu was teaching Chinese in a privately run school in the heart of Jakarta's Chinatown. Teacher Fu chose to describe what he thought was a historic first for Jakarta's Chinese community—an open and public discussion on Chinese-language education, the first after more than thirty years. He recalled that the organizers were exhilarated and gratified by the response and the intensity of the discussion generated. Describing them and himself as “pugilists” (*xiashi*) from the mountains, he adopted the language of the martial arts novel to describe the historic occasion. In a martial arts novel, true heroes seek seclusion when circumstances are unfavorable to them. In remote mountain retreats, they cultivate patience and spiritual well-being, honing their skills to perfection and waiting for the right moment to re-enter the public world. Banned from teaching Chinese for more than three decades, Teacher Fu was clearly excited about what could be accomplished after these years of hibernation.

When Suharto assumed and consolidated power in Indonesia in the mid-1960s, his self-styled “New Order” government implemented a range of discriminatory regulations banning Chinese-language schools, newspapers, and other kinds of Chinese-language mass media. Chinese-language materials were not allowed into the country. The public use and display of Chinese-language characters was strictly forbidden. The number and type of Chinese organizations, or any group with large numbers of members who were of Chinese descent, was heavily circumscribed. Chinese-Indonesian citizens were strongly encouraged to change their names to Indonesian-sounding ones. These regulations were formalized in a document released in 1967 entitled *The Basic Policy for the Solution of the Chinese Problem*, also known as the “No. 37 Instruction.”

The New Order government's unusual ban against a major world language in the 1960s was motivated by its perception of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese citizenry as a two-fold “security threat” to the nation. The government came into power after the violent elimination of the Communist Party of Indonesia in a series of bloody massacres of communists and their supporters between 1965 and 1966. The 1965–66 killings inaugurated the New Order regime, at which time anti-communism became the ideological linchpin of the regime, what Ariel Heryanto has called its “master narrative.”<sup>2</sup> Since the Chinese language (Mandarin) is the national language of the Communist People's Republic of China, the New Order government feared it could be used to disseminate communism in Indonesia. In addition, the government believed the language posed a major obstacle to its attempt to manage the Chinese minority. Should the community possess a common language unintelligible to the larger national society, not only would this hinder the assimilation of Chinese-Indonesians, it would make it more difficult to regulate their activities.

The ban on Chinese language, and, in particular, Chinese-language education, did not necessarily mean that Chinese-Indonesians were henceforth denied all access to the language. For example, the government published a Chinese-language daily, *Harian Indonesia*, which it used to communicate with the literate Chinese population. In addition to this one-and-only official publication, Chinese-Indonesians were also able

---

<sup>2</sup> Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), p. 8.

to enjoy movies and drama serials imported from Taiwan and Hong Kong, some of which were dubbed in Indonesian, in video and later digital formats from the 1980s onwards.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the restricted availability of Chinese-language materials in New Order Indonesia meant that obtaining Chinese-language materials outside of official channels was transformed into a clandestine activity, as cultural products, such as Chinese-language printed matter and Chinese-language classes, became effectively contraband. Such controlled access was critical in shaping Chinese-Indonesians' experience of the language ban. Stories about encounters with customs officers at airports, for example, were commonplace, and reports of extra custom checks, or of success or failure in smuggling "cultural contraband," were often recounted. Stories about the burning and burying of Chinese-language books, magazines, and even entire private library collections, as well as stories of attempts to acquire Chinese-language proficiency on the sly in private Chinese-language instruction classes, were also common. These anecdotes do not simply provide a glimpse into the restricted circumstances under which some Chinese-Indonesians tried to gain access to the language. Their repeated telling and circulation within the community (and outside, to researchers) generated a collective sense of persecution. Unsurprisingly, when the New Order regime fell in May 1998, the language ban was one of the issues that attracted the immediate attention of Chinese-Indonesians and academics alike. To Chinese-Indonesians like Teacher Fu, regime change brought about a tangible sense of freedom and new hope that they would be able to speak and teach the language openly. More than a decade after the fall of the New Order regime, Chinese-language lessons offered by schools and through instructors who charge tuition, as well as all forms of Chinese-language media, including print, radio, television, and film, now proliferate in major towns and cities all over Indonesia.

Born in 1947, Teacher Fu studied and also taught briefly in several of the Chinese-language schools banned by the New Order government. Among Chinese-Indonesians, a minority group that constitutes between 2 to 3 percent of the total population, it was alumni like him who felt the impact of the New Order's ban on language instruction most acutely. In the 1960s, the ban on Chinese-language education affected 629 schools, 6,478 teachers, and 272,782 students in eleven cities all over Indonesia. In Jakarta alone, 82 schools were shut down, 47,432 students could not continue their studies, and 957 teachers lost their jobs.<sup>4</sup> I argue that, following May 1998, alumni and teachers of these formerly banned Chinese schools constitute one of the most important social groups promoting the viability of the Chinese language in Indonesia. Most significantly, their efforts in promoting the language are accompanied by crucial gestures in memory work that serve to localize the language in Indonesia. By "localization" of the Chinese language, I refer to the attempt by Chinese-educated alumni to initiate and sustain Chinese-language use and instruction within a multilingual framework throughout Indonesia. It also describes their attempt to re-narrate the history of the language in a

<sup>3</sup> Aimee Dawis, "The Indonesian Chinese: Their Search for Identity and Development of Collective Memory through the Media" (PhD dissertation, New York University, New York, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> These figures were official statistics released by the Education Ministry. For in-depth accounts and analyses of events leading to the language ban, see Charles Coppel, *Indonesian Chinese in Crisis* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Kam-Hing Lee, *Education and Politics in Indonesia 1945-1965* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1995).

way that allows the Chinese language, as well as themselves, to be integrated legitimately within the Indonesian nation.

These advances in memory work are significant. The attempt to acknowledge and clarify the relationship between the Chinese language and ethnic and national identities points to important connections between identity formation and language ideology,<sup>5</sup> connections that have been reinforced by efforts to revise the history of a once troubled past for the Chinese-Indonesian community. The project of recasting the past is particularly salient in this instance given that what is at stake is a generational identity that is closely tied to the Chinese language. Literacy in Chinese has been rendered an integral component of identity for the Chinese-educated alumni. The narrative strategies and discursive practices involved in the emergence of the figure of the Chinese-educated Indonesian citizen are most explicit in public seminars, talks, classes, and reunion gatherings, as well as in the Chinese-language print media. Despite the proliferation of these activities, which are now increasingly discussed with reference to the “resinicization” of Chinese-Indonesians after the 1998 regime change, contemporary scholarship in Chinese-Indonesian studies has yet to attend to the obvious interconnectivity between language, history, and identity formation in depth.

This article aims to rectify this neglect. Using Michael Warner’s formulation of “publics” and focusing on specific textual and communicative acts carried out by the Chinese-language “public” centered in Jakarta during the post-1998 period, this article traces the making of the post-New Order Chinese-educated generation. It details the public narratives centered on revising the history of the Chinese language as a means of securing the localization of language and identity in Indonesia. Among Chinese-educated alumni, these public narratives buttress collective identity even as they generate a high degree of uniformity across individual biographies. In highlighting the inter-connectivity between language, history, and identity, and by challenging the assumption that there is a transparent relationship between language and ethnic identity, in particular, I follow the cue of anthropologists working on language ideology. Beyond the specific example of the Chinese-educated alumni in Indonesia, the article shows how ties between language, ethnic identity, and nation are envisioned and enacted by actively redeeming an illegitimate past.

### **Interpreting “Chinese-ness”: Language and the Resinicization Debate in Post-1998 Indonesia**

Scholarly discussion concerning the Chinese language in post-1998 Indonesia has focused mainly on the revival of the language and its effects on the perceived resinicization of Chinese-Indonesians following greater dissemination of all forms of Chinese-language mass media in the country. Researchers and analysts observe quite rightly that even as opportunities are now available for using Chinese, “resinicization” of Chinese-Indonesians is by no means a uniform phenomenon. They note that, among Chinese-Indonesians, the victimization of several Chinese-Indonesian communities in

<sup>5</sup> Kroskrity defines “language ideologies” as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.” See Paul Kroskrity, “Regimenting Languages: Language Ideological Perspectives,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul Kroskrity (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2000), p. 5.

outbreaks of violence accompanying regime change in different parts of Indonesia has triggered greater awareness of their ethnicity,<sup>6</sup> but Chinese-Indonesians are also redefining their ethnic and national identities in ways that differ from representations typical of the New Order days, at times to the point of completely disregarding their Chinese-ness. For example, activists, including Chinese-Indonesians in civil rights groups, wear their ethnic identities lightly.<sup>7</sup> In a special issue of the journal *Asian Ethnicity* focused on the civil and political participation of Chinese-Indonesians after May 1998, several authors observe the politicization of Chinese-Indonesians: they are joining mainstream political parties, contesting in elections, and joining civil-society groups championing causes such as human rights and anti-racism. In addition, despite the apparent reemergence of the language after May 1998, commentators note the challenges and question the viability of sustaining the Chinese-language mass media in the country.<sup>8</sup> While analysts are cautious about predicting the end of anti-Chinese sentiments, they suggest that these developments can create room for reimagining citizenship, and ethnic and national identities, in post-1998 Indonesia.<sup>9</sup> To better study Chinese identities in what appears to be an increasingly complicated landscape of identity politics in the country, recent studies are turning to the concept of hybridity.<sup>10</sup>

Not all critics are this sanguine. Ariel Heryanto argues that, despite newfound assertiveness, Chinese-Indonesians have not yet articulated versions of ethnic and Indonesian nationalist identity that challenge the entrenched nativism of the “indigenous and non-indigenous” (*pribumi dan non-pribumi*) binary. In popular usage, “*non-pribumi*” refers only to the Chinese. The official ban on Chinese-language schools, media, and organizations worked hand in glove with an extensive “Assimilation” (*Pembaruan*) Program the New Order regime initiated to absorb Chinese communities into the Indonesian nation-state by stripping them of all traces of Chinese-ness. As Heryanto stresses, New Order surveillance of those who exhibit “Chinese-ness” does not just censor or repress Chinese-ness but also ultimately reinforces New Order cultural hegemony, in which essentialist notions of what constitute “indigenous” and “Chinese” cultures and identities are reproduced and practiced on a daily basis. Thus, both positive and negative beliefs and stereotypical images about the Chinese were disseminated by the New Order state as well as ordinary individuals, Chinese and

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough treatment of the violence accompanying regime change in 1998, especially the “anti-Chinese” dimension, see Jemma Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996–1999* (Singapore: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Singapore University Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Ju-Lan Thung, “Ethnicity and the Civil Rights Movement in Indonesia,” in *Civil Society in Southeast Asia*, ed. Hock-Guan Lee (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), pp. 217–33.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Pandiangan, “The Chinese Press after the New Order: Caught between the Continuity of Idealism and the Logic of the Market,” *Asian Ethnicity* 4,3 (October 2003): 401–19; Chang-Yau Hoon, “Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Hybridity: The Dilemmas of the Ethnic Chinese in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” *Asian Ethnicity* 7, 2 (June 2006): 149–66.

<sup>9</sup> I am referring especially to the following articles in *Asian Ethnicity*, 4,3 (October 2003): Susan Giblin, “Overcoming Stereotypes: Chinese-Indonesian Civil Society Groups in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” pp. 353–68; Judith Nagata, “Local and Transnational Initiatives towards Improving Chinese-Indigenous Relations in Post-Suharto Indonesia: The Role of the Voluntary Sector,” pp. 369–81; Sarah Turner, “Speaking Out: Chinese-Indonesians After Suharto,” pp. 337–52.

<sup>10</sup> Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese* (London: Routledge, 2001); Hoon, “Assimilation, Multiculturalism, Hybridity”; Jamie Mackie, “Thinking About the Chinese Overseas,” *Asian American Review* 21,4 (Winter 2003): 1–44.

non-Chinese alike.<sup>11</sup> After May 1998, Heryanto notes that, among Chinese-Indonesians, the tendency to conceive of ethnicity as essentialist is still alive and well, but there is a new element in assertions of Chinese-ness, i.e., Indonesian nationalism: "It is not enough for the ethnic minority to be legitimately Chinese within Indonesia's ethnic diversity; they seek to demonstrate how legitimately Indonesian they are as members of an ethnic minority."<sup>12</sup> Such claims about the legitimacy of Chinese ethnicity within Indonesia nationalism, Heryanto opines, have not resulted in a recognition of the legacy of nation-building in Indonesia or a redefinition of identity as always a "work-in-progress."

What has been left out of this resinicization debate is the issue of signification, that is, consideration of the specific signifiers analysts *read* to interpret "Chinese-ness." Implicit in the terms of debate framing this discussion is an unspoken assumption about the seemingly transparent relationship between language and ethnic identity. Thus, the reemergence of the Chinese language after thirty years is conveniently interpreted as a sign of the revival of Chinese-ness. This is problematic not least because the Chinese language in Indonesia is currently the object of much ideological work undertaken by some groups of Chinese-Indonesians themselves. Any analytical work should therefore take into consideration such efforts and not simply interpret them in a bid to prove or disprove the actuality of resinicization as a sociological phenomenon. Moreover, since too little critical attention has been focused on the issue of signification, the workings of a language ideology underpinning influential scholarship in Chinese-Indonesian studies remain obscured. This situation needs to be interrogated as well.

Language ideologies can be understood as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use."<sup>13</sup> To elaborate further, following Kathryn Woolard,

... ideologies of language are *not* about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling, and law.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars who examine linguistic ideologies productive of these multiple linkages are disinclined to assume an inevitable connection between language and identity, and, instead, are able to demonstrate the historicity of these linkages, which show identity formation to be a "work-in-progress." The study of language ideologies is especially

<sup>11</sup> Ariel Heryanto, "Ethnic Identities and Erasure: Chinese-Indonesians in Public Culture," in *Southeast Asian Identities*, ed. Joel Kahn (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998), pp. 95–114.

<sup>12</sup> Ariel Heryanto, "Remembering and Dismembering Indonesia," *Latitudes* 1 (February 2001): 10–15. See also Ariel Heryanto, *State Terrorism and Political Identity*.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Paul Kroskrity, "Regimenting Languages," p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Kathryn A. Woolard, "Introduction: Language Ideology as a Field of Inquiry," in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, ed. Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul Kroskrity (New York, NY, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 1.

fruitful in complex multilingual situations, as it enables scholars to steer away from simplistic conclusions about language usage and identity formation.<sup>15</sup>

Some of these insights about language ideologies have also surfaced in studies on diasporic Chinese communities. Here, recent scholarship has usefully warned against the instinct to correlate language and ethnic identity. Rather than treat language as a transparent indicator of the presence or absence of “Chinese” attributes, scholars now recognize that “language has always been a central problematic in the politics of diaspora.”<sup>16</sup> The theorist Ien Ang challenges the tight language–identity nexus when she ponders the gap between her inability to speak Chinese and the expectation that, as a person who “looks Chinese” and who can claim some Chinese (Indonesian) ancestry, she should speak the language.<sup>17</sup> In her ethnography on the Chinese in Panama, Lok Siu demonstrates how unevenness in Chinese language fluency is utilized in a variety of settings in Panama to mark social differences.<sup>18</sup> Such issues are not only relevant to studies of diasporic Chinese speakers or communities, but to academia as well. Rey Chow questions the practice of labeling Chinese dialects as sub-branches of the Chinese language in Chinese Studies programs in North America, a practice that refuses to treat Chinese “dialects” as proper languages. The “sub” status of Chinese dialects, she argues, devalues them as sources of authentic Chinese-ness and is authorized by an unspoken linkage between the Mandarin Chinese or Beijing dialect and the Chinese script.<sup>19</sup>

The contemporary revival of the Chinese language in post-1998 Indonesia reflects this academic discrimination between “standard” Mandarin Chinese and “substandard” Chinese dialects. Among groups of Chinese language-school alumni, Mandarin Chinese is accepted unquestionably as the standard Chinese language. Despite the fact that a variety of Chinese dialects are still in use by the heterogeneous minority community in Indonesia, alumni groups are invested in promoting oral and written proficiency in Mandarin Chinese *only*. In this article, the term “the Chinese language” thus refers exclusively to both the oral and written forms of Mandarin Chinese that have been transformed by the alumni groups into a vehicle for ethnic identification in contemporary Indonesia. The language ideology of the Chinese-educated restricts public discussion about language and Chinese-ness in the country. This prevailing ideology has led to occlusions in public discourse: an absence of discussion about the status and fate of the different “substandard” Chinese dialects and their impact on ethnic Chinese identity; an absence of critical interest in the statist project of standardizing the Chinese language by prescribing Mandarin Chinese as the national standard in mainland China; and, above all, too little study of the transposition of that statist project and its uneven effects in Indonesia’s multilingual environment, effects that have been evident since the turn of the twentieth century. The latter is the subject examined in the next section. Here, I note that these occlusions

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See also Patrick Eisenlohr, *Little India: Diaspora, Time, and Ethnolinguistic Belonging in Hindu Mauritius* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> C. D. Lok Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Cultural Citizenship of the Chinese in Panama* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 78.

<sup>17</sup> Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*, pp. 21–36.

<sup>18</sup> Siu, *Memories of a Future Home*, pp. 72–74.

<sup>19</sup> Rey Chow, “Introduction: On Chinese as a Theoretical Problem,” *Boundary 2* 25,3 (1998): 1–24.

in public discourse have not only homogenized the notion of “the Chinese language,” they have also resulted in deeply held beliefs centering on the ahistorical equation between language and identity. The alumni groups therefore understand “identity” as inhering in one’s ancestry, and assume that Mandarin Chinese is the ancestral language of Chinese-Indonesians and that this language defines their ethnic and cultural authenticity. From their perspective, the New Order regime had deprived Chinese-Indonesians of their right to inherit their ancestral language and culture, which they are now seeking to reclaim.

It is tempting to dismiss the alumni’s preoccupation with the Chinese language as counterproductive to the radical reconceptualization of ethnic identity in Indonesia and elsewhere that many scholars have envisioned. I am cognizant of this temptation, and before launching fully into a discussion of language ideology in Chinese-Indonesian studies, I want to state at the outset that I am not arguing that an older group of Chinese-Indonesians are “resinicizing” themselves or that they are in the vanguard of a resinicization phenomenon in post-1998 Indonesia. I do not regard the pre-1967 alumni and their current preoccupation with promoting the Chinese language as harbingers of ethnic revivalism. Quite the opposite. I want to emphasize the reworking of identity, even for a group of Chinese-Indonesians whose affinity with the language appears so evident and natural that it is taken for granted by purportedly objective third-party observers in academia.

One manifestation of the implicit workings of a language ideology in Chinese-Indonesian studies is the *Peranakan* and *Totok* Chinese typology. The terms “*Peranakan*” Chinese and “*Totok*” Chinese have become a common fixture in any writing on Chinese-Indonesians, most noticeably in the sections reviewing current literature. In everyday usage in the country, the term *Peranakan* Chinese refers to local-born Chinese descended from a mix of Chinese and native ancestors, whereas *Totok* Chinese literally means “pure-blooded Chinese” and refers to that part of the community with “pure Chinese” ancestry. While these identity labels are drawn from the folk knowledge of Java’s Chinese communities, what is notable about the two terms is the way they constitute a sociological typology of Chinese identities in the whole of Indonesia, as William Skinner has shown. Based on a complex number of factors, including place of birth, the period when one’s ancestors migrated to Indonesia, the impact of official colonial policy on one’s family, the family’s religion, the attractiveness of indigenous cultural systems, and the primary language used in the family,<sup>20</sup> Chinese communities in Indonesia, Skinner argues, can be categorized into two main groups—*Peranakan* and *Totok* Chinese:

It may be stated as a general rule that if a given area of Indonesia was settled by Chinese in appreciable numbers prior to this century, Chinese society there is in some degree dichotomous today. In one sector of the society, adults as well as children are Indonesia-born, the orientation toward China is attenuated, and the influence of indigenous culture is apparent. In the other sector of the society, the population consists of twentieth-century immigrants and their immediate

<sup>20</sup> William Skinner presented a more complete argument on the significance of these factors in a much later piece in 1996. See William Skinner, “Creolized Chinese Societies in Southeast Asia,” in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese*, ed. Anthony Reid (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Asian Studies of Australia in association with Allen and Unwin, 1996), pp. 51–93.

descendents, who are less acculturated and more strongly oriented towards China.<sup>21</sup>

Skinner conceptualized the *Peranakan–Totok* typology based primarily on his research about Java's Chinese communities in the 1950s and 1960s. However, he argues that *all* Chinese communities in Indonesia can be placed along a continuum depending on the extent to which their socio-cultural systems manifest "indigenous" or "purely Chinese" characteristics. Chinese communities in Indonesia may, therefore, be arranged on "a gradient according to the degree of indigenous influence in their synthesized culture."<sup>22</sup> Java's *Peranakan* Chinese communities, he surmises, occupy one end of this gradient, as they are the most acculturated or assimilated group in Indonesia, while communities like those of the Chinese from Bagan Siapi-api on Sumatra, who continue to speak in their respective dialects, belong to the opposite end of this continuum.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, Skinner's continuum is his Java-centered *Peranakan–Totok* typology writ large.

Among the numerous factors shaping the extent to which the Chinese are acculturated, language has assumed singular importance in definitions of *Peranakan* and *Totok* Chinese. Scholars, including sometimes Skinner himself, tend to privilege the language criterion; specifically, they identify the loss of what is perceived as the Chinese language and dialects as the major characteristic identifying Chinese-Indonesians who have acculturated themselves, whereas the preservation of the language would indicate greater preservation of Chinese-ness. Scholars Charles Coppel and Leo Suryadinata have noted this scholarly consensus regarding the importance of language in the field. Coppel, for instance, cites Willmott's and Heidhues's definitions of acculturated *Peranakan* Chinese as examples. Willmott writes that "the distinguishing mark of a *Peranakan* is his inability to speak one of the dialects of China's coastal provinces," while Heidhues states that "local-born persons are not called 'Peranakan' if their mother tongue is a Chinese language, no matter in what other ways they may be acculturated to the indigenous way of life."<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, Suryadinata adds that "the most important characteristic trait of *Peranakans* is considered to be the use of Bahasa Indonesia (the Indonesian national language) or an Indonesian dialect as their mother tongue."<sup>25</sup> Coppel and Suryadinata have critiqued this language-biased definition of acculturated Chinese, questioning its empirical applicability to Chinese communities outside Java and noting its inability to account for changes in identification patterns that have taken place in recent years.<sup>26</sup> Empirical applicability aside, what needs highlighting is the language ideology underpinning this influential sociological typology. At issue here is not simply empirical accuracy, but the sociological and historical imagination of the academy. Setting up this

<sup>21</sup> William Skinner, "The Chinese Minority," in *Indonesia*, ed. Ruth McVey (New Haven, CT: Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 1963), pp. 103–4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Charles Coppel, *Studying Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia* (Singapore: Singapore Association of Asian Studies, 2002), p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> Leo Suryadinata, "Ethnic and National Identities of the Chinese in Indonesia: A Re-examination," *Asian Culture* 26 (June 2002): 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, and Coppel, *Studying Ethnic Chinese.*"

language-biased definition of dual ideal-types has limited the ways scholars in the field explain changes in Chinese-Indonesian identities. The *Peranakan-Totok* typology imposes and encourages the idea of unilineal identity shifts between two polar opposites—from Chinese to Indonesian (or back, as in the case of resinicization)—based on normative assumptions about ethnolinguistic identification, a logic that leaves us with few explanatory devices other than convenient notions of “cultural attenuation” or “preservation.”<sup>27</sup> It is easy, then, to slip into understanding the promotion of the Chinese language as a regressive phenomenon and to underestimate its productive potential for identity formation.

Moreover, much of the already substantial scholarship exploring the language-identity nexus in Indonesian studies has ignored the patterns of Chinese language usage within Indonesia’s Chinese minority. This scholarship has focused mainly on examining the establishment of Bahasa Indonesia as the authoritative language of the nation. Scholars have pointed out that the Indonesian case is unique since Bahasa Indonesia is neither the language of the majority ethnic group, which is Javanese, nor is it perceived as the mother tongue of any ethnic group in particular.<sup>28</sup> They have investigated further how its “non-native” and “second-language” properties have given rise to a notion of “regional language” (Bahasa Daerah), which permits the numerous and diverse languages of the archipelago to be safely encompassed within the Indonesian nation-state, with implications for cultural practices and identity politics at the local level.<sup>29</sup> As for the Chinese minority, scholars agree that the exclusion from Bahasa Indonesia and its literary canon of a variant of Malay and Malay-language literature that the Chinese had helped develop during the colonial period was a key event in the making of the national language via techniques of standardization.<sup>30</sup> However, other than note the displacement of the Chinese from Indonesian linguistic nationalism, few scholars have ventured to investigate how this displacement has had an impact on identity formation among Chinese-Indonesians.<sup>31</sup> Despite the multilingual character of the Chinese minority, and New Order stigmatization of the Chinese language as a threatening “foreign” tongue, scholars working on Indonesia remain bound by the nationalist imagination undergirding area

<sup>27</sup> In relation to scholarship on the Chinese in the Philippines, Caroline Hau has critiqued the notion of unilineal “identity shift” from “China-centeredness” to “Philippine-centeredness.” See Caroline Hau, “The Question of Foreigners: Bai Ren’s *Nanyang Piauoliuji* and the Re/making of Chinese and Philippine Nation-ness,” in *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict Anderson*, ed. James T. Siegel and Audrey R. Kahin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2003), pp. 189–22.

<sup>28</sup> James Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Joseph Errington, “Indonesian(s) Authority,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, pp. 205–27; Webb Keane, “Public Speaking: On Indonesian as the Language of the Nation,” *Public Culture* 15,3 (2003): 503–30.

<sup>29</sup> Philip Yampolsky, “Forces for Change in the Regional Performing Arts of Indonesia,” in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 151 (1995): 700–25; Webb Keane, “Knowing One’s Place: National Language and the Idea of the Local in Eastern Indonesia,” in *Cultural Anthropology* 12,1 (February 1997): 37–63; and Joseph Errington, “Indonesian(s) Development: On the State of a Language of State,” in *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory*, pp. 271–84.

<sup>30</sup> M. J. Hendrik Maier, “From Heteroglossia to Polyglossia: The Creation of Malay and Dutch in the Indies,” in *Indonesia* 56 (October 1993): 37–66; M. J. Hendrik Maier, “Forms of Censorship in the Dutch East Indies: The Marginalization of Chinese-Malay Literature in Indonesia,” in *Indonesia*, Special Issue (July 1991): 67–82; Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*; Keane, “On Indonesian as the Language of the Nation.”

<sup>31</sup> Keane, “On Indonesian as the Language of the Nation,” p. 514.

studies. No scholar has ventured to examine the history of the Chinese language in Indonesia nor investigated its implications for identity formation among Chinese-Indonesians. I suggest that, instead of dismissing the attempt of pre-1967 alumni to reconfigure the relationship between the Chinese language, ethnicity, and nationalist identification because this project disappoints scholarly hopes for a more radical critique, we should turn our attention to this project and recognize that it provides a valuable opportunity to open a new area of inquiry.

### A History of Chinese-Language Education in Jakarta

To better appreciate the formation of a collective identity around the Chinese language during the post-1998 period, we need to situate the contemporary moment in Indonesian history and explore the changing role of the language in a multilingual environment, beginning from its use in Batavia at the turn of the twentieth century. The bulk of the materials showcased in this article were collected in two field trips to Jakarta between September 2003 and March 2004 and a shorter one-month stay between December 2004 and January 2005. Between April 2003 and August 2003, research and interviews were also conducted in Singapore. Jakarta is a suitable place to begin a critical reflection on the history of Chinese-language education in Indonesia. It is widely regarded by scholars and Chinese-Indonesians as a prominent center where prestigious Chinese schools congregated during the colonial and immediate post-World War Two periods, up until the official language ban in 1967.<sup>32</sup> Three of the most reputable Chinese middle schools in the country were located in Jakarta. These were: the Batavian Tiong Hwa Hwe Koan School, the Batavia Middle School (Bacheng Zhongxue), and the Chinese Middle School (Zhonghua Zhongxue), known locally by their abbreviated Chinese names as *Pa Hoa*, *Bazhong*, and *Huazhong*, respectively. The reputation of these schools appears to have taken some knocks during the post-1998 period. These days, alumni in Jakarta do not always regard the promotion of Chinese-language education in the capital city as exemplary or extraordinary. Many, in fact, regard Chinese-language education in nearby Tangerang (West Java), Surabaya (East Java), and West Kalimantan as better organized and more successful than that in Jakarta. They especially praise the efforts of the Chinese in Surabaya, referring invariably to that fact that, in May 2003, Surabaya preceded Jakarta, the nation's capital, in hosting a nationwide conference on Chinese-language education in Indonesia. In interviews and conversations with Chinese-language teachers, those teachers often identified Chinese-language education in Surabaya as an exemplar that the Jakartan Chinese should emulate. Current developments in Chinese-language education in Jakarta are by no means a Jakarta-centered phenomenon, but are happening in other parts of Indonesia as well.

In addition, Jakarta is a suitable site for this study because, as scholars such as Lea Williams have pointed out, a chain of Chinese elementary schools was established throughout the Dutch East Indies, beginning in Batavia in 1901, and this development can be seen as the origin of modern Chinese-language education.<sup>33</sup> According to

<sup>32</sup> Leo Suryadinata, "Indonesian Chinese Education: Past and Present" in *Indonesia* 14 (October 1972): 49–71.

<sup>33</sup> Claudine Salmon points the way to an alternative perspective on the modernizing efforts of Indies Chinese at the turn of the twentieth century with her examination of earlier reformist efforts undertaken

Williams, the emergence of modern Chinese-language education in the Indies blazed the trail for a larger cultural nationalist movement aimed at modernizing the Chinese community in the colony. Batavia in 1901 also marks an important beginning point since an essential component of a modernized Chinese-language education agenda is the introduction of Mandarin Chinese as the standard form of the language in the Indies. Leo Suryadinata observes that, from 1901 onwards, Mandarin Chinese, then known as *Tjeng Im* (meaning the “correct tone or sound”), was introduced and taught as *Guoyu*, literally the “national language,” in these elementary schools.<sup>34</sup> The introduction of Mandarin Chinese under the rubric of a “national language” bore traces of the statist project of standardizing the language that was then unfolding in continental China. Like their counterparts elsewhere in Southeast Asia before World War Two, schools founded by the different Chinese dialect groups in the Indies would sometimes teach the Chinese script using the Chinese dialects. Yet this resort to the use of dialect was perceived as a temporary measure, one that would suffice until students became fluent in Mandarin. The schools’ commitment to teaching Mandarin reflected the nationalistic pedagogical and ideological agendas that typically advocated linguistic standardization. However, in Indonesia, the introduction of Mandarin Chinese and the standardization of the Chinese language took place in a multilingual Indies environment that failed to generate a uniform Chinese identity after the turn of the twentieth century. Suryadinata, for example, notes the heavy experimentation with a bilingual Chinese-English curriculum in the early schools founded in Batavia.<sup>35</sup> More recently, James Siegel has elaborated on the identity dilemmas engendered by this early resinicization attempt, which was motivated by long-distance Chinese nationalism. Paying particular attention to the fact that the main vehicle of expressions of Chinese-ness in the 1900s was Malay—the nonstandard *lingua franca* in the Indies—Siegel has called this hybridized phenomenon “Sino-Malay nationalism.”<sup>36</sup> The choice of Malay, Siegel argues, had serious implications for the Chinese. By “abandoning” the more obvious languages, such as Chinese, Dutch, or even Javanese, and using Malay, the language of the market, to articulate Chinese-ness, Indies Chinese were left with the dilemma of

... developing a “national identity” in a place that was not “Chinese,” culturally, politically, or geographically, within an institution—the market—whose

---

by the Chinese in Surabaya in the 1880s. Her work on the Chinese in Surabaya has the potential to revise our understanding of Batavia as the origin of the modernization movement in Indonesia. See Claudine Salmon, “Confucianists and Revolutionaries in Surabaya (c1880–c1906),” in *Chinese-Indonesians: Remembering, Distorting, Forgetting*, ed. Tim Lindsey and Helen Pausacker (Singapore: ISEAS, 2005), pp. 130–47. For further reading, see also, Lea Williams, *Overseas Chinese Nationalism: The Genesis of the Pan-Chinese Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1916* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960); Claudine Salmon, “Le Sjair De ‘L’Association Chinoise’ De Batavia,” in *Archipel* 2 (1971): 55–100; Mona Lohanda, *Growing Pains: The Chinese and the Dutch in Colonial Java, 1890–1942* (Jakarta: Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2002); Ming Govaars-Tjia, *Dutch Colonial Education: The Chinese Experience in Indonesia, 1900–1942*, translated from Dutch by Lore Lynn Trytten (Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Leo Suryadinata, “Indonesian Chinese Education,” p. 53.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

<sup>36</sup> For an account and analysis of “Sino-Malay nationalism,” see Siegel, *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution*, pp. 115–33.

characteristic it is to mediate between different peoples, and with a language—*lingua franca*—that did the same.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the “fickleness” of this *lingua franca* thwarted Chinese attempts at self-validation.

Siegel’s analysis exemplifies the neglect of Chinese-Indonesian identity formation, and of the checkered history of local engagement with the Chinese language in the Indies, that has typified scholarship over the last century. While Siegel appreciates the hybrid elements in Chinese-Indonesian identity, his analysis misses how expressions of Sino-Malay nationalism routinely *misrecognized* the unifying and mediating value of Malay, even as it was used to disseminate and popularize messages of Chinese-ness. Instead, the Chinese language was elevated by Chinese in the Indies as *the* symbolic marker of identity. As languages that mediated and thus helped to form group identities, Malay and Chinese were valued in different ways at different sites. If Malay had value as a *lingua franca* in the market, the Chinese language was seen as the language of ethnic authenticity, appropriate to be taught and acquired, and as an essential element of formalistic instruction in schools.<sup>38</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, as discussions in Malay on language, education, progress, identity, and Chinese-ness filled page after page of newsprint, the symbolism attached to the Chinese language as the most meaningful marker of Chinese identity, and the struggle to live up to the prescribed symbolism embedded in the language, was unmistakable. Chinese readers and writers filled their Malay-language newspapers with long, passionate, and oftentimes controversial articles about which (Dutch, Malay, or Chinese?) language they should adopt for educating their children in schools. Historians who have written on this long-standing and inconclusive debate point out that schools teaching in Malay were most unpopular with Chinese parents and students.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, while schools instructing in Dutch were sought after by the wealthy, even the best of the Dutch-educated Chinese struggled to compensate for their apparent loss in Chinese literacy by launching all sorts of campaigns, schemes, and plans to “reacquire” the language, inviting accusations of hypocrisy in the process.<sup>40</sup> For instance, in 1927, an organization of Dutch-educated Chinese-Indonesian youths drew up an ambitious plan to turn Mandarin Chinese into the daily language of all Chinese inhabitants. It declared that “all Chinese businesses, companies, and other Chinese establishments would be requested to require their employees to speak Chinese after January 1, 1930.”<sup>41</sup> Nothing changed after that date. Sometime in mid-

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>38</sup> Siew-Min Sai, “Representing the Past of Chinese Language Education: Language, History, and Chinese Identities in Indonesia” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2006), pp. 222–52.

<sup>39</sup> Some statistics would provide a rough gauge. In a survey on education for Javanese Chinese published by a major Sino-Malay newspaper, *Sin Po*, in 1934, 45,000 children were listed as enrolled in schools instructing in Chinese, while 23,353 children were enrolled in Dutch-medium schools. The latter number was later contested by a local physician, Dr. Loe Ping Kian, in 1936. By combining enrollment in Malay-medium and Dutch-medium schools, Dr. Loe estimated that the number of students enrolled in non-Chinese-medium schools should be about 53,000. Making his own calculations, Leo Suryadinata argues that Loe’s figure was too high. Suryadinata estimates that the numbers in Chinese-medium schools and Dutch-medium schools were at least equally matched. See Leo Suryadinata, “Indonesian Chinese Education,” pp. 61–62.

<sup>40</sup> Govaars-Tjia, *Dutch Colonial Experience*, pp. 173–203.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

1931, the same organization announced, "Chinese lessons will begin soon. We dare not make any prediction on this subject."<sup>42</sup>

There were countless examples of such embarrassing attempts, and newspaper writers and readers were often very harsh on fellow compatriots and their own community. Name-calling, furious exchanges of letters, long treatises on the state of language education, and self-flagellating commentaries suggesting all sorts of "Chinese" social ills, which were allegedly responsible for the writers' failure to learn the language, followed by more "improved" proposals for effectively teaching Chinese, formed a veritable paper trail in the wake of these failed attempts. The point is not that the Chinese language was truly negligible, or that the Chinese community was simply too complexly multilingual and hybrid during this period. The situation confronted by the Chinese underscored the necessity of taking into account how social practices that contributed to the formation of identity were mediated intensely by language ideologies. Malay was unable to provide self-validation for the Chinese not only by virtue of it being a loose *lingua franca*. The construction of the Chinese language and its inscription as the language of the Chinese in Sino-Malay nationalism was a key element in disabling Malay as "the language of our people." One consequence of the community's active attempts to rank these languages as relatively more or less valuable was, ironically, multilingualism. Nevertheless, the character of Chinese multilingualism during the late colonial period did not express a triumphant sense of cosmopolitanism or happy hybridity. On the contrary, one detects deep confusion, distress, and crisis permeating discourses on language instruction, education, and identity in Sino-Malay presses, and these proliferated wildly in the 1920s and 1930s. For the Chinese in Java during the late-colonial period, the multilingual situation was a cause of deep angst, at the root of which was the inability to validate oneself, whether in Malay or in Chinese.

These dilemmas concerned with identity formation were further sharpened and aggravated during the post-war period. Between 1945 and 1967, Chinese-language education was inextricably implicated in nation-state building processes unfolding simultaneously in Indonesia and China. For governments in the new Indonesian and Chinese nation-states, differentiating between "citizens" and "non-citizens" among Chinese residents in Indonesia, and subjecting citizens to and excluding non-citizens from a national education system, constituted crucial exercises in the demonstration of national sovereignty and identification. In Indonesia, the main battle lines were drawn between Left-inclined groups that advanced the proposal to integrate the Chinese minority into the Indonesian Republic through allowing the retention of Chinese culture, including the Chinese language, and Right-wing groups that advocated complete assimilation of Chinese-Indonesians. At the same time, Chinese schools in Indonesia were drawn into the political and military conflict between the Nationalist and Communist parties in China. Schools were segregated politically and ideologically into "pro-Taipei" as opposed to "pro-Beijing" schools. Within the limits set by the Indonesian Education Ministry, schools employed staff, adopted the curricula, abided by educational policies, and used textbooks approved by the respective Chinese governments they supported. These highly politicized contests over language and

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

national identification were forcibly resolved with the inauguration of New Order Indonesia and its language ban.

Post-World War Two politicization of Chinese-language education was thus a formative experience for alumni groups who came of age between 1945 and 1967. To the extent that possession of some Chinese-language education has shaped their personal lives, alumni from Chinese language schools have not been wholly formed by the New Order regime, even as they have lived within its embrace. They have lived through the pre-1967 period, *before* the Assimilation Program and prejudice against the Chinese language was institutionalized as official policy. However, their pre-1967 experiences have been unavoidably recast by the New Order's discriminatory language ideology. Active New Order cultivation of a cultural hegemony that alienated the Chinese language from legitimate notions of Indonesian national identity stigmatized this group's literacy in Chinese, turning it into negative cultural equity. Thus transformed, the Chinese language served as the most visible material index of their experiences of a pre-1967 past that, after 1998, quickly became a focal point of their identity-making efforts. Far from testifying to the applicability of the notion of cultural attenuation or preservation, this brief history of the Chinese language in Jakarta and Indonesia underscores the need for more critical attention to be paid to the fluidity of the relationships among language, ethnic identity, and nationalism at specific moments.

### **On the Chinese-Language Public Space in Post-1998 Jakarta**

The Chinese-language "public" is a discursive space defined by the circulation of texts conveyed through communicative acts carried out primarily in the Chinese language. Events, such as the first workshop on Chinese-language education in Jakarta, comprise one site of this public space where organizers and audiences are drawn by the appeal of a common issue that addresses them directly as members of a social collectivity. I use Michael Warner's conceptualization of "publics" rather than the more conventional Habermasian notion of the public sphere. Warner and others have argued that the Habermasian public sphere embeds the idea of dialogue or conversation among individuals, which assumes too much about the capacity of persons to engage in rational and informed exchange. More significantly, the image of individuals talking to one another obfuscates a key dimension of how publics work, that is, through circulation of texts in and through time.<sup>43</sup> Several of Warner's insights about the characteristics of publics and how they work resonate with my observations about how a public anchored by the Chinese language and a specific language ideology is emerging in Jakarta. The crux of Warner's argument is that publics are self-organized around *the address*. "A public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic; it exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast ... speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists *by virtue of being addressed*."<sup>44</sup> Relative to the Chinese population in Jakarta, the Chinese-language public is peopled and dominated by a minority of Chinese-Indonesians who are literate in the Chinese language. What is striking is how this public is organized

<sup>43</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67 (emphasis in original).

around a self-conscious generational self. For instance, in the Chinese-language print media, terms referencing generational identity include “those fifty years and above,” “those born in the 1940s and 1950s,” or, more explicitly, “we, the generation who had been educated in Chinese-language schools,” and its abbreviated form, “alumni from Chinese schools” (*huayou*). Self-referential in nature, these terms name at once the public identity of the speaker and/or writer and that of the audience and/or readers. Chinese-Indonesians born before 1950 in this address count as “one generation” in this public. It is also commonplace to hear about or read labels differentiating this generation from younger generations, such as “those thirty-years or forty-years old and younger.” Called into being performatively, the self-referential “We, the Chinese-educated generation” is the meaningful address of the Chinese-language public.

If publics are a particular form of a modern social *imaginary*, it does not mean that publics are fake and devoid of sociological significance. Publics are not purely textual things. Warner discusses the social character of publics using the term “circulation” in two ways. First, there is the circulation of discourse and texts in a public, which takes place through and in time, thereby creating an intertextual, even intergeneric, environment of citation and implication: “publics have an ongoing life; one doesn’t publish to them once and for all ... It is the way texts circulate, and become the basis for further representations, that convinces us that publics have activity and duration.”<sup>45</sup> Second, there is the kind of circulation that creates an addressee who is both “real” in the social sense and potentially transformative in the performative sense. Insofar as circulating texts in a public bring into being the postulated object of address, this process enables what Warner calls the “poetic world-making” function of publics.<sup>46</sup> In Jakarta, much is made of the transformative power held by the Chinese-educated generation. The creation of historical consciousness and agency evocatively described in Jakarta’s Chinese-language public as “*lishi shiming*” (historical mission) is a highly relevant point. As they resurrect the history of Chinese-language education and reorient language training towards a flexible trilingual (i.e., Chinese, Indonesian, English) future in Indonesia, the Chinese-educated generation is writing itself as *the* historical agent of a particular historical trajectory, in effect, the Subject of their own history.

When I first arrived in Jakarta in September 2003, alumni from formerly banned Chinese-language schools were establishing alumni organizations with such speed and intensity that many observers remarked cynically about how it had become such a mindless fad. Much to my disappointment, I discovered it was especially difficult to schedule meetings and interviews during the weekends because of the flurry of activities organized by these alumni groups. Activities alumni groups organized consisted of reunion gatherings for different graduating batches or for the school as a whole, anniversary celebrations of their schools’ founding, celebrations of Chinese festivals such as the Chinese New Year, and public lectures and discussion seminars on Chinese-language education, as well as seminars and training courses for the current corps of Chinese-language teachers in Jakarta.

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

To gather for a reunion was an especially popular type of social activity. On these occasions, it was striking how the Chinese language was used as the main, or at least one of the main, ceremonial languages. Chinese was typically the main language of communication between the Master of Ceremonies, host/hostess or organizers, and the audience. In October 2003, when I attended the reunion of the Zhenqiang School, a former primary and junior-middle school in Jakarta, the audience was addressed in both Chinese and Indonesian. This, I later learned, was also common practice for alumni groups such as *Pa Hoa*. They wished to include in their activities younger alumni as well as the younger family members of alumni whose grasp of Chinese might be weak. However, during occasions such as lectures, talks, workshops, and seminar discussions targeted at teachers currently teaching the Chinese language, only Chinese was used between speakers and audience. On these occasions, the tendency to use Chinese even in casual conversations among friends and members of the audience was obvious. At all the events I attended, the Chinese-Indonesian Master of Ceremonies and/or speakers had no problems delivering entire speeches or sustaining discussions in the Chinese language. The use of Chinese as the language of communication and instruction, as well as the ceremonial language, during activities organized by alumni organizations created an arena of social interaction mediated predominantly by Chinese.

In Jakarta, almost all the members of the alumni organizations I met were eager to reconnect with Chinese. Several of the people I interviewed demonstrated keen interest in promoting the language, while the well-funded alumni groups had proposed and initiated programs to teach Chinese. For example, from July 2002 onwards, the *Pa Hoa* alumni group responded to a request by Kampung Sadangan, a small Chinese-Indonesian farming village in the Parung Pinang District in Bogor, to sponsor Chinese-language classes for their residents. By 2003, alumni from *Huazhong* who were already managing private Indonesian-language national schools had introduced Chinese-language classes in their regular school curricula. In 2003, the *Huazhong* and *Bazhong* alumni groups also held training classes over the course of several months for Chinese-language teachers.

Apart from forming and participating in alumni organizations, students and teachers of Chinese-language schools were typically active leaders and members in non-alumni type groups, such as associations formed on the basis of shared dialects or hometown affiliations in Indonesia and China. Like alumni organizations, these associations were running Chinese-language classes for which the students paid tuition and organizing talks, lectures, workshops, and seminars about the language. In January 2004, a group of alumni, mostly former teachers, took the lead in establishing a Coordinating Body for Mandarin Language Education in Jakarta (Asosiasi Lembaga Pengajar Bahasa Mandarin).<sup>47</sup> As its name suggests, its leaders did not intend this

---

<sup>47</sup> This “coordinating body” was one of the first groups established by the Chinese in Jakarta immediately following May 1998. The initiative was led by alumni from *Pa Hoa*. In June 1998, a group of *Pa Hoa* alumni held a meeting and agreed that two groups should be formed to reach out to the Chinese community in Jakarta. One of these groups should focus on helping alumni from former Chinese-language schools, while the other would be a nonpolitical umbrella organization that would seek to unify Chinese-Indonesians. The former group evolved to become the Coordinating Body of Alumni in Jakarta; the latter group grew to become the now famous and expansive Indonesia-wide Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia (Indonesian Chinese Social Association), better known by its Indonesian acronym, “PSMTI.” The direct

association to function as a centrifugal institution. For the diverse groups in Jakarta sharing an interest in promoting and teaching Chinese, this organization served mainly as a forum for inter-group communication and cooperation.

The frequency and intensity of activities organized by students and teachers of the formerly banned Chinese schools—reunions, talks, lectures, workshops, and classes—leave us with a sense of “the real path for the circulation of discourse.”<sup>48</sup> However, not unexpectedly for these alumni, collective identity is enacted most vicariously in the Chinese-language print media. Table 1 (below) provides a list of popular titles circulating in Jakarta’s Chinese-language public. In order to sketch a tightly connected, intertextual environment, I have refrained from providing an exhaustive list.<sup>49</sup> The titles on this list refer to publications that circulate in Jakarta; they are easily available on a daily basis in Jakarta and were frequently cited, discussed, or mentioned by my interviewees and acquaintances. In addition to Chinese-language newspapers and magazines published for profit, alumni groups and organizations also publish their own non-profit in-house magazines. *Media Aspirations (Hu Sheng)*, for instance, is the official magazine of the Coordinating Body of Alumni in Jakarta. The *Pa Hoa*, *Huazhong*, and *Bazhong* alumni organizations all publish in-house bulletins and magazines for their members. Essays and articles that appeared in these in-house magazines were not read exclusively by members of the respective alumni groups. It was common practice for *The International Daily News* to reprint articles and letters from these publications. Readers may respond to articles carried in *The International Daily News* by writing not only to the daily, but to these in-house magazines as well, and vice versa. *The International Daily News* is headed by Chief Editor Lee Cho-Hui, who is himself a former Chinese-language teacher and a graduate of Jakarta’s Chinese schools. This is the largest Chinese-language daily in Indonesia and the main local newspaper widely read and subscribed to by Jakartan Chinese literate in the language. On account of my interest in Chinese-language education, I was constantly reminded to refer to its numerous articles and reports on the topic. Indeed, Chief Editor Lee counts himself an authority on the subject, having published a book compiled from articles he had published in the daily.<sup>50</sup> Several of my interviewees have also written articles for or are regular contributors to this newspaper. In this regard, *The International Daily News* is an important mouthpiece for alumni of former Chinese schools in Jakarta and Indonesia.

Dawis notes that of all the Chinese-language periodicals, *The International Daily News* is by far the most widely read. Figures released by the newspaper show that circulation figures have increased from 20,000 in 2002 to 50,000 in 2007.<sup>51</sup> In a public

---

role played by *Pa Hoa*’s alumni in establishing PSMTI is not widely known in Jakarta and the rest of Indonesia, but is documented in the organization’s newsletter.

<sup>48</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 92.

<sup>49</sup> Readers may refer to Pandiangan, “Chinese Press after the New Order,” and Chang-Yau Hoon, “A Hundred Flowers Bloom: The Re-emergence of the Chinese Press in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” in *Media and the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. Sun Wanning (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), pp. 91–118, for more complete lists of titles.

<sup>50</sup> Cho-Hui Lee, *Yingjie Luodishenggeng Shidai: Yinni Huaren Jiaoyu Wenhua Shi* [Welcoming the Era of Putting Down Roots in Indonesia: Historical Essays on Culture and Education of Chinese-Indonesians] (Jakarta: Liantong Bookstore, 2003).

<sup>51</sup> Aimee Dawis, “Chinese Education in Indonesia: Developments in the Post-1998 Era,” in *Ethnic Chinese in Contemporary Indonesia*, ed. Leo Suryadinata (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), pp. 74–95.

lecture in Singapore on August 25, 2007, Chief Editor Lee estimated that they were reaching about 100,000 people nationwide and that most of their readers were above fifty-five years old.

**Table 1: List of Popular Titles Circulating in Jakarta's Chinese-Language Public**

| Title (Chinese)   | Title (Indonesian/English)                       | Date/Year of First Publication   | Type   |
|-------------------|--|--|--|
| 呼声                | Ind: Media Aspirasi                              | June 1999  | Monthly magazine of the Coordinating Body of Alumni in Jakarta     |
| 印华之声              | Eng: Voice of Indonesian Chinese Magazine        | July 1999  | Monthly magazine   |
| 印尼与东协             | Eng: Indonesia and ASEAN                         | Based in Hong Kong during the pre-1998 period. Post-1998, has set up office in Jakarta | Monthly magazine   |
| *国际日报             | Eng: The International Daily News                | 2001   | Daily newspaper  |
| 世界日报              | Eng: The Universal Daily News                    | 1999. Ceased publication in 2007   | Daily newspaper  |
| 八华雅雅善中华<br>会馆校友简讯 | Ind: Berita Alumni THHK Pa Hoa/JPP               |  | In-house bulletin of Jakarta's <i>Pa Hoa</i> alumni organization   |
| 华中春秋              | Eng: <i>Huazhong Days</i> (Author's Translation) | January 2001   | In-house magazine of Jakarta's <i>Huazhong</i> alumni organization |
| 巴中文苑              | Ind: Media Pah Tsung                             | January 2002   | In-house magazine of Jakarta's <i>Bazhong</i> alumni organization  |

### Performative Genres: Objective and Subjective Histories of Chinese-Language Education

In speech-act theory, "performatives" belong to a special speech-act category. They do not only designate or describe an object, but call into being that which they are describing, the classic example being "I now pronounce you husband and wife." Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma have extended the concept of performativity in speech-act theory and used it in analyses of more complex publics. According to Lee and LiPuma, there is a performative dimension to the modern social imaginary of publics. Performativity in speech-acts relies on the skilful use of what linguistic anthropologists call "indexicals" and "nonindexicals." Indexicality

refers to the pervasive context-dependency of natural language utterances, including such varied phenomena as regional accent (indexing speaker's identity), indicators of verbal etiquette (marking deference and demeanor), the referential use of pronouns (I, you, we, he, etc.), demonstratives (this, that), deictic adverbs (here, there, now, then), and tense.<sup>52</sup>

Indexicals do not have content meaning or fixed properties, but derive their function from pure reference to context. For instance, pronouns such as "I" and "you" and demonstratives such as "this" and "that" do not necessarily refer to a single thing. Insofar as indexicals motivate linguistic meaning, it is by virtue of the fact that they direct attention to someone, something, some time, or some place. As such, indexicals "encode relations between objects and context ... [it] is this link to context that secures uniqueness of reference even without description."<sup>53</sup>

The distinction between indexicality and non-indexicality, Lee and LiPuma argue, can be made at the level of genre. "Objective" genres, they argue "minimize the use of indexicals," while "subjective" genres give full play to "indexicality" and even "meta-indexicality." Objective genres, such as scientific tracts or historiographical works, are constructed at a level of generality independent of a specific individual or context, while subjective genres, such as novels, make full use of indexicality.<sup>54</sup> As will be seen in the following sections, both genres are extremely popular and circulate in the Chinese-language public. The performative enactment of a generational self in the Chinese-language public is "intergeneric" in that it depends on the creative interpenetration of "objective" and "subjective" genres in representing Chinese-language education. The non-indexical genres retrieve the past of Chinese-language education as a collective and highly symbolic history, while indexical genres enable the individual to interpret his or her biography in terms of this larger history. Indeed, the skillful interplay of these two genres by some writers provides much rich material for the performance of both collective and personal selves.

Mr. Xu Jingneng (Sidharta Wirahadi Kusuma), or "Teacher Xu" as he is known among his peers, is closely associated with the current attempt to legitimize Chinese-language education in Jakarta. Born in Tanjung Priok, North Jakarta, on May 5, 1932, Teacher Xu received most of his education in Indonesian Chinese-language schools, both before and after the Japanese Occupation. He is a highly respected educator in Jakarta, having taught in schools in Kalimantan and Jakarta before the New Order ban on Chinese-language education was imposed.<sup>55</sup> For our purpose of analyzing representations that characterize Chinese-language education in Jakarta, Teacher Xu is an important figure. He is regarded as an authoritative representative of the Chinese-educated generation and its collective history in the city. A regular speaker at Chinese-language public forums in Jakarta, Teacher Xu's favorite topic is the history of the Chinese language in the country. Among the materials I collected from him in Jakarta

<sup>52</sup> William Hank, "Indexicality," in *Key Terms in Language and Culture*, ed. Alessandro Duranti (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), p. 119.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Lee Benjamin and Edward Li Puma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," in *Public Culture* 14, 1 (Winter 2002): 191–213.

<sup>55</sup> Biographical information on Teacher Xu is from the author's interview with Teacher Xu. Xu Jingneng, interview by author in Jakarta, January 3, 2005.

was a three-page Chinese-language article that Teacher Xu had penned for a lecture on Chinese education organized by the *Bazhong* alumni organization on November 9, 2003, in North Jakarta.

On that day, Teacher Xu spoke about the historical development of Chinese-language education in Indonesia. This history was framed in terms of a transition narrative linking “the past” and “now.” The temporal shift was mapped in relation to spatial reference points rooted in the nationalist identification of Chinese-Indonesians, which in turn, according to the speaker, determined the character of Chinese-language education and its history. According to Teacher Xu, Chinese-language education in the past existed as a version of “education for overseas citizens” (*qiaomin jiaoyu*). The word *qiao* is often paired with *Hua* (Chinese) to mean *Huaqiao*, which is translated as “overseas Chinese.” In a series of oft-cited articles discussing *Huaqiao* and other cognate terms, Wang Gung-wu writes that *qiao* describes the act of sojourning for extended periods of time outside mainland China. *Huaqiao* identity is a historically specific identity tied to the ideological project of nation-building in China at the turn of the twentieth century. The term is ideologically weighted to evoke nationalistic identification with and a geographical focus centered on mainland China.<sup>56</sup> It was thus significant that Teacher Xu used the term *qiaomin* (overseas citizens) when describing Chinese-language education in the past as an extension of the nationalist education system centered on China. In contrast, as he explained, Chinese-language education “now” is about “the teaching of Chinese” as part of the Indonesian national education system. The language must now develop as part of a trilingual education system encompassing Indonesian as well as English.

Less than three months later, in January 2004, Teacher Xu reiterated this transitional narrative in another public lecture in Jakarta, addressed to a group of Chinese-Indonesians from West Kalimantan. On this occasion, Teacher Xu explained that a transformation of language ideology is taking place. “In the past,” said Teacher Xu, Chinese “was seen as a political language [*zhengzhi yuyan*] containing a ‘certain ideology and thinking’ [*mouzhong zhuyi sixiang*]. Today, Chinese is like the English language now, for Chinese has become an important language of interaction and communication globally ... an important language of communication between and among different nations ...” By alluding to the “political” nature of Chinese, Teacher Xu was referring to the New Order suspicion that, since it was the national language of the Communist regime in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Chinese language (and Chinese-Indonesians as a “fifth column”) would be used to spread Communism in Indonesia. Now that the rise of the PRC as a key economic and political player in the global arena in the twenty-first century has prompted a reevaluation of China, and Chinese, Teacher Xu expects the language to be safely accommodated within Indonesia.

<sup>56</sup> For further reading, see the following pieces, all by Wang Gung-wu; “Sojourning: The Chinese Experience in Southeast Asia,” in *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, with the Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1996), pp. 1–14; “The Origins of Hua Chiao,” in Wang Gung-wu, *Community and Nation: China, Southeast Asia, and Australia* (St. Leonards, New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, with the Asian Studies Association of Australia, 1992), pp. 1–10; “The Limits of Nanyang Chinese Nationalism, 1912–1937,” in *Community and Nation*, pp. 40–57; “The Study of Chinese Identities in Southeast Asia,” in *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War Two*, ed. Jennifer Cushman and Wang Gung-wu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988), pp. 1–21; and “Southeast Asian Hua-Chiao in Chinese History-Writing,” in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 12, 1 (March 1981): 1–14.

Teacher Xu's account of the history of Chinese-language education is widely accepted in the Chinese-language public. Although opinions differ concerning the feasibility, execution, and actual implementation of the project, Teacher Xu's push for Chinese-language education as part of a trilingual national education system lodged within Indonesia expresses a general consensus among Chinese-Indonesians and was formally approved by representatives of Chinese communities throughout Indonesia who attended a Chinese-language education conference in Surabaya in 2003, an event that was given extensive coverage in *The International Daily News* in Jakarta.

Yet, despite this general consensus, Teacher Xu's optimistic narrative describing this historical shift was momentarily derailed when he alluded to the ambiguous status of the language in Indonesia: "Now, Chinese is the language of our ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, but it is also a foreign language [*waiyu*] that our children may choose to study in Indonesian national schools." Despite the Indonesian nationality of these children and their claims that Chinese is their primary language, the language remains classified in Indonesian schools as "foreign," so that Chinese-Indonesian students study it as a tongue "foreign" to Indonesia. Moreover, Jakarta's Chinese-language educators realize that most young Chinese-Indonesians who grew up during the New Order have no prior knowledge of or daily contact with Chinese, and so it must be taught to them as a second language. This state of affairs and practical responses to it created further confusion over the relationship between the Chinese language and the Indonesian Chinese community, which touched raw nerves. Is the Chinese language the "mother tongue" (*muyu*) of Chinese-Indonesians?

Between late October 2003 and early 2004, readers of *Media Aspirations* wrote to comment on the issue, affirming that the language was indeed the mother tongue of Chinese-Indonesians. The present state of instruction was mainly a stopgap measure, meant to compensate for the lost Suharto decades. Citing dictionary definitions of "mother tongue," reader Yang Chengzhong's erudite piece clarified that "mother tongue" refers to the language of one's ethnic group and that the Han language (*Hanyu*) is the language of China's majority Han ethnic group. Yang argued that although, within the Han ethnic group, different groups use different regional dialects, they adopt a common script based on the Beijing dialect—i.e., Mandarin—for purposes of unifying the ethnic group. Yang's definition of *Hanyu* therefore refers to standardized Mandarin Chinese and its subbranches. Yang then invokes *Huayu*, which he uses as a term equivalent to *Hanyu* in his discussion to argue that *Hanyu* or *Huayu* is the rightful ancestral language of Chinese-Indonesians. While the two terms refer to the same conception of the Chinese language, Yang's evocation of *Huayu* as opposed to *Hanyu* is oriented towards capturing the shift in national identification that has been experienced by, and has come to define, Chinese-Indonesians. Whereas in the past, Yang argues, a Chinese person was referred to as *Zhongguoren*,<sup>57</sup> literally meaning

<sup>57</sup> In a treatment of terms that refer to subjectivity in the Chinese language, Yew-Foong Hui notes that *Zhongguoren* is "an emotionally loaded word signifying belonging to the Chinese nation, especially during the heydays of Chinese nationalism, from the founding of the Republic of China in 1912 till the early 1960s." It was a term that "hyper-signified [Chineseness] encompassing within its semiotic range a claim to origin from China, the Chinese nation, Chinese descent, and perhaps more." Hui also notes that, although these nuances still linger in the word, it is now taken to refer to a native inhabitant of the People's Republic of China. Yew-Foong Hui, "Strangers at Home: History and Subjectivity among the Chinese Communities of West Kalimantan, Indonesia" (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 2007), p. 6. I

“person from China,” the term is no longer used internationally for Chinese people who have acquired non-Chinese nationality and are residing outside of China. In place of *Zhongguoren*, *Huaren* (Chinese person) or *Huazu* (Chinese ethnicity) are now used. But, according to Yang, all *Huaren* are descended from the bloodline of the Han ethnic group. Yang concludes that “since the Han language is the mother tongue of the Han ethnic group, as *Huaren* originating from the Han ethnic group, *Hanyu* or *Huayu* should be the mother tongue of *Huaren*.” To Yang, this is but a matter of course, and should never be doubted.<sup>58</sup>

Hoon has commented on this “mother-tongue” debate. He notes that readers of *Media Aspirations*, such as Yang, argue in favor of recognizing *Huayu* as the legitimate mother tongue of Chinese-Indonesians by introducing a series of essentialist concepts that deal with bloodline, race, ethnicity, and the very idea of a “mother tongue.”<sup>59</sup> Yet few who have responded to Yang’s narrative point out that these essentialist concepts are compatible with the historical account of the transitional shift that has been circulating through the Chinese-Indonesian public. After all, what differentiates *Huayu* from *Hanyu* is neither ancestry nor ethnicity, nor a radically different understanding of the Chinese language, but, is instead, nationality. To further secure the mother tongue status of *Huayu* for all Chinese-Indonesians, Yang argues that, while Chinese-Indonesians speak a variety of first languages, which he defines in a literal sense as “the very first language acquired by a child,” the Chinese language is the one-and-only mother tongue of Chinese-Indonesians.<sup>60</sup>

The awkward bump in what appeared to be a smooth transition narrative promulgated by Teacher Xu and the anxiety to secure the mother tongue status of the Chinese language for all Chinese-Indonesians in *Media Aspirations* demonstrate that, despite obvious changes in language ideology, the localization of Chinese and its placement within an Indonesian context remains an incomplete and uncertain project. However, this incomplete script is not as debilitating as is often imagined. In the Chinese-language public, the fact that no one can outline fully, in detail, how Chinese-language education will be established locally throughout the nation empowers the Chinese-educated generation to hope for a future for the language in Indonesia and drives their efforts to promote it. As the force motivating their “poetic world-making,”<sup>61</sup> the language is a crucial element in the effort to form a collective identity.

As Teacher Xu wrapped up his speech that bright afternoon in 2004, he turned to an issue of great concern among the Chinese-educated generation in the Chinese language public—the revival of Chinese-language schools banned in the 1960s. Teacher Xu stated boldly that it was “next to impossible” that these schools could be revived. This would mean “re-tracing our steps ... From 1901 until 1965, Chinese-language schools were shut down on a nationwide basis three times ... We must bear in mind these historical lessons and avoid going backwards.” He reminded his

---

generally agree with Hui’s observations about *Zhongguoren*, although there is a strong element of Han centrism that often goes unnoticed when the word is used, in this instance, in Yang’s article.

<sup>58</sup> Cheng-zhong Yang, *Qiantan Huaren de Muyu Wenti* [On the Mother-Tongue Problem of the Chinese], in *Hu Sheng* (*Media Aspirations*) 59 (February 2004): 14.

<sup>59</sup> Hoon, “A Hundred Flowers Bloom,” pp. 113–14.

<sup>60</sup> Yang, *Qiantan Huaren*, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 114.

audience that they had a “historical mission” (*lishi shiming*) and urged his generation to be “like the sun setting at dusk, giving off what’s left of its warmth.”

The term *lishi shiming* is extremely popular in the Chinese-language public and reveals the world-making, almost missionary, impulse motivating the memory work of the alumni groups. *Lishi shiming* provides a historical reference for the Chinese-educated generation, allowing them to define themselves as agents in developments that follow a particular historical trajectory. Teacher Xu’s discussion that day was directed in response to an announcement made by the *Huazhong* alumni organization about its intention to reestablish its alma mater. The announcement captured the imagination of both *Huazhong*’s alumni and non-alumni alike, sparking a lively discussion in the Chinese-language public about the significance and possibility of reviving the *Huazhong* schools and other Chinese-language schools.

The immediate response from *Huazhong*’s own alumni was one of overwhelming support, which quickly gave way to a sober discussion about what “reviving” (*fuban*) their alma mater really meant. Alumni urged reconsideration of the terms “*fuban*” and “*chongjian*” (rebuilding). One writer, using the pseudonym “Wuming,” felt that these terms were “politically sensitive.” Instead, like Teacher Xu, Wuming argued that reviving *Huazhong* in its original form was both “impossible and impractical.”<sup>62</sup> Reflecting the general consensus on multilingual education, *Huazhong* alumni who wrote to their alumni organization and to Chinese publications proposed the establishment of either bilingual or trilingual schools. The revival of *Huazhong* and Chinese-language education should henceforth be lodged within a trilingual framework in Indonesia. This was the *lishi shiming* of “We, the Chinese-educated generation”:

The historical mission [*lishi shiming*] of establishing national schools rests on the shoulders of our generation. We, the alumni of Chinese-language schools, together with the rest in the community who are passionate about Chinese-language education, should join hands and accelerate the use of what’s left of our remaining years to do something historically meaningful [*lishixing yiyi*] for our grandchildren and descendants and society ...<sup>63</sup>

From 2005 onwards, reports on the impending establishment, in East Java, of a trilingual university to be named Ma Chung University gave fresh impetus to hopes and plans for offering trilingual education at the tertiary level. When the university was eventually established in mid-2007, it was lauded as the perfect showcase for the viability of the trilingual model of Chinese-language education in Indonesia. Ma Chung University was established thanks to the combined efforts of the alumni of a former Chinese middle school in the city of Malang, including the very prominent banker, businessman, and founder of the Lippo Group, Mr. Mochtar Riady (Li Wenzheng). *The International Daily News* and the university’s publicity materials profiled Ma Chung University’s “brand” as unique because it emphasizes equipping

<sup>62</sup> Wuming, “Chongjian (Fuban) Muxiao yu Tuiguang Huawen Jiaoyu” [Rebuilding (Reviving) the Alma Mater and the Promotion of Chinese-Language Education], *The International Daily News*, May 21, 2003, p. C4.

<sup>63</sup> Yuanzhi, “Fuban Huaxiao Yinggai Yikao Qunzhong” [The Revival of Chinese Schools Depends on the Public], *The International Daily News*, June 13, 2003, p. C4.

students with computer, technological, and managerial skills, as well as a trilingual education. To this end, the university has teamed up with Microsoft International and the Huanan Normal University in China to help implement several of its academic programs. Huanan Normal University, in particular, has pledged to send faculty over to Ma Chung University to teach the Chinese language. The goal is to make sure that all of Ma Chung University's students will be fluent in the language in four years' time (from 2007).<sup>64</sup>

The obvious forward-looking tenor of these debates notwithstanding, the significant role played by the Chinese-educated generation as individuals eager to outline and confirm their own historical and transformative agency, is evident in the constant evocation of *lishi shiming*. Much of the energy fueling this drive towards the realization of a trilingual Chinese-language education model can be traced explicitly to the memory work of alumni from Chinese-language schools. In the December 2004 issue of *Voice of Indonesian Chinese Magazine*, a "memorial" dedicated to the history of Chinese-language education in Indonesia was created.<sup>65</sup> Like *The International Daily News*, *Voice of Indonesian Chinese Magazine* had been publishing articles on the history of Chinese-language education. From 2004 onwards, the magazine ran one article every month about the history of a Chinese-language school in Indonesia. In December 2004, the title of one such article was "Eternal Memory: The Point of Beginning for Chinese-Indonesian Education." In it, the author, Li Yuanzhong, explained why it was necessary to create an "eternal memory"—a memorial commemorating the history of Chinese-language education:

My hope in writing "Eternal Memory" is that everyone will be able to confront history, and reflect upon the extremely arduous process our overseas community leaders and pioneers experienced to establish schools in Indonesia ... One hundred years ago, our predecessors went through great hardships to found schools for one common ideal. However, because of the ban on Chinese and the closure of Chinese-language schools, we, this generation, cannot realize this ideal of establishing schools and strengthening clan and community. Now, all that is left are the school buildings and premises, historical debris from the past ...<sup>66</sup>

To Li, writing the history of Chinese-language education was a material act of memorializing, and his article was therefore a material memorial. Writing transforms his statement from mere words to a material document and artifact. By creating an artifact testifying to the historic significance of Chinese-language education, Li hoped to salvage some meaning from the school buildings and premises that, now stripped of semantic content, survive as mere "debris."

Li's advocacy of history-writing as memorializing may be symptomatic of particular attitudes to the past triggered by regime change in Indonesia. Karen Strassler investigates a different mode of creating memorials when she studies how,

<sup>64</sup> This discussion on Ma Chung University draws mainly from reports published between 2005 and 2007 in *The International Daily News*.

<sup>65</sup> The magazine was started and managed by a group of Chinese-Indonesians who had graduated from educational institutions in Taiwan.

<sup>66</sup> Yuan-zhong Li, "Yongheng de Jiayi: Yinhua Jiaoyu de Qidian" [Eternal Memory: The Point of Beginning for Indonesian Chinese Education], in *Yinhua Zhisheng* [Voice of the Indonesian Chinese] 65 (December 2004): 32.

among students in the university town of Yogyakarta in central Java, photographs of the student movement during the Reformation (*Reformasi*) period became cherished artifacts just as the student movement was losing its sense of purpose and energy after 1998. As cherished memorials, photographs extend the act of witnessing

... to generate an interpretive community grounded in a common visual vocabulary and sharing a morally engaged stance towards an historical process. At its best, this sense of personal engagement in the public events of history is empowering and ... ethically engaged.<sup>67</sup>

However, a counter tendency is also present in such acts of memorializing the past, for “[the students’] desire to relive the glory days of their movement seems increasingly to take the form of a disabling nostalgia, turning attention to a monumentalized past instead of a troubled present and inchoate future.”<sup>68</sup> Strassler’s insights on memorials and the creation of an interpretive community explain some of the dynamics of Chinese-Indonesian memory work after May 1998. Reminding readers animatedly that *Pa Hoa* is the point of beginning to their “eternal memory,” Li waxed nostalgic about the glory days of Chinese-language education in a manner that echoes the tone of the student activists Strassler describes. However, if “we can no longer see the grandeur of *Pa Hoa*,” Li wrote, then a memorial like his would help “establish a historical landmark and let it live on forever so that the history of Chinese-language schools in Indonesia could be passed on from one generation to the next generation.”<sup>69</sup> Whereas the student movement was increasingly crippled by “disabling nostalgia,” “consign(ing) their own historical agency to the past,”<sup>70</sup> Li’s memory work was aimed at empowering his interpretive community—the Chinese-educated generation. He wanted them *not* to surrender their agency, even if the past has now congealed. Li’s memorial was directed towards the creation of the historical agency of the Chinese-educated generation.

### **Life Stories and Commemorative Essays: History of Chinese-Language Education in the Subjective Genre**

If the transition narrative, typified in the speeches of Teacher Xu, encourages a consciousness of historical change in Chinese-language education as a unidirectional movement from one moment and one national space to another, this does not mean that the past of Chinese-language education is condemned to the dustbin of history. The number of articles about the history of Chinese-language education during the post-1998 period has grown exponentially over the years and taken different forms. Two types of subjective genres have been especially popular—i.e., life stories of individuals and nostalgic commemorative essays recalling times spent in schools. If objective genres described general histories and imagined a collective subject, these subjective genres enabled individuals to interpret their lives using accounts of the collective past circulating in this public. The popularity of these subjective genres

<sup>67</sup> Karen Strassler, “Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and the Indonesian Culture of Documentation in Postcolonial Java” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2003), p. 334.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Yuan-zhong Li, “*Yongheng de Jiayi*,” p. 34.

<sup>70</sup> Karen Strassler, “Photographs and the Making of Reformasi Memory,” in *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, ed. Mary Zurbuchen (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), p. 281.

demonstrates a high degree of identification with a generational self, suggesting that “We, the Chinese-educated generation” is an efficacious title for the group that refers to itself in this way.

In June 2003, when I was conducting library research in the Chinese Library at the National University of Singapore, by pure chance, alone, I met Mr. Li Yuanzhong. Li was then writing for the *Voice of Indonesian Chinese Magazine* as one of its special correspondents. Li is a graduate of the prestigious National Taiwan University and counts the editor of the magazine as a good friend. A retired engineer, Li has been a Singaporean citizen since 1981. He was born in 1945 in a small town seventeen kilometers from Medan in North Sumatra. When he was six, his family moved to Medan, where he studied in Chinese-language schools until 1959. He moved from Medan to Penang that year because in 1958 the Indonesian government had barred any Chinese student holding Indonesian citizenship from studying in schools owned and managed by non-Indonesian citizens. Li and his family held Indonesian citizenship. Fearing that his children would no longer be able to receive Chinese-language education, Li’s father sent Li and his elder brother away to a Chinese middle school in Penang. As Li saw it, 1959 was a turning point in his life, marking the beginning of a life of displacement from Indonesia and ceaseless movement from one place to another. From Penang, Li would move for a temporary period to Macau, then Taipei, and finally to Singapore.<sup>71</sup>

In this chance encounter, Li made a deep impression on me. He was a diligent researcher and a meticulous reader. He wrote using source materials taken mainly from the Chinese Library at the university, along with materials he had obtained from friends in Indonesia. I quickly realized that he had a keen sense of how to interpret the materials he collected and that he was a very good writer. By the time I embarked on my library research in 2003, Li was well on his way to writing essays on numerous interrelated topics concerning the history of the Chinese in Indonesia. These ranged from a series of articles on the individual histories of Chinese-language schools in Indonesia, to biographies of prominent educators and personalities, histories of clan associations in Indonesia, and his own life story. Li explained to me that he wanted to write these histories to let the younger generation know that the Chinese possess a history in Indonesia. Even more striking was Mr Li’s assertion that this history, especially the hitherto illegitimate history of Chinese-language education in Indonesia, is “our history as Chinese-Indonesians.” As it challenged the popular stereotypical assumption that the Chinese in Indonesia do not have a history, Li’s claim was, to me, startling.

Li would graciously pass me handwritten manuscripts of the articles he had completed. These included a moving five-page memoir that he had entitled “A Stormy Life Journey” (Fengyu Renshenglu). His life story would subsequently be published in several installments in *Voice of Indonesian Chinese Magazine* during the second half of 2003. In this memoir, the line between a collective voice and Li’s autobiographical voice was constantly crossed and blurred as he strove not only to express his own experiences but those of “a generation.” In Li’s opinion, his current status as a

<sup>71</sup> Biographical information and the following paragraphs on Li Yuanzhong are composed from my fieldnotes taken during numerous meetings with Li Yuanzhong between June 2003 to August 2003, as well as a recorded interview conducted in Singapore on July 28, 2003.

Singaporean citizen and his physical place of residence do not compromise his ability to represent this group through his own “Chinese-Indonesian” narrative. Quite the opposite. He wrote that if the individual experiences of his peers were “related and linked bit by bit and point by point, perhaps they can reflect forty years of political and social changes, changes in lives and situations ... perhaps it would strike a note of ‘collective resonance’ [*gongming*] for ethnic Chinese-Indonesians of the same age and generation.”<sup>72</sup> Clearly the author felt a keen sense of anticipation and hope that, in writing his own life story, he was also giving voice to what one generation of Chinese-Indonesians had gone through:

*Our* life journeys, we got through those days and lived through the same experiences, especially towards the end of the 1950s ... When Chinese-language education began to bear the brunt of political repression and moved towards the fateful moment, we faced a lot of painful choices. At that time, the sons and daughters of the overseas Chinese who stayed, as well as those who left, their life journeys were bumpy, stormy, full of crises and disasters ...<sup>73</sup>

His portrayal of this collective past was inevitably structured by his diasporic experiences of displacement and unceasing movement. Yet he asserted that those who stayed in Indonesia had basically lived the same story as those who, like him, had left the country. This was a story about political turbulence and crises, displacement, separation of kin and family, and marginality. Not only was Li confident he had articulated his life’s story, but he also trusted that any member from “his generation”—the Chinese-educated generation in Indonesia—would recognize and identify with his narrative.

Li’s memoir-writing was not an idiosyncratic act of a lone, isolated individual. *The International Daily News*, for example, regularly published the life stories of individuals who had been involved in Chinese-language education in Indonesia. Even more popular among members of the Chinese-language public in Jakarta are short essays in *The International Daily News* recollecting times spent with friends, classmates, teachers, and principals. Bearing titles like “My Alma Mater, I am Proud of You: My Principal, My Teachers, My Schoolmates,” these “commemorative essays” (*huainian wenzhang*) are narrated in the first-person voice, often in a highly nostalgic manner. *The International Daily News* would often publish these commemorative essays in conjunction with the anniversaries of the schools’ founding. In 2003, for instance, the newspaper featured a series of commemorative essays about the Zhenqiang School in Jakarta. Established and managed in the 1950s by a group of teachers, the school celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in Jakarta in 2002. For several consecutive days, the daily published commemorative essays about this school, focusing in particular on popular principals and teachers. Clearly underscoring the circulation of texts in this public, several readers were motivated to write simply because they were inspired by the commemorative essays they had come across. One reader by the name of “Changqing” who wrote to the newspaper was not even a Zhenqiang alumnus:

Recently, *The International Daily News*, in conjunction with the fiftieth anniversary of Zhenqiang School, has published consecutively several commemorative essays.

<sup>72</sup> All direct quotes in this paragraph are taken from Mr. Li Yuanzhong’s handwritten manuscript.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

I may not be an alumnus from Zhenqiang but as soon as I see “Zhenqiang,” these two words, I too feel a tug at my heartstrings. In these commemorative essays, nearly all of them mention a name I am very familiar with—Teacher Huang Qinglin ...<sup>74</sup>

By pinpointing exact names and places through the recollection of anecdotes featuring particular individuals, commemorative essays evoke a real-life timbre similar in quality to eye-witness accounts. Like eye-witness accounts, these biographical and commemorative essays perform the function of testifying to the quotidian reality of a collective experience, thereby securing an indexical relationship between the personal and the collective. The indexical quality of these essays was further enhanced by the practice of scheduling their publication to coincide with important commemorative events honoring the educational institution concerned.

It was anticipated, if not assumed, by the authors that members of an interpretive community exist and that they would therefore be able to relate to these personal anecdotes and recognize some of their own stories in the life stories and commemorative essays of the narrators. When we seek to understand and measure the popularity and circulation of these genres of autobiographical writings, their value as group testimonials—i.e., their indexical quality—should not be taken at face value. However, I would also caution against moving to the other extreme of dismissing these highly personal narratives based on the judgment that individual reports cannot reveal anything significant about the collective memory of the pre-1967 alumni. The authors’ compulsion to narrate their memories for collective consumption in the Chinese-language public provides an entry point at which we can analyze how individuals’ published life stories are produced in a collective mode. To use the words of writer Li Yuanzhong, the combined production of writings about individual life stories and commemorative episodes creates the effect of evoking “collective resonance,” since it is expected that members of an interpretive community are “tuned in” and would be able to relate and respond to these stories and re/member some of their own very private and intimate moments, an act of empathy that makes these stories concrete and real. The narration and dissemination of biographical stories buttress a collective sense of a generational identity in post-1998 Indonesia. In other words, and harking back to Warner, the Chinese-language public space is brought alive by a self-referential address centered on a generational self and the circulation of meaningful texts. These circulating texts consist of two main genres centered on repositioning the past of Chinese-language education in Indonesia. The first genre comprises objective histories expressing a general outline of the past, present, and future for the community; the second genre is made up of subjective and personalized autobiographical accounts. Both are crucial to the making of the Chinese-educated generation in contemporary Indonesia.

## Conclusion

Scholars in Indonesian studies have neglected examining the role of the Chinese language in shaping the identity of the Chinese minority in Indonesia. Guided by

<sup>74</sup> Changqing, “Wo Jiyi Zhong de Huang Qinglin Xiaozhang” [My Memory of Principal Huang Qing-Lin], *The International Daily News*, February 24, 2003, p. C4.

academic frameworks presupposing the “foreign-ness” of the language in Indonesia and its limited use within the Chinese-Indonesian community, we have yet to account for those specific moments when the language becomes capable of evoking the power and pathos of identity. The current academic discussion concerning the resinicization of Chinese-Indonesians after May 1998 relies on notions of cultural preservation (often used in juxtaposition with the concept of cultural attenuation), which fail to explain the dynamics involved in laying claims to a language as one’s own. This article argues for the need to study and analyze the effort and resources invested in making the Chinese language an object of identification for Chinese-Indonesians.

In the post-1998 period, alumni from Chinese-language schools banned by the New Order government in 1967 constitute the most important social group motivating and contributing to this effort to connect language and ethnic identity. In the aftermath of regime change, their anxiety and worry about language and cultural loss are accompanied by a conscious return towards the history of Chinese-language education in Indonesia. The current burst of activity centered on promoting the localization of the language within a trilingual education model is accompanied by self-conscious gestures intended to memorialize this past. The collective desire to redeem this past takes place in the highly visible space of the Chinese-language public. The narratives, discourses, and communicative acts circulating in this public have been investigated in this article. Memory work undertaken by the pre-1967 alumni concerning the past of Chinese-language education does not simply serve the instrumental purpose of promoting the viability of the language in Indonesia, but is also crucial for identity formation. Thus, the figure of the Chinese-educated Indonesian citizen has emerged from the constant invocation of a vocabulary that emphasizes shifts in national identification, historical mission, collective resonance, and nostalgic remembrances in the Chinese-language public during the post-1998 era.