THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF CHINESE OVERSEAS IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Political participation plays an important role in protecting the interests of the Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia. This journal is qualitative research with a library approach method. This research aims to find 1) political participation patterns of Chinese Overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia; 2) factors that influence the political participation of Chinese Overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia. Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia do not actively participate in politics as the local ethnic majorities, however with the development of democracy, the Chinese overseas mainly take part in the political field by voting in national elections and regional elections, participating in political parties, joining various associations, and building close relationships with government officials. In political participation, Chinese overseas is mainly influenced by the level of democracy, political awareness, and relations with local ethics.

KEYWORDS: Political Participation, Chinese Overseas, Indonesia, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese overseas is an ethnic minority both in Indonesia and in Malaysia, the percentage of the Chinese overseas from the total number of Malaysian citizens is greater than Indonesia, but the percentage of the Chinese overseas in Malaysia is starting to decrease, as each citizen can only vote once, with descendants of the percentage of Chinese overseas, political conditions in Malaysia will also be affected, the massive political participation of the Chinese overseas in the past will hard to continue. Chinese overseas who have lived for generations in Indonesia, since the current reform era, have succeeded in fighting to no longer be referred to as Chinese, but to be referred to as Tionghoa, Chinese overseas in Indonesia (Groeneveldt, 2009: 24). The number of Chinese overseas in Indonesia is the largest in Southeast Asia, but the percentage is low, so the Chinese overseas is an ethnic minority compared to other local ethnic groups, each citizen can only vote one vote, so the Chinese overseas cannot occupy an important place in the national political field in Indonesia, and usually plays a role in regional politics.

Islam is the most important religion in Indonesia and Malaysia, the Muslim population in both two countries is the dominant part of the total population of the country, so Islam can have a big influence in the political field, the participation of the Chinese overseas faces major challenges
from religious issues. Although the Chinese overseas played an important role in independence in both Indonesia and Malaysia, due to ethnic, religion, culture, population and other factors, the Chinese overseas was unable to play an important role in political fields.

Since entering the reform era, Indonesian people have really participated in modern political life, since the government of B.J Habibie, through Presidential Instruction No. 26 of 1998, concerning the Cessation of the Use of the Terms Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, all government officials have also been ordered to no longer use the terms indigenous and non-indigenous to distinguish residents of Chinese descent from Indonesian citizens (Suharyanto, 2014). At the beginning, the Chinese overseas also tried to build a political party consisting only of the Chinese overseas, such as the Indonesian Bhinneka Party, but the experiment was not very successful. Some Chinese overseas began to join other political parties. In Malaysia, for example, Malaysia is inhabited by three major ethnic groups namely Malay, Chinese and Indian, each of which competes for power in politics, thus triggering the three ethnicities to establish political parties to fight for their ethnic political interests in political decision-making of national and local government. Most political parties in Malaysia are made up of people belonging to the same ethnic group. The Chinese overseas in Malaysia can participate in political activities through political parties of the Chinese overseas, for example the Malaysian Chinese Association and the Democratic Action Party, the United Party is a partner of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) which is dominant in the ruling national coalitions (Freedman, 2000: 11).

Compared to research on the participation of Chinese overseas in Southeast Asia in the economic and cultural fields, research on political participation is still not so much. In book Political Participation and Ethnic Minorities: Chinese Overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States, Amy L. Freedman (2000) discusses the underlying causes that lead to political inequality between the indigenous population and the Chinese overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States, Freedman chose various cases that occurred in the three countries, such as Malaysia's former prime minister Mahathir tolerating moderate opposition to his regime, but when his legitimacy, or the legitimacy of the dominant party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was challenged, he relied on Malay-based nationalism to attack his opponent. In order to discuss the cases, Freedman focuses on the political aspect, and also pays attention to the cultural aspect and the class aspect. According to Freedman (2000), a country's political institutions and forms have determined how ethnic groups interact with each other, and how immigrant groups participate in the political process.

The article Chinese Indonesians And Regime Change: Alternative Perspectives written by Marleen Dieleman, Juliette Koning, and Peter Post (2011) discusses the fundamental transition after the New Order in Indonesian society from different aspects and disciplines, and shows that Chinese overseas in Indonesia is a diverse group and is active in social activities. This article also shows that during regime change, the Chinese overseas used creative and constructive ways to deal with difficult situations and crises. In Freedman's book, he discusses the political participation of the Chinese overseas in Indonesia, Malaysia and the United States as a whole, on the other hand, Marleen Dieleman, Juliette Koning, and Peter Post's articles focus more on the role of the Chinese overseas in regime change in Indonesia. With this research, the researcher wants to try to discuss the forms of participation of the Chinese community in Indonesia and Malaysia and their influencing factors in detail, the specialty of which I will research the participation of the Chinese
overseas in regional head elections in Indonesia.

The study of the Chinese overseas focuses more on the role of the Chinese overseas in the cultural and economic fields, studies which focus on the political field are still not so many, so the researcher wants to try to research the political participation of the Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia with the aim of knowing more about the patterns of political participation of the Chinese community in Indonesia and Malaysia, and influencing factors in the political participation of the Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative research with a library approach method. Qualitative research according to Moleong (2010: 6) is the research that intends to holistically understand phenomena about what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions and so on, with descriptions in the form of words and language on a context, especial natural contexts and by utilizing various natural methods. In this study, the focus of the research is 1) the patterns of political participation of the Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia; 2) the factors that influence the Chinese overseas to participate in politics. The research locations are Indonesia and Malaysia. The population of Chinese overseas in both two countries is large, but the Chinese overseas in both two countries are more interested in the economic field, do not attach much importance to politics and even ignore politics, thus they have a history of not actively participating in politics. In this study, secondary data collection were used. Secondary data is a data source that does not directly provide data to data collectors, but seeks data from other people or with documents (Sugiyono, 2013:225). The author collects secondary data which are associated with themes 1) the patterns of political participation of the Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia; 2) the factors that influence the Chinese overseas to participate in politics. After the data is collected, categorized, then analyzed, then elaborated by using the theory of political participation, political participation is a voluntary action that succeeds or fails, which will be organized or not, sometimes or continuously using legal or illegal means to influence choices of government policy, administration of government or election of political leaders and government at the national, regional or local level (Rahman 2002: 158).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The patterns of political participation of the Chinese Overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia

The Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia participate in politics by actively participating in local or national elections and voting. The right to vote is a basic right that is protected by law both in Indonesia and in Malaysia, the Chinese overseas can vote for candidates who promise to protect the rights of all people without ethnic discrimination, so the interests of the Chinese overseas will also be respected. Data from Minority Rights Group International shows the population of Han Chinese ethnicity in Malaysia is around 7.4 million people, while the Xinhua news agency reports, Malaysia's population of Chinese descent in 2021 will be 22.4 percent from the whole population, down slightly from 22.6 percent in 2020. (Iswara, 2021). With these data, it
can be seen that the Chinese overseas population in Malaysia is large, the percentage is not dominant but can have a major impact on the elections. In the 1990 general election in Malaysia, the Chinese overseas protested against the ruling government by voting for the DAP candidate at the election in federal level (Case, 1993), so that the incumbent government won hard in that election, thus the government in power issued a policy of economic development which only contains a few colors of ethnic, and encourages cooperation between the Chinese overseas and the Malay ethnic.

In Indonesia, the percentage of the Chinese overseas is small, but they can also have an impact in the election of regional governor, the Chinese overseas usually live together because customs and traditions are almost the same, besides they can work together to face challenges from outside, so usually the Chinese overseas can occupy the dominant population in a small area, and then the Chinese overseas will be more active in participating in politics. The percentage of political participation of the Chinese overseas in voting in Slawi Wetan Village in the 2014 Pilkada reached 95.58% (Singestecia, 2018). During the general election in 1999, the Chinese overseas voted for different parties based on the area of residence (Freedman, 2003: 445). In West Kalimantan, the voice of the Chinese overseas goes to all major parties, including Islamic parties such as the PPP (The United Development Party). On the other hand, in Surabaya, many Chinese overseas follow PKB, Wahid's Islamic party, while Chinese overseas living in urban areas follow PAN and Golkar (Wibowo, 2001).

The Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia participate in politics by following political parties. Political parties play an important role in political activity, in Malaysia there are many Chinese overseas parties, for example MCA, the largest Chinese overseas political party in Malaysia. Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP) which was carried out for 20 years, and greatly injured the interests of the Chinese overseas in the economic, educational and cultural fields. To deal with the NEP, MCA held various seminars to gather feedback from the general public and published the 'Malaysia Unity Plan' and presented a policy that could be used to replace the NEP. Tun Tan Siew Sin was the chairman of MCA, when he worked as Minister of Finance from 1959 to 1974, he prioritized the benefit of the Chinese overseas with his power (Koon, 1997). In Indonesia, since the reformation era in 1998, Chinese overseas who are members of the PDI-P and Gerindra parties have succeeded in getting their political rights more boldly and openly (Rahmat, 2013).

Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia participate in politics by joining various associations. With different purposes, associations can be classified as business associations, cultural associations, political associations, education associations and so on. Political associations are most closely related to political participation, in 1985, 15 associations of Chinese overseas issued a Joint Statement of the Malaysian Chinese Association 1985\(^1\), the introduction to the statement explain that the government grants privileges to the Malay ethic, other ethnic communities face limitations in the political, economic, educational and social fields, this will lead to injustice and discrimination. The statement also conveys demands and suggestions about matters in the political, educational, economic and social fields. When the government offends the interests

of the Chinese overseas, political associations will communicate with the government. Economic associations also play an important role in political participation, the Chinese overseas occupies an important place in the economic field in both Indonesia and Malaysia, the phenomenon of 'money politics' cannot be ignored, political activities such as elections require a lot of funds, the propaganda has cost a lot of money, thus funds sufficient is the awareness of political participation. Amirudin (2006: 13) states “with a number of regional head candidates, it is known that on average each candidate provides a nomination budget up to Rp. 8 billion. Candidates who are still in office (incumbent) generally provide a budget which is greater than the average amount”. Because the Chinese overseas plays an important role in the economic field, trade associations can also exert great influence indirectly to politics. Dong Jiao Zong is an educational association in Malaysia, this association enters the political field indirectly by strengthening its role in defending Chinese education. In the early 1980s, Dong Jiao Zong recommended several Chinese educators into one of the political component parties in the Barisan Nasional government with the aim to preserve Dong Jiao Zong’s interests within the National Front.

Chinese overseas in Indonesia and Malaysia participate in politics indirectly by building close relationships with government officials. The Chinese overseas contact government officials informally to build informal relationships in order to influence in the formation and implementation of policies with the aim of creating a political atmosphere that can benefit the Chinese overseas. During the period of Suharto, electoral politics was very rigid. There are no Chinese political parties, or opposition parties seeking for power, the Chinese overseas’ political influence is conveyed through informal ways. Coppel (1976: 65) referred to this pattern as “cukong influence”, intended to convey political influence informally by the efforts of Chinese businessmen (or cukong) who could be in close contact with officials who hold the real power of the country. The Chinese overseas who hoped for treatment or improvement of certain policies by the Indonesian government always cooperated with Chinese businessmen, because there were no effective alternative ways (Coppel, 1976: 66). For example, in the mid-1990s, Liem Sioe Liong was one of the twelve richest businessmen in the world, and he was a close friend of President Suharto. As a result, Liem's Salim Group became one of the most privileged players in the Indonesian state-driven economy (Seagrave 1995:206). In Malaysia, in order to have good relationships with government officials, Chinese businessmen invite officials or political figures to join the company. Former Chief of State Police Mohd Hantiff Omar, former Deputy Chief of State Police was once invited by Lim Goh Tong to become director of a subsidiary of Genting Group (Gomez, 1999:55).

Factors Affecting Chinese Oversees Participation in Politics

The democracy process is one of the factors that influence the Chinese overseas to participate in politics. The political participation of the Chinese community is increasing with the development of the democracy process. The level of democracy also affects the political environment itself. A conducive political environment makes people glad to participate in political life. In a more democratic political environment, people feel more free and comfortable to engage in political activities than in a totalitarian political environment. The political environment which is often filled with brutal and violent activities keeps people away from the political sphere. In
Malaysia, the progress of democracy continues to grow, the Chinese overseas can participate in politics in various ways. Chinese overseas people can freely participate in elections at any level, can build political parties, associations, interest groups, and can find Chinese newspapers and TV to convey their voices. However, the Malaysian constitution gives privileges to ethnic Malays, according to Akta Hasutan, citizens cannot challenge the provision that the Malay ethnic has special rights, this undermines the spirit of the Chinese overseas to participate in politics. The Reformation Era was a meaning of independence for Chinese overseas in Indonesia, President B.J Habibie issued Presidential Instruction No. 26 of 1998, concerning the Cessation of the Use of the Terms Indigenous and Non-Indigenous, all government officials have also been ordered to no longer use the terms indigenous and non-indigenous to distinguish residents of Chinese descent from Indonesian citizens in general (Suharyanto, 2013). Under the leadership of K.H Abdurahman Wahid, the Chinese overseas were free to hold their cultural activities such as Chinese New Year, without any element of pressure from any party. Direct local elections in Indonesia which began from June 2005 are often described as a “democratic leap”. Direct elections means democracy provides opportunities for the people as a political infrastructure to elect their regional heads directly through the voting mechanism (Suharyanto, 2013). Direct elections also provide opportunities for the Chinese overseas to participate in politics, especially regional politics. Compared to the presidential general election, regional head elections are easier to participate in, since 2005, several Chinese political elites have been elected as regional heads, such as Christiany Sanjaya who was Deputy Governor of West Kalimantan from 2008 to 2018, Tjhai Chui Mie, S.E., M.H. is the Mayor of Singkawang since December 17, 2017, Benny Alexander Litenoni is a former Deputy Governor of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT).

Political awareness is one of the factors that influence the Chinese overseas to participate in politics. The political participation of the Chinese community is increasing with the development of political awareness. In Indonesia and Malaysia, the Chinese overseas is an active community in the economic field (Freedman, 2000: 9), the Chinese overseas are interested in doing business, but they are not actively participating in politics in the long term, so that the political position of the Chinese overseas is not on par with other ethnic groups. The strength of the Chinese overseas in the economic field keeps them away from other ethnic communities, thus impeding political participation. However, with the increase of political awareness, the Chinese overseas are also more actively participating in politics. Chinese overseas usually get higher education with strong economic support, a high level of education can have an influence on political education. Usually people who accept higher education will have a critical attitude and a high desire to study politics. They will learn about politics to find out the issues that occur in the political world. The community has a good provision of political education when taking formal education, because most of the Chinese overseas in Slawi Wetan Village only graduated from high school (Singestecia, 2018). With high political awareness, Chinese overseas people can realize their very important role in the political field, so political participation will also get higher. In Malaysia, since 1998, the Chinese overseas has rethought the elements of traditional culture which are not compatible with social development, then united the awareness of the Chinese nation with the awareness of political participation, the Chinese overseas realized the importance of political participation. Along with the development of Chinese education, awareness of the political rights of the younger generation is increasing. The percentage of the Chinese overseas in Malaysia is almost 24%, thus their impact
in the political field cannot be ignored, the benefits of political participation can be expected, therefore, the political awareness of the Chinese overseas in Malaysia is also high, and they will be more willing to participate in politics.

Relationships with local ethnics are one of the factors that influence the Chinese overseas to participate in politics. While relations with local ethnic groups are getting better, the political participation of the Chinese overseas is increasing. The Chinese overseas is an ethnic minority both in Indonesia and Malaysia, tolerance of local ethics can influence the political participation of the Chinese overseas, this tolerance is related to the relationship between the Chinese overseas and the local ethnic community. If the Chinese overseas have good relationships with the local ethnic groups, then political participation is more open to the Chinese overseas. The democratic system in Malaysia is quite complete, the Chinese overseas can establish their own political parties and interest groups, so they can participate actively in politics. However, the relationship between the Chinese overseas and the Malay ethnic community is not good, the government gives privileges to the ethnic Malay community, but the Chinese overseas faces limitations in the fields of politics, culture, economy, education and so on.

In Indonesia, the relationship between the Chinese overseas and the local ethnic groups also greatly influences the political participation of the Chinese overseas. In general, the Chinese overseas achieve success in the regional head elections, because in regional areas such as West Kalimantan, the relationship between the Chinese overseas and local ethics is good. Compared to other ethnic populations, the Chinese population in West Kalimantan was quite large. West Kalimantan has the second largest Chinese population in Indonesia. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Chinese population in West Kalimantan reached 358,451 people in 2010. The Chinese population is concentrated in cities, such as Pontianak, Singkawang, and Ketapang. The nationally political participation of the Chinese overseas is still less visible, and discrimination against the Chinese overseas persists so that relations between the Chinese overseas and the local ethnic community are often in trouble. In 2002, the cost for a birth certificate for the Chinese overseas was higher than for other citizens, even for making a birth certificate, Chinese families were asked to prepare a citizenship document, or a Citizenship Certificate and a Statement of Change Name (SBKRI), but other citizens did not need to (Freedman, 2003). The central government has tried to overcome discrimination against the Chinese overseas, for example the Chinese New Year became a national holiday, but regional discrimination still exists. In Freedman's (2003) paper, it is said that Acun, an illegal bank owner, was unable to pay Rp. 4.2 billion to depositors for failing to produce interest dividends to their clients, then the Government of Garut ordered 400 Chinese businessmen to pay Acun's debts.

CONCLUSION

This research can contribute in the field of studies on the political participation of the Chinese overseas in Southeast Asia. Indonesia and Malaysia are two important countries in Southeast Asia, the two countries have many things in common. The Chinese overseas is an ethnic minority in both Indonesia and Malaysia, to protect the interests of the Chinese overseas, and to convey a voice, political participation is an important activity for the Chinese overseas in both Indonesia

and Malaysia. The Chinese overseas can participate in politics mainly in the following forms: 1) voting in national elections and local elections; 2) joining a political party; 3) joining various associations; 4) building close relationships with government officials. The main factors that influence the political participation of the Chinese overseas are: 1) the progress of democracy; 2) political awareness; 3) relations with local ethnic groups.

REFERENCES


