

MANDARIN AS OVERSEAS CHINESE'S INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE (CASE IN INDONESIA)

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Abstract

Overseas Chinese have long stayed and become one of the indigenous groups in the country where they exist and survive for years. Even they adjust their nationality. In Indonesia, Overseas Chinese have 'melted' with other tribes here. Today, Overseas Chinese is the third biggest indigenous groups in Indonesia. They live, act and appear like Indonesia indigenous people. However, many of them still use mandarin for daily conversation among their families or in group. Even Chinese dialects, such as Hokkien, Hakka, Canton, Tio Ciu and many more are still used. Each dialect shows the identity of the person. Some of them speak Mandarin only, some are able to speak Mandarin and one of the dialects, some even can speak mandarin and more than one dialects. Mandarin was forbidden to be used during Suharto's regime. In that period, many Overseas Chinese children didn't have opportunity to learn it. Though, the language and dialects survive. For Overseas Chinese, Mandarin and the dialects are their indigenous languages. This paper will discuss about how do the mandarin and other Chinese dialects still been spoken and well- maintained till today.

1. Who is Overseas Chinese? What is Mandarin?

1.1 Overseas Chinese

The Overseas Chinese people are people of Chinese birth or descent who live outside Republic of China and People's Republic of China. They have always been recognized for their drive and their work ethic – and they are proud of it. It is no accident this needs to thrive mindset; the Chinese culture upholds character qualities like self-discipline, hardworking and diligence. Formerly many Overseas Chinese ever had a strong identification with nationalism in China, but with the passage of time and the 'brutal policies of the Cultural Revolution' in China, they have gradually developed a national (local) identity. Besides, Chinese Indonesians also have communal identity, which Chinese Indonesians see themselves as a political community with rights to protect. Communal Identity is limited to Chinese organizations and associations. The other component of identities is cultural identity, which is the set of beliefs, values, and customs that is transmitted from generation to generation. There has been a major change from Chinese historical identity (consciousness of traditional family values and symbols of a glorious Chinese past) to cultural identity, the modern version of the traditional Chinese Identity.

1.2 Mandarin

"Mandarin" refers to the northeastern Chinese dialect that China's rulers have long promoted as a unifying language. It is spoken by more people than any other language in the world. As one of the six official languages used by United Nation (UN), Mandarin now has earned itself greater status in the world. Within China this dialect is referred to as 'standard speech' (Putonghua). Meanwhile outside China, it may be called 'country language' (guoyu) or simply 'Chinese' (huayu). Mandarin has always been the language of high culture among the Chinese within China and abroad. Mandarin is the main language in Mainland China. While there are a number of dialects spoken throughout China, it is the most recognized dialect. Mandarin is used by more than 50% of the population in China. The number of users of Mandarin is constantly growing rapidly than other dialects of Chinese's users.

Mandarin belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Besides a core vocabulary and sounds, Mandarin shares features that make it unlike most Western languages. It is monosyllabic, has even less inflection than English, and is tonal language, meaning that different tones, or intonations, distinguish words that otherwise are pronounced identically. The four Chinese tones are flat tone, rising tone, low rising tone, down tone. It is not unusual for a syllable to pronounce in each of the four tones, each yielding a word with a completely different meaning. It means that in order to indicate differences in meaning between words similar in sound, tone languages assign to words a distinctive relative pitch high or low or a distinctive pitch contour level, rising, or falling. Mandarin has no inflection of nouns which exists in order to show whether they are, for example, subject or object, and no indication is given that verbs, nouns, and adjectives agree with each other in number. Word order is even more important than it

is in English as an indicator of the relation of words to one another in the sentence. In broad outline, Chinese word order is subject-verb-object, modifier-modified. On closer inspection, in Chinese, the grammar is more often simply a topic set forth to be followed by a comment. Further grammatical characteristics of Chinese are that, in general, verb tense is not expressed; and for lack of an equivalent of the English relative clause, quite complicated modifier phrases may precede the term modified.

The Chinese written language is an old and conservative type that assigns a single distinctive symbol, or character, to each word of the vocabulary. The writing system has been standardized and stylistically altered, its principles and many of its symbols remain fundamentally the same. Chinese characters 'kanji' is derived from picture writing; it grew into a word-by-word representation of language when it was discovered that words too abstract to be readily pictured could be indicated by their sound rather than their sense. Chinese still works pictographically and phonetically. There are four broadly defined styles of writing:

1. Seal scripts
2. Regular Brush scripts
3. Running script
4. 'grass' script

The printing of abbreviated characters of kanji is used in China nowadays. The abbreviated characters are sometimes referred to as the 'simplified' characters.

Chinese words have usually been transliterated according to a phonetic Romanization, known as 'Pinyin' (spelling). It has had official standing in the Peoples' Republic of China. Replacement of the traditional characters 'kanji' by 'pinyin' has been advocated but is unlikely to be carried through completely because of the threat it poses to literature and historical documentation in the classical language. Simplification of the sound system through time, with the resultant homonyms, has made the tense classical style, unintelligible when transcribed in an alphabetic script.

2. Overseas Chinese in Indonesia (Chinese Indonesians)

Overseas Chinese in Indonesia are ethnically Chinese people living in Indonesia, as a result of centuries of overseas Chinese migration. Chinese Indonesians currently formed the largest Overseas Chinese community in the world. Chinese Indonesian people are diverse in their origins, timing and circumstances of immigration to Indonesia, and level of ties to China. Many trace their origins to the southern parts of China, such as Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan provinces. There were three waves of immigration of ethnic Chinese to Indonesia. The first wave was spurred by trading activities dating back to the time of Cheng Ho's voyage in the early 15th century, the second wave around the time of the Opium War, and the third wave around the first half of the 20th century where the warlord era, second Sino-Japanese war and Chinese Civil war took place. Chinese Indonesians who came in the first and second waves are called Peranakan Chinese. The third wave, who are still culturally Chinese are called Chinese Totok.

Physical characteristics, language, name, geographical location, and life-style of Overseas Chinese in Indonesia are not always distinct from those of the rest of the population. Many people who identify themselves as Chinese Indonesians cannot read or write Mandarin. But some of them are still using Mandarin to communicate with among the family members. They considered themselves as keepers of Chinese cultural ideals and maintained their traditions through household shrines, reverence for ancestors, and private language instruction in Chinese school. Highly oriented toward success, they saw themselves as more dedicated to hard work, individual social mobility through the acquisition of wealth, and self-reliance.

The struggle for economic recovery which set aside the powerful economy of Chinese Indonesians' business has proved to be ineffective. The management skills and hard work ethics typically found in Chinese Indonesian people should be learned by the whole nation; their existence must be accepted by and integrated within the society. For this reason, Overseas Chinese still exist in Indonesia. The wave of globalization which is underway should not pose any threat to them. The full acceptance of overseas Chinese within the society should open a wider horizon to them. They would be motivated to take part in every aspect of nation building. Economic and social gaps would be narrowed, and interactions among ethnic Chinese and other ethnic groups in Indonesia would be more harmonious than ever.

3. As Vernacular Language, Mandarin is indeed Chinese Indonesians' Indigenous Language

Mandarin is spoken by several group of ethnic Chinese group in Indonesia. Since this language ever been banned for more than 30 years, many Chinese Indonesians' who run their school periods from 1966-1997 never be able to study Mandarin in formal school. They have to learn it 'secretly'. So, even their Chinese descents but they hardly can speak Mandarin, if they don't train and use it in their house, among family's members. Here, ironically, Mandarin as the most spoken language in the world is just a vernacular language in Indonesia. Vernacular language generally is defined as the first language of a group socially and politically dominated by a group with different language. It is the variety used for communication in the home and with close friends (Holmes:1994). It is the language of solidarity between people from the same ethnic group.

The revitalization of the Chinese community in Indonesia will be the premise of the future, together as the cause of education in Indonesia of Chinese language education. Chinese language education in Indonesia in the last 10 years has made great progress. The Chinese language education has the right place, and many other advantages, particularly in the Chinese population, has a huge base of 20 million Chinese, accounting for 50% of the total number of overseas Chinese. Special historical background and the ubiquitous Chinese community in Indonesia so the Chinese language education requirements should be better developed. However, the actual situation of Chinese language education is lagging behind, which is Indonesia's human and economic construction is extremely unfavorable. Chinese Indonesians are struggling to find their place. The teaching of Mandarin has played a special role in their efforts. More than 30 years (1966-1998), Mandarin was banned and treated as a sign of immutable foreignness. In response, a restoration of Chinese language education has been crucial to Chinese Indonesians' effort at cultural revival and challenges to reigning concepts of ethnicity in these 10 years. It puts focus on Chinese language education and tries to create so called 'Chinese-educated generation.'

4. Maintaining Mandarin and Other Dialects among Chinese Society in Indonesia

How can the Mandarin and other Chinese dialects be maintained? Janet Holmes in her theory 'Language maintenance and Shift' explains about it, which could be applied too for the reasons why Chinese and other Chinese dialects can be maintained.

- 1) A language can be maintained and preserved, when it's highly valued as an important symbol of ethnic identity for the minority group.

Until recently the designation of mandarin as the world's most spoken language was mainly due to the size of the population of China itself. But now Mandarin may be poised to spread beyond the Chinese world as a language of commerce and influence among the elite and professional among this minority group. Mandarin and other Chinese dialects are spoken in order to show the identity of the users as Chinese descents. Being able to speak Mandarin is their social identity, related to their background as Chinese descents.

- 2) If families from a minority group live near each other and see each other frequently, their interactions will help to maintain the language.

Chinatowns are spread in many countries in the world. It is the center of Overseas Chinese's activities. Mandarin is still used to communicate among each others there. Beside Mandarin, sometimes other Chinese dialects are used there also. Except Chinatown, Overseas Chinese usually stay exclusively in several areas. In those places, they speak in their own languages. Other Chinese dialects such as Hakka, Fukien, Cantonese, etc are also heard to be spoken, beside Mandarin. In family, the interaction using Mandarin and other Chinese dialects are common. In this way, Mandarin is maintained well even though only as vernacular language among them. In family, where the grand parents and parents are communicating with each other in Mandarin or other Chinese dialects, the children are also 'forced' to use the same language. They have strong reasons to train the Children in speaking those languages in stead of bahasa Indonesia. Firstly, it is to maintain the ability of the children to be able to speak in more than 2 languages. They are very sure that bahasa Indonesia and English can be learned when the children go to school.

- 3) For emigrate individuals from a minority group, the degree and frequency of contact with the homeland can contribute to language maintenance.

It is important to highlight the affective-expressive components in Mandarin. Diasporic discourses reflect a sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes dispersed people who retain a sense of their uniqueness and an interest in their homeland, China. A diaspora is a social

construct founded on feeling, consciousness, memory, mythology, history, meaningful narratives, group identity, longing dreams, allegorical and virtual elements all of which play an important role in establishing a diaspora reality. The sense of connection to the homeland must be strong enough to resist forgetting, assimilating or distance. China had its own special relationships with the Chinese Indonesians. The most striking is clearly the economic perspective. As China has developed to the industrial country, increasing in every sector, many ethnic Chinese has business relationship with China. Most of them are joining the rush to invest in China. They had been looking for opportunities to invest in China. Some of them are known to have made investments and contributions on a smaller scale to specific areas, especially to their ancestral villages and towns if they still had relatives there. There is little evidence that they were investing in China for any reason other than an opportunity to set up a profitable business. But they were clearly preparing themselves for large-scale investments when the chances were there. All of them were waiting for a firm commitment from China to expand and sustain economic growth and welcome and protect foreign ventures. Hundreds of thousands returned to rebuild their country, but many more still left out of China. Those opportunities and relationship among Chinese Indonesians and China have 'forced' them to learn and maintain their ability to speak Mandarin. As a tool of communication, Mandarin has been used worldwide to bridge their cooperation in business and also other issues.

- 4) Intermarriage within the same minority group is helpful to maintain the native language.
If the husband and wife belong to same minority group, they will communicate with each other in their native language, in this case, Mandarin. If the children were born, the parents are using Mandarin as the native language to communicate to the children also. Continuously the children will keep on using and speak Mandarin with their children in the future. Once the married couple come from the same tribe that is able to speak Mandarin, it will guarantee that Mandarin will continuously maintain as the communication's tools among the family members. If the family speaks other Chinese dialects at home, those dialects will be well maintained.
- 5) Ensuring that the minority group language is used at formal settings such as schools or worship places will increase language maintenance.
Overseas Chinese business is known for its strength in terms of its 'relationship' and family lineage. Through the Overseas Chinese network, the group has achieved many successes despite its minority status. For instance, it has been claimed that overseas Chinese constitute only 3% of the total population in Indonesia, and yet the group amasses 70% of the total wealth of the country. With such strength and success, it is expected that Overseas Chinese business is able to exploit its comparative advantage to play an important role. Notwithstanding the so-called strengths and success, Overseas Chinese business at best plays a secondary role in the production network because the group exhibits several structural weaknesses such as conservatism, low technological know-how and a general lack of governance in management. With the spread of globalizing globalization and the rise of China in the recent decades, the networks will become an institution. Here, Mandarin is needed as the 'communication tool.' People who are speaking in the same language will be emotionally having the deep relationship among them.
- 6) An extended normal family in which parents, children and grandchildren live together and use the same minority language can help to maintain it.
Family with all members staying in the same place has a tendency to communicate in a same language. If Mandarin or other Chinese dialects are spoken among the family's members, from the grandparents till the grandchildren. The continuity of this condition will make the language being maintained well. Parents tend to 'force' the children to speak Mandarin or other Chinese dialects. Using the reason to maintain the language and to preserve their ethnic Chinese identity, they are also very proud of the children if they successfully train the children to be able to speak the languages. The more Chinese dialects (including Mandarin) can be spoken by the children, the more their parents will be proud of them.
- 7) Institutional support from domains such as education, law, administration, religion and the media can make a difference between the success and failure of maintaining a minority group language.
China's rapid economic development and technological progress has long been seen as human flourishing. Many evidences show that the total aspects of the Chinese economy after the United

States as the world's no. 2 power. Learning Chinese world-wide, learning Chinese crazes in full swing were started from the beginning of 2000 to 2010. When the annual statistics show that countries in the world are sending students to China and Chinese educational institutions are run by the average growth, Indonesia's growth was less than it. If more than 30 years because of the country's condition intensified the process of ethnic Chinese to assimilate, today the government will emerge stronger from the era of liberal culture, Chinese language education has been melting the ice of detention release. All-round development Chinese language education, to carry out exchanges with China, economic cooperation, the government has become an important part of development strategies to support the Chinese in Indonesia. Indonesia vigorous development of Chinese education, will be one advantage of Indonesia's national development of various undertakings, are bound to the development of Chinese language education. Maintaining Chinese language is to comply with Indonesia's principles of performance is the successor to maintain ethnic Chinese human culture, morality and wisdom of the performance. Meanwhile, we must strengthen cooperation with other friendly nations in Indonesia. Government has restricted Chinese-medium education and the Chinese-language press. The command of Chinese languages is useful in business, and allows Chinese to maintain ethnic ties across national boundaries. This is the important motive for the maintenance of Chinese-language ability.

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