

The Politics of Mandarin Fever in Contemporary Indonesia

Resinicization, Economic Impetus, and China's Soft Power

ABSTRACT

The fall of Suharto in 1998 opened up a new space for the public articulation of Chinese identity in Indonesia. Since the decrees that lifted the ban on Chinese language, Mandarin classes have had an unprecedented boom. This paper reflects on this phenomenon in the geopolitical context of the economic rise of China and its promotion of soft power, as well as the market forces that reward Mandarin competency in contemporary Indonesia.

KEYWORDS: rise of China, Mandarin fever, Chinese Indonesians, Indonesia, resinicization

INTRODUCTION

The political events of May 1998 that forced President Suharto to step down opened up a new space for the public articulation of Chinese identity in Indonesia, which had been prohibited under Suharto's assimilation policy. In February 2001 President Abdurrahman Wahid lifted the 1978 ban on the display of Chinese characters and the importation of Chinese publications. This was followed by the declaration of support from President Megawati Sukarnoputri's government in 2002 for Chinese education to flourish and for Sinology departments to be established in Indonesian universities. Since

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these developments, Chinese language learning has had an unprecedented boom in Indonesia. Among young Indonesians, ethnic Chinese as well as non-Chinese, learning Mandarin has become a popular pursuit, triggering a proliferation of after-school and after-work Mandarin courses.¹

Thousands of Chinese language tuition centers and dozens of trilingual (Chinese, English, and Indonesian) schools have sprung up in Indonesia's major cities; Chinese language as a subject has been included in the curricula of many state and private schools; and Chinese-studies centers and Confucius Institutes have been established in various universities—a kind of Mandarin Fever.² Besides the shifts in domestic policies, the resurgence of the Chinese language in Indonesia needs to be read in the wider context of the economic rise of China and its ramifications for Southeast Asia.³ Djao contends that “the national dignity regained by PRC [in recent decades] led to greater respect for the Chinese [people] overseas in various countries.”⁴ A new interest in Mandarin and Chinese culture has also become common among ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese across Southeast Asia.⁵

The importance of Mandarin in Indonesia was further elevated in 2005, when President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed a joint declaration with

1. Chang-Yau Hoon, “How to Be Chinese: Ethnic Chinese Experience a ‘Reawakening’ of Their Chinese Identity,” *Inside Indonesia* 78 (April-June, 2004): 13–14; Chang-Yau Hoon, *Chinese Identity in Post-Subarto Indonesia: Culture, Politics and Media* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press): 51. In this article, the phrase “Chinese language” refers to “Mandarin,” and the two are used interchangeably. Most, if not all, Chinese-language courses in post-Suharto Indonesia are conducted in Mandarin.

2. Currently, there are 26 universities across Indonesia that offer Chinese language instruction (unpublished report, Association of Chinese Language Studies Program in Indonesia [Asosiasi Program Studi Mandarin Indonesia], August 2018). We thank Ibu Elisa Christiana for access to the data.

3. Liu Hong, “Zhongguo jueqi shidai de dongnanya huaren shehui: bianqian yu tiaozhan” [Southeast Asian Chinese at a Time of China Rising: Transformation and Challenges], *Dongnanya Yanjiu* [Southeast Asian Studies] 6 (2012): 66–72.

4. Wei Djao, “Opinion Status as Ethnic Identity in the Chinese Diaspora,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 32:3 (2000): 366.

5. Pranee Chokkajitsumpun, “Chinese Literacy in a Bangkok Chinese Family,” in Chee Kiong Tong and Kwok Bun Chan (eds.), *Alternate Identities: The Chinese of Contemporary Thailand* (Singapore: Times Academic Press / Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001): 203–26; Teresita Ang-See, “The Chinese in the Philippines: Continuity and Change,” in Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Southeast Asian Chinese: The Social Cultural Dimension* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1995): 28–41; Khun Eng Kuah, *Rebuilding the Ancestral Village: Singaporeans in China* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Fang Chang Ping and Hou Jie, “Huaqiao huaren yu zhongguo zai dongnanya de ruanshili jianshe” [Chinese overseas and China's building of soft power in Southeast Asia], *Dongnanya Yanjiu* [Southeast Asian Studies] 2 (2017): 136–52.

China to establish a broad strategic partnership to promote bilateral ties and intercultural exchanges.⁶ Sino–Indonesian relations became even closer in January 2010 with the ratification of a five-year plan of action committing to a “bilateral dialogue mechanism on technical cooperation, cooperation in regional and international affairs and on funding arrangements.”⁷ The plan includes cooperation in politics, defense, security, law, economy, and socio-cultural exchange, creating unprecedented opportunities for people with Chinese language competency.

The trade relationship between Indonesia and China has continued to grow. In 2016, China overtook the United States to become the third-largest investor in Indonesia, after Singapore and Japan, bringing in US\$ 1.6 billion of foreign direct investment.⁸ China’s deepening economic ties with Indonesia are also reflected in ambitious projects to build roads, ports, and railways in the archipelago. Furthermore, Indonesia could be one of the largest beneficiaries of China’s One Belt One Road initiative in Southeast Asia, as it offers infrastructure projects worth up to US\$ 60 billion to Chinese investors.⁹

Domestic and international politics work in tandem to contribute to Mandarin Fever in post-Suharto Indonesia. Some scholars have referred to this resurgence of Chinese culture and language among the ethnic Chinese as resinicization.¹⁰ In this article, the term refers to the process by which ethnic Chinese who have lost almost all of their affinity with their Chinese origin begin to rediscover their “Chineseness” and “voluntarily identify with their

6. Shao Chang Chao, “Yinni mianlan diqu hanyu jiaoxue xianzhuang diaocha yu duice yanjiu” [Survey and strategies of Chinese language teaching in the Medan area of Indonesia], *Dongnanya Yanjiu* [Southeast Asian Studies] 2 (2012): 103–11.

7. Greta Nabbs-Keller, “Growing Convergence, Greater Consequence: The Strategic Implications of Closer Indonesia-China Relations,” *Security Challenges* 7:3 (2011): 32.

8. “Why Indonesia is Chasing China’s Billions,” *Bloomberg News*, November 1, 2016, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-31/china-deepens-economic-ties-with-indonesia-as-investment-doubles>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

9. “Indonesia Woos Chinese Investors with \$60-Billion Menu of Belt and Road Projects,” Reuters, December 5, 2018, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-china/indonesia-woos-chinese-investors-with-60-billion-menu-of-belt-and-road-projects-idUSKBN1O4oZV>>, accessed April 04, 2019.

10. Liu Hong, “Southeast Asian Chinese”; Charlotte Setijadi, “‘A Beautiful Bridge’: Chinese Indonesian Associations, Social Capital and Strategic Identification in a New Era of China–Indonesia Relations,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25:102 (2016): 822–35; Chang-Yau Hoon, “Between Hybridity and Identity: Chineseness as a Cultural Resource in Indonesia,” Working Paper No. 32, Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 2017.

cultural ‘roots.’”¹¹ Ang argues that this process is driven by “a passionate identification with and reification of ‘Chineseness’ as a globally relevant marker for identity and difference, and for which ‘China’ . . . culturally defined as much as geographically located, forms the centre.”¹² This process has intensified with China’s dedicated efforts to “‘resinicize’ the Chinese overseas and strengthen their cultural ties with [the motherland] in the hope that they will serve China’s national interests.”¹³ However, the cultural notion of resinicization is inadequate to analyze the rise of Chinese language in contemporary Indonesia because it does not effectively capture the strategic identification of the Chinese community with selective elements of the Chinese culture, and it fails to explain Mandarin’s rising popularity among non-Chinese. We try to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of Mandarin Fever in Indonesia by taking into account the developments in Indonesia’s post-Suharto domestic policies toward the ethnic Chinese, as well as the global effects of the rise of China, especially the opportunities brought about by its ambitious One Belt One Road initiative.

In tracing the trajectory of Mandarin learning in Indonesia, we highlight the shifting motivations behind such pursuits in different historical periods.¹⁴ We argue that in contemporary Indonesia learning Mandarin is an investment: through language, a person negotiates a sense of self, and gains (or is denied) access to powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak. Thus, we highlight the economic incentives presented by a rising China and the systematic investment China has made to promote its soft power through global media and the Chinese language. A thorough consideration of the position of Mandarin in the political economy of Indonesia and in the wider geopolitical context of the rise of China will shed some light on the economic reasons that both Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesian youth pursue the language.

We will demonstrate that various internal and external forces may determine the future survival of Chinese language education in Indonesia. These include the ongoing Indonesian government policy on the ethnic Chinese,

11. Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001): 84.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Leo Suryadinata, *The Rise of China and the Chinese Overseas* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2017): 182.

14. For a discussion of the shifting motivations of learners of “heritage language” see Nelleke Van Deusen-Scholl, “Toward a Definition of Heritage Language: Sociopolitical and Pedagogical Considerations,” *Journal of Language, Identity and Education* 2:3 (2003): 211–30.

the dynamics of religious and cultural politics in Indonesia, Sino–Indonesian bilateral relations, and China’s domestic and international affairs, as well as its continuing investments in promoting its soft power. The discussion of the ways in which domestic and international forces intersect aims to contribute to a comprehensive, original, and innovative interpretation of the development of Chinese language education in contemporary Indonesia.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CHINESE EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

The ethnic Chinese only began to receive a modern education in the Netherlands East Indies after 1901. When the Dutch laid the foundations for European and native education prior to the twentieth century, the Chinese were largely left to their own devices. The rise of pan-Chinese nationalism in Southeast Asia in the early twentieth century was the watershed that changed the predicament of the Indies Chinese. In 1900, the Chinese in Java established the *Tiong Hoa Hwee Koan* (Chinese Organization, THHK) to foster educational and cultural nationalism among the Chinese in the colony.¹⁵ Objectives of the THHK included promoting Chinese culture and Confucianism, and providing Chinese schools with a modern curriculum.¹⁶ Cushman and Wang note, “No single institution has been more effective in maintaining a sense of China’s cultural heritage than have Chinese schools; their curricula and medium of instruction ensured that Chinese cultural values were transmitted to successive generations of young Chinese.”¹⁷

The THHK schools, first opened in 1901 in Batavia (now Jakarta), were popular among both *peranakan* (Indies-born or “mixed” blood) and *totok* (China-born, “pure” blood) Chinese. The rise of Chinese education and the introduction of Confucian values provided a new identity for some *peranakan* and “awakened” their pride in being Chinese.¹⁸ Fearing that the

15. Donald Earl Wilmott, *The National Status of the Chinese in Indonesia*, Interim Report Series, Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1956.

16. Kwee Tek Hoay, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Movement in Indonesia*, translated and edited by Lea E. Williams, Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1969.

17. Jennifer Cushman and Wang Gungwu (eds.), *Changing Identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1988): 33.

18. Mary F. Somers, *Peranakan Chinese Politics in Indonesia*, PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1965: 67.

THHK and its schools would turn the *peranakan* Chinese politically toward China, the Dutch colonial administration established the Dutch Chinese Schools (Hollandsche Chineesche Scholen) in 1908 to meet the challenge of pan-Chinese nationalism. With these schools, colonial government education reached all sectors of the population: Europeans, natives, and “foreign Orientals” (read: Chinese). The Dutch Chinese Schools won many elite *peranakan* from the THHK schools. They taught Western values through the Dutch language under conditions of exclusivism: the schools segregated the Chinese from the natives, as they were established exclusively for wealthy Chinese.¹⁹

There were some *peranakan* Chinese who were more accustomed to the Malay language than to Dutch or Chinese, and who were financially weak. They could not fit into either the Dutch Chinese Schools or the THHK schools. Based on these considerations, in 1927 the Netherlands Indies government launched the Malay-Chinese schools to cater to the education needs of underprivileged *peranakan* Chinese.²⁰ But the Malay-Chinese schools were met with fierce protest by the Chinese community, who perceived these schools as inferior.

During the Japanese occupation, all Dutch and Western mission schools were closed down, and only Chinese and Indonesian-medium schools were permitted to operate.²¹ As a result, the number of Chinese schools escalated, and it continued to rise after Indonesia’s independence in 1945. Many of these schools were closely oriented to politics in mainland China, and thus were divided between the pro-China and pro-Taiwan camps. However, after 1958 the political situation in post-colonial Indonesia prohibited ethnic Chinese with Indonesian citizenship from attending Chinese-medium schools. Most remaining Chinese-medium schools, which catered to Chinese students of foreign nationality, were closed in 1966 after President Suharto came to power following the abortive coup of 1965.

With the military-backed assimilation policy implemented by Suharto’s New Order regime, all Chinese were urged to enter Indonesian-medium schools, both private and public. A few Special Project National Schools,

19. Ibid.: 50.

20. Mona Lohanda, *Growing Pains: The Chinese and the Dutch in Colonial Java, 1890–1942* (Jakarta: Cipta Loka Caraka Foundation, 2002): 71.

21. Aimee Dawis, “Chinese Education in Indonesia: Developments in the Post-1998 Era,” in Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *Ethnic Chinese in Contemporary Indonesia: 75–96*.

which offered Chinese language as a subject, were allowed to be established in 1968 to cater to the Chinese who were not Indonesian nationals, but in 1975 these schools were all converted into Indonesian national schools (called Sekolah Pembauran, or Assimilation Schools).²²

The fate of the Chinese in New Order Indonesia was determined by the September 30, 1965, “communist” coup attempt, in which the People’s Republic of China was accused of being involved. After assuming power in 1966, President Suharto systematically repressed any expression of Chinese ethnic or cultural identity. The New Order government perceived Chinese-ness as incompatible with Indonesia’s national identity and problematic for national integration and unity. A host of harsh measures were introduced to coercively assimilate the ethnic Chinese into the wider Indonesian population, to make them give up their Chineseness and “exclusiveness.” Chinese Indonesians were encouraged to adopt Indonesian-sounding names, and the use of Chinese language in public places was strongly discouraged. Items printed with Chinese characters entering Indonesia fell under the category of prohibited imports like narcotics, pornography, and explosives. No Chinese-language press was permitted except the government-sponsored *Yindunixiya Ribao* (Indonesia Daily), which promulgated the official voice of the government.²³

As the New Order administration (1966–1998) actively promoted religious affiliation to prevent the re-emergence of communism, every Indonesian was required to register the religion to which they adhered. Many *peranakan* Chinese, who were influenced by both Western and Indonesian culture, converted to religions that were also observed by *pribumi* (non-Chinese, indigenous Indonesians), such as Christianity, which did not have the stigma of being “foreign” as Chinese religions did. Consequently, Christianity experienced a boom in Indonesia under the New Order. One of the effects of the conversion to Christianity among ethnic Chinese was a proliferation of Christian schools.²⁴ As Chinese schools had been important sites for transmitting Chinese culture and maintaining Chinese identity, their closure has

22. Leo Suryadinata, *Pribumi Indonesians, the Chinese Minority and China: A Study of Perceptions and Politics* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational, 1978): 153–59.

23. Hoon, *Chinese Identity in Post-Subarto Indonesia*: 42.

24. Chang-Yau Hoon, “Mapping Chinese Christian Schools in Indonesia: Ethnicity, Class and Religion,” *Asia Pacific Education Review* 12:3 (2013): 403–11.

prompted scholars to conclude that younger-generation Chinese Indonesians during the New Order became Indonesianized, as they no longer had a command of the Chinese language.²⁵

It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the agency of the ethnic Chinese in maintaining their language and cultural practices during the New Order. Moreover, the regime was not monolithic, and neither was it consistently anti-Chinese. Rather than becoming extinct, the Chinese language was driven underground; learning Chinese became a clandestine activity. A Chinese Indonesian who grew up during the New Order recounted his experience in learning Chinese as a child by reading Hong Kong comic books and studying with a private tutor: “When we studied, we had to close all our doors and windows. And when we saw somebody from the army outside, we quickly hid our books.”²⁶

But the effectiveness of private Chinese tutoring was limited. Many Chinese Indonesians acknowledge that even though they learned Mandarin from private tutors when they were young, their effort was wasted because the environment did not support the use of the language. Most of them ended up forgetting what they had learned. Some parents who were more desperate for their children to be exposed to Chinese education sent them overseas to Singapore, Malaysia, or Taiwan to study. At that time China was not an option, because Sino–Indonesia relations had been frozen since 1967, after the abortive coup. The New Order began to soften its attitude to China after the Cold War. Sino–Indonesian relations were only normalized after the visit of Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng in 1990.²⁷

CHINA’S PROMOTION OF SOFT POWER

According to Nye, soft power is the indirect or co-optive power to influence others through attraction rather than coercion.²⁸ As an emerging global superpower, China has been proactively investing in a strategy of

25. Leo Suryadinata, *The Chinese Minority in Indonesia: Seven Papers* (Singapore: Chopmen, 1978): 32.

26. Michelle Tsai, “Indonesia Learns Chinese,” *Foreign Policy*, May 20, 2010, <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/20/indonesia-learns-chinese/>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

27. Ariel Heryanto, “Ethnic Identities and Erasure: Chinese Indonesians in Public Culture,” in Joel S. Kahn (ed.), *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand* (Singapore: ISEAS, 1998): 95–114.

28. Joseph Nye, “Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy* 80 (1990): 153–71.

communication with a global audience to develop its soft power.²⁹ China's soft-power initiatives include global expansion of its premier state television channel, CCTV, by providing programs in English and other languages, setting up Chinese cultural centers and Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms around the world, establishing international academic exchanges, distributing national-image films, and organizing concerts and exhibitions overseas.³⁰

After establishing the Office of Chinese Language Council (Hanban) in 1987, China opened its first Confucius Institute in 2004, and they subsequently spread all over the world. Since 2007, seven Confucius Institutes have been established in Indonesia. The first was considered unofficial, as it was attached to the Jakarta Chinese Language Teaching Centre (Bina Terampil Insan Persada, BTIP) rather than a university, but the other six are attached to public and private universities.³¹ (The Confucius Institute at BTIP, established in 2007 in collaboration with Hainan Normal University, was shut down in 2011 after the establishment of the official Confucius Institutes at various universities.)³² All Confucius Institutes are required to have a counterpart university in China. Thus, Al Azhar University of Indonesia is linked with Fujian Normal University, Malang State University with Guangxi Normal University, Maranatha Christian University with Hebei Normal University, Surabaya State University with Central China Normal University, Tanjungpura University with Dongbei Normal University, and

29. Chwen Chwen Chen, Cinzia Colapindo, and Qing Luo, "The 2008 Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Visual Insights into China's Soft Power," *Visual Culture* 27:2 (2012): 188–95.

30. David Shambaugh, "China's Soft Power Push: The Search for Respect," *Foreign Affairs*, July–August, 2015; Ying Zhou and Sabrina Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes: A Tool for Promoting China's Soft Power?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 25:100 (2016): 628–42.

31. Thung explains that this exception was an initiative from the Ambassador of China to Indonesia, who signed an agreement of cooperation with the BTIP on behalf of Hanban. This unofficial relationship became the catalyst for official Confucius Institutes being established in Indonesia. Thung Ju Lan, "Confucius Institute at Universitas Al Azhar, Jakarta: The Unseen Power of China," *Wacana* 18:1 (2017): 148–82.

32. Li Qi Hui and Jiang Xing Shan, "Yinni kongzi xueyuan gongzuo chuyi" [Discussion on Indonesia Confucius Institute], *Dongnanya Yanjiu* [Southeast Asia Studies] 3 (2013): 86–92. Li and Jiang note that the Ministry of National Education (MONE) in Indonesia was unsupportive of the establishment of the Confucius Institutes, including the unofficial one at BTIP. It only changed its stance in 2010, when Indonesia and China commemorated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China–Indonesia relations and declared 2010 the Year of Friendship between Chinese and Indonesia. To enhance bilateral relations, the director-general of MONE selected six universities to house the Confucius Institutes.

Hasanuddin University with Nanchang University. Through these Confucius Institutes, China is able to promote Chinese language and culture among the non-Chinese, as well as to Chinese descendants who have lost the language and cultural familiarity.³³

China has also been providing scholarships for foreign students to study on Chinese campuses. In 2017, Beijing announced 197 undergraduate and graduate scholarships for Indonesians, a sharp hike from only 15 in 2015.³⁴ There are currently around 14,000 Indonesian students studying in China, making it the sixth-largest foreign student population.³⁵ Educational soft power can be an effective tool for China to reach out to non-Chinese as well as ethnic-Chinese students so that they can serve, or at least be sympathetic to, China's broader interests.

Efforts by China to build its soft power aim to correct the anti-Chinese sentiment used in the "discourse war" with the West,³⁶ to fend off the "China threat argument," and to reassure the world about China's peaceful rise.³⁷ The promotion of Chinese language and culture is not merely a passive result of a global development but an important part of China's proactive public diplomacy. Through its soft-power strategy, China is trying to build harmonious relations with neighboring countries and to project a benign image on the world stage.³⁸

It can be argued that China's promotion of soft power in Indonesia has had some success, but much remains to be done. In his study of Indonesians' perception of China, Herlijanto attested to the achievement of China in

33. In recent years, Confucius Institutes have been the subject of criticism and controversy for subverting academic freedom at host universities, surveillance of overseas Chinese students, industrial and military espionage, and advancing the Chinese Communist Party's political agenda on Taiwan, Tibet, and other issues related to human rights. This has prompted their closure in a number of universities in North America. Marshall Sahlins, "Confucius Institutes: Academic Malware and Cold Warfare," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 26, 2018, <<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/07/26/confucius-institutes-function-propaganda-arms-chinese-government-opinion>>, accessed April 6, 2019.

34. Aisyah Llewellyn, "What's Made Indonesian Students Forget the China Taboo?" *South China Morning Post*, April 1, 2018, <<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/society/article/2139714/whats-made-indonesian-students-forget-china-taboo>>, accessed July 19, 2018.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Shambaugh, "China's Soft Power Push."

37. Zhuo and Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes": 628.

38. Tony Tai Ting Liu and Tung Chieh Tsai, "Swords into Ploughshares? China's Softpower Strategy in Southeast Asia and Its Challenges," *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 57 (2014): 28–48.

disseminating the discourse of its economic transformation and rise to Indonesians.³⁹ He observed that perceptions of China are largely positive in Indonesian society. According to Herlijanto, this positive perception is encapsulated in the public discourse of “learn from China,” wherein Indonesians who lament what they see as the failing condition of their own country perceive China’s development model as something that Indonesia should emulate.⁴⁰

But the 2017 Indonesia National Survey, conducted by ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, suggested otherwise.⁴¹ The survey found that compared to their views on the ASEAN countries, Indonesians by contrast tended to admire China less, and saw it as less important. When asked whether the rise of China will have a positive or negative impact on Indonesia, only 41% said positive, and slightly more than 39% said negative.⁴² It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the reasons behind these perceptions and the contrasting findings of Herlijanto versus this survey. Suffice it to say that there is still a lot of room for China’s promotion of soft power in Indonesia to expand and improve.

THE POST-1998 MANDARIN FEVER IN INDONESIA

Chinese language education experienced unprecedented growth after the lifting of the official ban on the language in 1999. Seizing the economic opportunities that a rising China might provide, many institutions of higher learning rode on the Mandarin Fever and applied to the Ministry of Education for permission to establish Chinese studies and language courses. Chinese language education passed a milestone in 2001, when the Chinese proficiency examination (HSK) began to be held in four major cities in Indonesia: Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Bandung.⁴³ Demand for the HSK

39. Johannes Herlijanto, *Emulating China: Representation of China and the Contemporary Critique of Indonesia*, PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, and Macquarie University, Sydney, 2013: 312.

40. *Ibid.*: 208.

41. Diego Fossati, Hui Yew-Foong, and Siwage Dharma Negara, “The Indonesia National Survey Project: Economy, Society and Politics,” *Trends in Southeast Asia* No. 10, ISEAS, Singapore, 2017: 40–46.

42. Furthermore, most respondents (62.4%) thought that close economic ties with China would bring little benefit to Indonesia (41).

43. Shao Chang Chao, “Survey and Strategies”: 103–11.

has been rising over the years. The number of people sitting for the exams increased from 2,431 in 2013 to 14,908 in 2017. And the frequency of the exams has increased, from once a year in 2001 to twice a year in 2013, and four times a year since 2017.⁴⁴

Between 2005 and 2007, with the growing demand for candidates with Chinese-language competency, many universities applied to Hanban, the Beijing headquarters of the Confucius Institutes, to set up Confucius Institutes, but they could not get approval from the Indonesian Education Ministry, possibly due to its reservations toward what could be perceived as an expansion of China's influence in Indonesia.⁴⁵ This prompted the establishment of the aforementioned unofficial Confucius Institute at a private Chinese language center, the BTIP, which circumvented the need for ministry approval. The Indonesian government was also concerned about the religious implications of the name of the Confucius Institute.⁴⁶ The status of Confucianism as an officially recognized religion in Indonesia prompted the Confucius Institute to adopt the name Mandarin Language Centers (Pusat Bahasa Mandarin), instead of the Indonesian translation Lembaga Konfusius or Lembaga Khonghucu, so that it would not be seen as a religiously affiliated institution. As a compromise, Hanban and the universities concerned have agreed that the Chinese characters *Kongzi xueyuan* (Confucius Institute) may be used for identification and for official functions, as long as they are not translated into the Indonesian language.⁴⁷

However, this post-1998 Mandarin boom should not be seen as the restoration of Chinese education to its pre-1965 status. Mandarin Fever is a novel phenomenon that needs to be read in relation to political developments in Indonesia and the rise of China. Chinese language training can be obtained from least five sources: a formal Mandarin curriculum at private trilingual schools, state schools, and universities; informal classes at private language centers and home tutoring; free classes at Chinese religious and cultural organizations, such as temples, churches, and clan associations; online courses, which are very popular among young professionals; and Chinese education overseas, in China, Taiwan, Malaysia, or Singapore.

44. Elisa Christiana interview, Surabaya, September 2, 2018.

45. Li and Jiang, "Discussion on Indonesia Confucius Institute": 86.

46. Zhuo and Luk, "Establishing Confucius Institutes": 640.

47. Thung Ju Lan, "Confucius Institute at Universitas Al Azhar, Jakarta": 148–82.

While formerly Mandarin teaching was mainly provided by Chinese-medium schools, not a single Chinese-only-medium school has been established in post-Suharto Indonesia. Although most Chinese organizations agree on the importance of promoting Chinese language education, they have different opinions about the need to revive Chinese-medium schools. And although some older-generation Chinese Indonesians have expressed hopes of establishing a Chinese-medium school, seeing it as a cultural obligation, others are more pragmatic and cautious. One said, “To establish Chinese schools requires a lot of money. Who would want to invest in such a project? The government in Indonesia changes every four years. What if the next government changed their policy towards the Chinese? It is too risky and uncertain.”⁴⁸

The risk and uncertainty are related to the fear that Chinese schools might be an easy target should there be another round of anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia. Some Chinese Indonesians perceive Chinese-medium schools as a symbol of a Chinese sojourner identity, also known as *luoye guigen*, or “fallen leaves return to their roots.” For instance, Li Zhuo Hui, a senior editor of a Chinese newspaper in Indonesia, criticized the pre-1965 Chinese-medium schools for being too “China-centered,” because their curriculum was heavily focused on China. He also noted that these schools were too polarized and obsessed with politics in China and Taiwan.⁴⁹

The concept of *luodi shenggen* (fallen leaves, rooted locally), on the other hand, purports to be a new paradigm of understanding Chinese overseas—not as “sojourners, orphans or patriotic Chinese nationalists whose welfare, sole future, and final resting place is to be in China,” but as citizens rooted in the place where they reside.⁵⁰ In fact, as Indonesian citizens, Chinese Indonesians are expected to speak Indonesian and fully identify with Indonesia. However, with the recent rise of China, most Chinese Indonesians would likely agree that learning Mandarin is crucial but should be driven by practical factors such as career opportunities and competitiveness, rather than just because one is Chinese.

48. Quoted in Hoon, *Chinese Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia*: 63.

49. Li Zhuo Hui, *Yingjie luodi shenggen shidai: yinni huaren wenhua jiaoyu shihua* [*History of Chinese Education in Indonesia*] (Jakarta: Mandarin Book Store, 2003): 135.

50. Wang Ling Chi, “On Luodi-shenggen,” in Wang Ling-Chi and Wang Gungwu (eds.), *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003): ix.

While Chinese-medium schools are not viable, privately owned trilingual schools (Indonesian, Chinese, and English) have become fashionable. There are about 70 trilingual schools in Indonesia, catering mostly to middle- and upper-middle-class Chinese Indonesians.⁵¹ Some offer a National Plus curriculum, which means the government curriculum *plus* English, Mandarin, and Indonesian; others offer an international curriculum from Singapore (and charge a higher fee).⁵² Li Zhuo Hui suggests that Chinese education in such schools should be conducted with “Indonesian characteristics.” By that he means that the schools should “respect and integrate with the mainstream culture. . . . The curriculum should be centered on loving Indonesia and building Indonesia as its theme. [It should not be] China-centered, politically obsessed, and oriented to Chinese cultural chauvinism.”⁵³

Li’s statement demonstrates a change in the political identity of Chinese Indonesians, from *Huaqiao* (sojourner) to *Huaren* (ethnic Chinese) or *Huayi* (of Chinese descent). Trilingual schools have also proved to be a more realistic business proposition and more appealing to Chinese Indonesian parents and students than a pure Chinese-medium school.

Over the past decade or so, dozens of trilingual schools have been set up across major cities in Indonesia by Chinese Indonesian businesspeople and alumni of formerly closed Chinese-medium schools. One of the largest and most elite of these is the PaHoa School in Jakarta, which traces its genesis to a first-generation THHK School. Although claiming to promote multicultural values, PaHoa School uses Confucian values as the basis of its school philosophy. Furthermore, its exclusive ethnic-based values, and the considerable fees it charges as a private school, make it inaccessible to the non-Chinese working-class population. And catering to an elite and almost exclusively Chinese student population means that the school might be an easy target in case of anti-Chinese hostility. Setijadi observes that the school management is cognizant of this risk, and considers legal and practical issues related to the school’s assets should the government change its policy toward

51. Unpublished report, Association of Trilingual National Schools in Indonesia (Perkumpulan Sekolah Nasional Tiga Bahasa Se-Indonesia), 2018.

52. Aimee Dawis, *The Chinese in Indonesia and Their Search for Identity* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press): 199.

53. Li Zhuo Hui, *History of Chinese Education in Indonesia*: 139.

the ethnic Chinese.⁵⁴ The school has tight security around its compound, and has taken legal measures to safeguard its assets.

Writing in 1972, Gardner and Lambert identified two motivations for the learning of a new language: integrative and instrumental.⁵⁵ The former is about the learner integrating into the community in which the language is spoken, while the latter is about using the acquired language for functional or practical purposes. A survey conducted by the second author in early 2017 of 49 Chinese Indonesian students at Petra Christian University in Surabaya (the second-largest city in Indonesia) found that their motivation for learning Mandarin was more instrumental than integrative. With its small sample size, the survey is by no means representative of Chinese Indonesian youths in general. However, the narratives are quite illuminating for the topic under discussion here. Almost all the respondents cited economic rather than cultural factors in pursuing Mandarin at the university. Most reported that they were learning Mandarin for employment opportunities in multinational companies, for a better salary and a better job, and for doing business with Chinese partners. One respondent reported that most of the job vacancies she saw advertised on Petra University's bulletin boards were looking for people who can speak Chinese and have passed the HSK Chinese-proficiency exams. This further attests to the value of Mandarin competency in the job market.

A male student reflected on his view of the Chinese language through the lens of his identity as an Indonesian citizen:

I don't think there is any other reason beside business and work to learn Chinese, because I'm an Indonesian. In Indonesia, maybe some Chinese descendants think that they still belong to China. So they have this mentality, "I'm still Chinese in some way, so I need to learn the language." But I don't. I don't develop a Chinese identity. I call myself an Indonesian because I live here and speak the language. Just because my skin is yellow and my eyes are small, doesn't mean that I am Chinese. Therefore, Chinese language for me [is practical]: if I learn it, it will be only for work or business.

54. Charlotte Setijadi, "Cautiously Promoting Humanism," *Inside Indonesia* 102, October-December 2010, <<http://www.insideindonesia.org/cautiously-promoting-humanism>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

55. Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, *Attitude and Motivation in Second Language Learning* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1972).

For this particular respondent, the post-Suharto Mandarin Fever is mainly propelled by practical interests rather than cultural roots. His rekindled interest in learning Mandarin does not indicate that he identifies less as an Indonesian (or more as Chinese) or that he is now culturally or politically oriented toward China. This sentiment has been reaffirmed by many such Chinese Indonesian youth who reported experiencing “otherness” when they were treated as foreigners while studying or traveling in China.

The revitalization of Mandarin learning, especially since the end of the Cold War, has also been noted among ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia.⁵⁶ In the case of Thailand, Chokkajitsumpun points out that Mandarin education has boomed since the normalization of relations between Thailand and China. According to him, following China’s economic liberalization, and a proliferation of Taiwanese investment in Thailand, knowledge of Mandarin is now an advantage, prompting the Thai government to promote Mandarin education.⁵⁷ However, referring to a similar “China fever” in the Philippines starting in the 1990s, Teresita Ang-See worried that it might lead to a misleading conclusion about the “resinicization” of Chinese-Filipinos.⁵⁸ This concern is also shared by many Chinese Indonesians due to the suspicion of dual loyalty, and the lingering paranoia regarding Chinese overseas as a possible “fifth column” of Beijing.

It is not uncommon for members of the Chinese diaspora who are physically or emotionally detached from the mainland to have a fixed and essentialist notion of Chineseness that is based on an imagined connection to historical China and its assumed monolithic and timeless civilization.⁵⁹ Rather than political affinity, the term “resinicization” thus evokes an interest in cultural roots, usually based on an essentialized notion of Chineseness, such as Confucian moral values and ethos. While promoters of Chinese language in Indonesia show no sign of interest in a renewed political allegiance to China, they are very committed to rekindling interest in Chinese cultural heritage. This “cultural mission” has been embarked on mainly by the older generation, who feel obligated to pass on the language to younger, assimilated Chinese. For instance, many Chinese Indonesian educational, cultural, and religious organizations run by the Chinese-educated older

56. Liu Hong, “Southeast Asian Chinese”: 68.

57. Chokkajitsumpun, “Chinese Literacy”: 223.

58. Ang-See, “The Chinese in the Philippines”: 39.

59. Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese*: 81–84.

generation regularly organize classes on classical Chinese literature, such as the Tang Dynasty poems (Tang shi), “Standards for Being a Good Pupil and Child” (Di Zi Gui), and the *Three-Character Classic* (Sanzi Jing), to preserve a certain version of Chinese moral and ethnic identity. As language is “an important symbol of identity,”⁶⁰ the older generation believe that by learning the language, the younger generation will be influenced by the virtues of Chinese culture and Confucian values, and thus be culturally resinicized.

Another important feature of contemporary Mandarin education in Indonesia is the heterogeneity of learners of the language. While the pre-1965 students of Mandarin were exclusively Chinese, now many are natives (*pribumi*). Mandarin proficiency is attractive in the job market because it fetches higher wages in Indonesia, especially with the growing commercial demand in areas like education, business, translation, and tourism. Furthermore, the flow of East Asian (especially Hong Kongese, Taiwanese, and Chinese) popular-culture products such as movies, soap operas, and melodrama into Indonesia has complemented the rising trend of Mandarin. Most Chinese-language educators cherish and welcome the interest of *pribumi* in learning the language. They see it as an opportunity to promote cross-cultural understanding which may break down the stereotypes and prejudices regarding the Chinese constructed through Indonesian history. This new phenomenon also challenges the essentialist version of Chineseness, which uses the ability to speak Chinese as its quintessential benchmark.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES TO INDONESIA'S MANDARIN FEVER

Despite the unprecedented boom in Chinese language learning in the past two decades, there are still many challenges that may hamper its development. The foremost practical problem is the shortage of teachers to cater to the soaring demand.⁶¹ The teachers of the current scene come from two main sources: the Chinese-speaking older generation, and recent university graduates with a Chinese major. The first were students or teachers in Chinese

60. Mohammad Khatib and Mohammad Reza Ghamari, “Mutual Relations of Identity and Foreign Language Learning: An Overview of Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Approaches to Identity,” *Theories and Practice in Language Studies* 1:12 (2011): 1701–08.

61. “Indonesia needs more Mandarin Chinese teachers: expert,” *China Daily*, August 7, 2014, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2014-08/07/content_18264716.htm>, accessed January 27, 2018.

schools before their closure in 1965. This older generation may have a good command of the language, but they are “frozen” in their knowledge of the evolving language and their instruction often uses obsolete methods and vocabulary, due to the generation gap. The second group are mainly young *pribumi* graduates from Indonesian universities that offered Chinese majors. Many experienced Chinese educators claim that these graduates have only a shallow knowledge of the language, which may not surpass the high school level in a Chinese-medium school.⁶²

A smaller group of teachers are younger-generation Mandarin-speaking Chinese Indonesians who received an education overseas, especially in China. However, a profession in teaching is usually not the top preference for this group, whose Chinese competency could fetch them a higher-paying job in private enterprise. Every year the Chinese government, through the Hanban and Qiaoban (Overseas Chinese Affairs Office), provides around 100 Chinese teachers and teaching volunteers to teach in Indonesia.⁶³ But even with these additions, the rising demand for Chinese language training in contemporary Indonesia is still unmet.

Other limitations of the post-Suharto Chinese teaching scene in Indonesia are highlighted in Shao’s comprehensive study.⁶⁴ In his assessment of the state of Mandarin education in Medan, he highlighted the following problems: an inconsistent level of Chinese competency among students, lack of a unified Chinese language curriculum in schools with a long-term objective, lack of Chinese language resources relevant to the context of Indonesia, lack of a Mandarin-speaking language environment, lack of consistency between primary and secondary curricula in Chinese language, and lack of creative pedagogy in stimulating interest in the language. The class hours dedicated to Chinese language are also limited: only one or two hours per week in state schools that offer Mandarin, and three to five hours per week in trilingual schools.⁶⁵

The survival of Chinese language education in contemporary Indonesia is also heavily subject to external factors, both domestic and international, that are beyond the control of Chinese-language educators or Chinese organizations. Politically, these include the government’s policies on education,

62. Li Zhuo Hui, *History of Chinese Education in Indonesia*: 210–15.

63. Li and Jiang, “Discussion on Indonesia Confucius Institute”: 88.

64. Shao Chang Chao, “Survey and Strategies”: 103–11.

65. Li and Jiang, “Discussion on Indonesia Confucius Institute”: 88.

multiculturalism, and minority rights, the commitment of the power holders to democratization, and the attitude and tolerance of the majority toward minority groups. These factors will be explicated below.

Scholars have identified the years after the 1998 reform movement, in particular after 2004, as the watershed for the “conservative turn” in Indonesia, as conservative Islamic forces began to aggressively encroach on the public sphere.⁶⁶ Intolerance toward minorities has been growing in Indonesia.⁶⁷ Even though most reports cite cases of *religious* intolerance, with the rise in Islamic conservatism, the moral implications of this phenomenon affect ethnic and sexual minorities as well.

The most vivid example of the latent intolerance toward the Chinese minority was manifest in the Jakarta gubernatorial election in early 2017.⁶⁸ Ethnic Chinese-Christian candidate Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known as Ahok), the former governor of Jakarta, became the target of smear campaigns for his ethnic and religious identity. After losing the election in April 2017, he was sentenced to two years in prison for defaming the Holy Quran. The blasphemy charge was in response to a speech in which Ahok told the audience not to be fooled by people manipulating a certain verse of the Quran as justification to not vote for an unbeliever (i.e., him) in the upcoming elections. The statement was quoted out of context and sensationalized and went viral in social media. On November 4 and December 2, 2016, before the election, between 100,000 and 500,000 people participated in anti-Ahok rallies in Jakarta demanding his arrest and prosecution. These large-scale events re-awakened the fear and trauma of the ethnic Chinese, reminding them of the anti-Chinese riots of 1998, which was not so long ago.⁶⁹

66. Greg Fealey, “A Conservative Turn,” *Inside Indonesia* 87, July-September 2006, <<http://www.insideindonesia.org/a-conservative-turn>>, accessed January 27, 2018; Martin Van Bruinessen, “Introduction: Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam and the ‘Conservative Turn’ of the Early Twenty-First Century,” in Martin Van Bruinessen (ed.), *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the Conservative Turn* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013): 1–21.

67. Andreas Harsono, “Indonesia’s Religious Minorities under Threat,” Human Rights Watch, February 2, 2017, <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/02/indonesias-religious-minorities-under-threat>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

68. Yang Xiao Qiang and Wang Xi Zhe, “Yindunixiya: 2016 nian huigu yu 2017 nian zhanwang [Indonesia: review of 2016 and prospect of 2017], *Dongnanya Zongheng* [Crossroads: Southeast Asian Studies] 1 (2017): 23–28.

69. “Ahok Trial: The Blasphemy Case Testing Indonesian Identity,” *BBC News*, February 14, 2017, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38902960>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

A survey published in September 2017 by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies–Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore shows a worrying trend of anti-Chinese sentiment reemerging in Indonesia.⁷⁰ The survey confirmed the longstanding stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians as wealthy and having questionable loyalty to Indonesia. It also highlighted various negative prejudices against Chinese Indonesians' influence in national politics and the economy. Setijadi notes, "The results of the survey are alarming because they show that, despite the reforms of the past two decades, old stereotypes of ethnic Chinese still persist and are perhaps stronger than before."⁷¹

In fact, racial and religious fault lines were opportunistically exploited by Ahok's rival candidate in the Jakarta gubernatorial elections, Anies Baswedan, in his repeated appeal for voters to choose a *pribumi* Muslim as their leader. In his inauguration speech on October 16, 2017, at Jakarta City Hall, Baswedan renewed the indigeneity discourse: "In the past, we *pribumi* were oppressed and defeated. Now we have independence, now is the time to be the host in our own home."⁷² This statement invokes the Otherness of the ethnic Chinese based on the long-held perception of them as *pendatang* (newcomers) and *penumpang* (temporary residents, lodgers)—"eternal foreigners" on the "indigenous" soil of Indonesia.⁷³

The Ahok case has resurfaced the ongoing anti-Chinese sentiment, notwithstanding the positive legislative developments toward the citizenship and cultural rights of the ethnic Chinese since 1998. Acts of intolerance and violence by radical Islamists have been reported in recent years: attacks on Chinese temples, and demands for Chinese religious statues to be removed. In August 2017, a 100-foot-tall statue of a Chinese warrior deity, Guan Yu, in a temple complex in East Java was covered with an enormous sheet after pressure from a Muslim mob. Protesters gathered outside the East Java legislature building in the city of Surabaya to demand its destruction. They claimed that the statue was an emblem of "idol worship"; a protester also charged that it was a "symbol of treason" to have the statue of a foreign general

70. Fossati, Foong, and Negara, "Indonesia National Survey Project": 24–26.

71. Charlotte Setijadi, "Chinese Indonesians in the Eyes of the Pribumi Public," *ISEAS Perspectives* 73 (2017): 11.

72. Deasy Simandjuntak, "Commentary: Why Anies Baswedan, a New Governor with Big Shoes to Fill, Is Echoing Hardline Sentiment," *Channel News Asia*, October 19, 2017, <<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/commentary-why-anies-baswedan-a-new-governor-with-big-shoes-to-9322756>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

73. Hoon, *Chinese Identity in Post-Suharto Indonesia*: 137–42.

on Indonesian soil.⁷⁴ Such incidents point to the precarious position of the ethnic Chinese and the fragility of multiculturalism in Indonesia. They will certainly have an impact on the ongoing development of the Chinese language in Indonesia, especially if Mandarin Fever is seen by some factions as competing with or a threat to the exclusive indigenous notion of Indonesian identity in the current climate of rising nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

Besides domestic affairs, the dynamics of international relations also have ramifications for the development and survival of Chinese language education in Indonesia. These include Sino–Indonesian bilateral relations, China’s peaceful and harmonious rise and its relations with the region, China’s accommodation of its ethnic and religious (read: Muslim) minorities, and the territorial contestations in the South China Sea. While Herlijanto’s 2013 study showed that the perception by Indonesians of China has been largely positive, such perceptions can change. In early 2017, a rumor that between 10 million and 20 million Chinese workers would come into Indonesia and take over blue-collar jobs from the locals went viral. This came at the same time that foreign direct investment from China hit a record high, and that former Jakarta Governor Ahok was accused of blasphemy.⁷⁵ The rumor was not only xenophobic but also political in nature. No one can predict the backlash that Mandarin Fever and Chinese Indonesians might face if economic competition between China and Indonesia heats up enough that indigenous entrepreneurs feel threatened, or if provocateurs spread more rumors about China for their own political gains.

CONCLUSION

We have critically examined Mandarin Fever in contemporary Indonesia in light of the broader geopolitical context beyond the bounded, if not romantic, notion of cultural resinicization. We have discussed the disparate agendas of various actors in the post-1998 resurgence of the Chinese language in Indonesia, namely the Chinese Indonesians themselves (both older and

74. “Statue of Chinese God Guan Yu Stokes Tension in Indonesia,” *Straits Times*, August 11, 2017, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/statue-of-chinese-god-guan-yu-stokes-tension-in-indonesia>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

75. Eveline Danubrata and Gayathri Suroyo, “In Indonesia, Labor Friction and Politics Fan Anti-Chinese Sentiment,” *Reuters*, April 18, 2017, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-election-china/in-indonesia-labor-friction-and-politics-fan-anti-chinese-sentiment-idUSKBN17KoYG>>, accessed January 27, 2018.

younger generations), indigenous Indonesians, the Indonesian state, and the People's Republic of China. The convergence of these agendas has been made possible by the economic benefits brought about by the rise of China.

Learning Mandarin in post-Suharto Indonesia is instrumentally motivated; students see it as an investment for economic purposes. This can be contrasted to the New Order era, when Chinese Indonesians struggled to maintain their cultural identity; the clandestine study of Chinese was a way to retain what was left of their Chineseness. In general, it can be argued that the current Mandarin Fever has shown promising signs of cultural restoration for the Chinese Indonesian community, as well as for the building of an emerging generation of Chinese-literate indigenous Indonesians. It could contribute favorably to Sino-Indonesian relations, especially to the burgeoning Chinese investments in Indonesia.

However, the positive development of Chinese language and culture in contemporary Indonesia notwithstanding, most Chinese Indonesians are, at best, cautiously optimistic. This can be aptly described in an oft-cited Chinese idiom among older-generation Chinese Indonesians, *ju'an siwei*: "to be vigilant even in peacetime." Recent episodes of anti-Chinese sentiment show that this attitude may be more than just paranoia. After all, the 32 years of systematic erasure of the Chinese language under the Suharto regime caused more than the adulteration of the cultural identity of an ethnic group and the discontinuation of a language. It also eroded trust and widened the interethnic gulf between indigenous and Chinese Indonesians. While the practical challenges to the current Mandarin Fever will take time to overcome, one can only hope that the acquisition of Mandarin by non-Chinese Indonesians can improve intercultural understanding, helping bridge the cultural gap, combat racial prejudice, and debunk stereotypes.