Recuperation and fragmented identity: Chinese stories in contemporary Indonesian film

Author:
Teo, Miaw Lee

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Recuperation and Fragmented Identity: Chinese Stories in Contemporary Indonesian Film

Miaw Lee Teo

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The year 1998 saw anti-Chinese sentiment and discrimination in Indonesia reach its peak. The resulting outbreaks of violence not only caused the deaths of hundreds of Indonesian Chinese, but also triggered the downfall of Suharto's government and the dismantling of the New Order (1966-1998). After decades of suppression by successive regimes, ethnic Chinese public expression experienced a revival in the period of political reformation, the *reformasi*. The re-emergence of Chinese-themed films marks the rebirth of ethnic Chinese filmmaking after more than three decades of ethnic erasure and force assimilation. The lifting of the media regulations and the resurgence of Chinese identity in the *reformasi* era transformed the filmmaking scene in Indonesia, with a renewed focus on the stories of Chinese Indonesians. Inspired by the re-emergence of Chinese subjectivity and culture, Indonesian filmmakers, like Nia Dinata, Riri Riza and Nan Achnas turned their focus to Chinese-themed stories producing *Ca-bau-kan* (2002), *Gie* (2005) and *The Photograph* (2007) respectively. Central to this political transformation was the participation of ethnic Chinese filmmakers, like Edwin, in the Indonesian filmmaking scene. The young Indonesian filmmaker, who begun his career making short films, later produced his first feature, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012). This thesis seeks to unpack the multifaceted meaning of 'Chinese films' and 'Chineseness' as represented in contemporary Indonesian cinema. It evaluates the hybrid experiences of the ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesia through cinematic stories, themes and narrative styles of feature-length films produced in the early 2000s by the three key indigenous filmmakers and also focuses on Edwin as a case study to highlight a very different approach compared to the Chinese-themed films by indigenous Indonesian filmmakers. He expresses his experience of being Chinese in Indonesia through personal experience and through the adoption of an 'accented' style. The thesis argues that where the indigenous filmmakers narrate Chinese stories from the outside, Edwin manages to approach the trauma, fragmentation, dislocatedness and hybridity of being Chinese in Indonesia in a style that emerges from the inside and as such closely approximates this experience.

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Introduction

This dissertation studies Chinese Indonesian films made by both indigenous and Chinese Indonesian filmmakers that were produced after the downfall of President Suharto in 1998 and the dissolution of his political regime, the New Order (1966-1998). The political reformation, or *reformasi,* in the post-Suharto era led to a major socio-political transformation that instigated a new culture of artistic expression, which included the re-emergence of Chinese stories and themes in Indonesian films. During the New Order period, Chinese faces and their stories were erased from Indonesian screens due to the strict regulations that prohibited Chinese expression in the public domain. The resurgence of Chinese-themed films, after more than three decades, marked the revival of the Chinese participation in the Indonesian cinemascape. The recuperation of the Chinese stories through Indonesian cinema is significant as it holds the key to understanding how Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent, a deeply hybridized community, have negotiated their Chinese identity and sustained their cultural practices.

A handful of Chinese-themed Indonesian films were produced soon after the political transformation in 1998. In 2002, Nia Dinata successfully released a film, *Ca-bau-kan* (The Courtesan, 2002), a film that focussed on the story of a Chinese Indonesian businessman. Three years later, prominent Indonesian director, Riri Riza released a film about a Chinese Indonesian political activist, *Gie* (2005). This was following by the release of *The Photograph* (2007), a story that explores ethnic Chinese Indonesian cultural identity, directed by another Indonesian female filmmaker, Nan Achnas. These independent works were produced by indigenous filmmakers and attempted to capture the diverse stories of the Chinese in Indonesia. Two of the films

were based on fictional characters, while *Gie,* at least in part, was biographical: together these films played a vital role in recuperating the stories of Chinese characters into the multi-ethnic Indonesian filmmaking culture after thirty years of absence. This thesis argues that these three films played an important part in reimagining the stories of Indonesia's Chinese citizenry and restoring the Chinese back into Indonesia's cinematic imaginary. They did so, not only by telling stories featuring Chinese characters, but also by recuperating some Chinese traditions and cultural practices.

The emergence of a vibrant, independent and experimental filmmaking scene in Indonesia in the *reformasi* period also helped to facilitate the return of ethnic Chinese filmmakers to Indonesian cinema. Edwin was the most prominent Chinese Indonesian filmmaker to appear during this period, who began his filmmaking career by making short films. As this thesis explains, it is in these short films that Edwin develops his distinctive and personal cinematic style, which he develops further in his first two feature films, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (*Babi Buta Yang Ingin Terbang,* 2008) and *Postcards from the Zoo* (*Kebun Binatang,* 2012). This thesis argues that, unlike the indigenous filmmakers mentioned above, Edwin is not interested in recovering specifically Chinese stories. Rather, his films are marked by a distinctively "accented style" that more obliquely explore the experiences of displacement, marginalisation and hybridity, undergone by Indonesia's Chinese community during the New Order Period. This is important, for while the indigenous filmmakers provided opportunities for Chinese stories to be told, Edwin's films attempt to address Chinese Indonesian experience from a very personal perspective. This, it will be argued, is consistent with Hamid Naficy's theory of "accented cinema" (Naficy, 2001). Indeed, in contrast to the works by indigenous filmmakers, Edwin's films bear the traces of past traumas.

This thesis seeks to provide an examination of different perspectives on the issue of Chinese Indonesian cinema in the post-Suharto era. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Chinese stories featuring in the productions of both indigenous and Chinese filmmakers, it is necessary to consider the context of the socio-political transformation in the post-Suharto period and the revival of Chinese public expression and culture in Indonesia from 1998.

The Research Context, Aims and Justification

The year 1998 ushered in an economic recession that devastated many Asian economies and saw anti-Chinese sentiment and discrimination in Indonesia reach its peak. The resulting outbreaks of violence not only caused the deaths of hundreds of Indonesian Chinese, but also triggered the downfall of Suharto's government and the dismantling of the New Order (1966-1998). After decades of suppression by successive regimes, ethnic Chinese public expression experienced a revival in the period of political reformation, the *reformasi*. The appearance of Chinese Indonesian films in the post-Suharto era marked the rebirth of ethnic Chinese filmmaking in Indonesia after a lapse of more than thirty years. The first elected president of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid (1999-2001), revoked many of Suharto's repressive laws and ushered in a period of new freedom with regards to the media. His dissolution of the Ministry of Information (*Kementerian Penerangan*) essentially changed the climate of filmmaking in Indonesia. As a result, in 1999, a trend toward independent film (*Film Independen*) began to emerge in Indonesia (Kusumaryati, 2010). The production of the first independent film, *Kuldesak* (*Cul-de-sac*, 1998) in a digital format, by Mira Lesmana, Nan Achnas, Riri Riza and Rizal Mantovani inaugurated a new wave of Indonesian cinema.

The lifting of the media regulations and the resurgence of Chinese identity in the *reformasi* era transformed the filmmaking scene in Indonesia, with a renewed focus on the stories of Chinese Indonesians. Indonesian filmmakers, like Riri Riza, Nan Achnas and Nia Dinata, were inspired by the re-emergence of Chinese subjectivity and culture, and turned their focus to Chinese-themed stories. This is a topic that they are rather familiar with due to the long assimilation of the Chinese in the indigenous state. Central to this political transformation and the availability of digital technologies to the local film industry was the participation of Chinese filmmakers in the Indonesian filmmaking scene. A young Indonesian Chinese filmmaker, Edwin made his first independent feature, *The Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* in 2008. As a story that centers on a Chinese character it raised issues of ethnic Chinese identity and began to address the experiences of Indonesian Chinese. In the same year, a group of mostly first-time Chinese and indigenous filmmakers produced short films that sought to question the unjust treatment and marginalization of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The films were produced under the Umbrella Project 9808, which was established in 2008 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the race riots. The anti-Chinese riots that occurred in May 1998 mainly targeted Chinese-owned businesses, shops and Chinese-looking people. As a result of the violence more than a thousand people died, many Chinese women were subjected to sexual violence and Chinese businesses and shops were destroyed. The Umbrella Project 9808 or *Proyek Umbrella 9808*, was an anthology of 10 short films that commemorated those who died in the riots and celebrated Indonesia's political reform (Setijadi-Dunn, 2009), with the project entirely self-funded by the filmmakers.

The political reformation that brought about this process of democratisation allowed Indonesian filmmakers to focus on subject matters that had previously been prohibited. The consequence of this was the resurgence of Chinese cultural identity in

films made by both indigenous and Chinese Indonesian filmmakers. Most importantly, it is during the *reformasi* period that the Chinese, who had been prohibited from participating in Indonesian filmmaking for three decades, regained their right to produce films.

Prior to the prohibition and the imposition of the ethnic discrimination policies regulated under the regime of the New Order (1966-1998), the Chinese in Indonesia were the main investors and film producers in Indonesia. As the chief investors, the Chinese were thus responsible for the production, distribution and exhibition of film in Indonesian since the 1930s. Most of the films they produced were based upon Chinese and Malay-Chinese stories, which were very popular among Indonesian Chinese and indigenous Indonesian audiences. During the 1950's Chinese productions greatly diminished as a result of the upsurge of Indonesian nationalism, and the project of making 'authentic' Indonesian films that depicted the lives of indigenous people (Said, 1991). During the golden years of Indonesian cinema from the 1970s to the 1980s, indigenous directors dominated the film industry. By then, ethnic Chinese directors had all but disappeared from the Indonesian film industry. Despite the fact that Chinese Indonesians played an integral role in the establishment of the country's film industry, the history of their contribution has been overlooked in most accounts of Indonesian cinema (Sen, 2006a). The provision of a brief historical background of Chinese Indonesians and their involvement in cinematic history is therefore essential to both comprehend the socio-political conditions in which Chinese Indonesian filmmakers operate and to frame the current debate surrounding Chinese Indonesian filmmaking in the post-Suharto era. Chapter One of the thesis includes a more detailed discussion of the historiography of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking and also comprises a section on early Chinese migration and settlement, diasporic identity formation and the

suppression of ethnic Chinese identity in the New Order era. This first chapter aims to trace the history of Chinese Indonesian involvement in the film industry from the early years through to independence. This discussion of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking practices is placed within the historical and political development of Indonesia and underscores how Chinese involvement in the film industry was affected by major historical events.

This research has been inspired by the transformation of the cultural and political sphere in the post-Suharto era and the resurgence of Chinese stories in Indonesian film. For the first time in many decades, Chinese stories are being recuperated in Indonesian films and the work of ethnic Chinese filmmakers publicly exhibited. In addition, the reformation has encouraged the involvement of ethnic Chinese filmmakers and given them the right to openly discuss their experience of being Chinese in Indonesia. Both the renaissance of Chinese-themed films in the first decade of twenty-first century attempted by indigenous Indonesian filmmakers, and later the productions by ethnic Chinese filmmakers, must be considered in the constitution of 'Chinese films' in Indonesia and the significance of 'Chineseness' after a long period of prohibition and invisibility.

My study aims to situate Chinese Indonesian films and ethnic Chinese filmmaking within an historical, cultural and socio-political framework, delineating the various ways Chinese stories are recuperated. This thesis also seeks to evaluate the hybrid experiences of the ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesia through cinematic stories, themes and narrative styles of the feature-length films produced in the early 2000s by three indigenous filmmakers. In the discussion of the newly re-emerged Chinese-themed cinema in Indonesia, this thesis recognizes the films contributed by the indigenous filmmakers and the way in which they highlight the stories of Chinese

identity, cultural practice and diversity. Additionally, it examines the early shorts and feature films of the award-winning young, ethnic Chinese filmmaker, Edwin, who has also revived ethnic Chinese, independent feature filmmaking in the region. The focus on Edwin as a case study underscores the different approaches to Chinese-themed stories in film by indigenous and ethnic Chinese Indonesian filmmakers. Indigenous directors have tended to represent Chinese identity and 'Chineseness' from an 'outsider' perspective. As a Chinese Indonesian, however, Edwin acutely expresses his experience of being Chinese in Indonesia via his own personal encounters and his 'accented' style. It is through the various aspects of this accented cinema that Edwin's experience of being Chinese in Indonesia can be defined and understood.

Central to an assessment of the newly re-emerged Chinese films, is the evaluation of what constitutes Chinese-themed films and how ethnic Chinese experience and cultural hybridity influence filmmaking practice. Subsequently, this thesis reviews what kinds of cinematic approaches are utilized by indigenous filmmakers to represent Chinese identity, and how Chinese cultural practices are understood in a multicultural Indonesia. With regards to the feature films directed by Edwin, the thesis asks what kind of cinematic techniques and stylistic devices are adopted by the Chinese Indonesian filmmaker to negotiate his hybrid identity? Importantly, this thesis sets out to question and unpack the multifaceted meaning of 'Chinese films' and 'Chineseness' as represented in Indonesian cinema, for Chinese films in Indonesia are not made in a Chinese language (Khoo, 2009, p. 69)

Apart from the historiography provided in Chapter One, that traces Chinese Indonesian involvement in the film industry from the early years through to independence, this thesis consists of two major parts. The first section is comprised of Chapter Two, which focuses on three Chinese-themed films made by indigenous

filmmakers after the reform period: *Ca-bau-kan* (2002), *Gie* (2005) and *The Photograph* (2007). Through a close-textual analysis, this part of the thesis discusses how Chinese identity and cultural practice are represented in a multicultural Indonesia. These three films made by indigenous filmmakers signal an important historical moment in Indonesian cinema, in which Chinese stories were first recuperated. Crucially this section also identifies the lack of Chinese filmmakers in the Indonesian film industry as a result of the long absence of Chinese involvement.

The second part of the thesis consists of Chapter Three, Chapter Four and Chapter Five, which are devoted to the films directed by ethnic Chinese filmmaker, Edwin. As a junior filmmaker, Edwin began his filmmaking career by making short films when he was still in film school. His unique cinematic style is evident in his short films, a mode that is then further developed in his two feature films, namely *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012). It is impossible, however, to discuss Edwin's feature films without first understanding the thematic concerns and cinematic strategies developed in his short films. Chapter Three is thus dedicated to examining Edwin's short films within the framework of Naficy's "accented" mode of production. This chapter takes into consideration the filmmaker's ethnic Chinese background and the complexity of his hybrid identity and sense of in-betweenness, which plays an important role in structuring his cinematic practice.

If the Chinese-themed films made by indigenous filmmakers played an important role in the representation of Chinese Indonesian cultural identity in the post-Suharto era, Edwin's first feature film, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly*, depicts the experience of being Chinese in Indonesia, from a personal perspective. Chapter Four discusses Edwin's debut feature and his experimental and fragmented aesthetic, and how this reflects his personal sense of deterritorialisation and alienation. *Postcards from*

the Zoo more broadly explores the implications of Edwin's hybrid identity as a Chinese Indonesian. Chapter Five thus examines Edwin's sense of 'belonging' and his cultural affinity to his Indonesian homeland. In particular, it focuses on notions of spatial "chronotopes" and how Naficy's accented cinema theory assists in illuminating Edwin's complex identity formation.

Literature Reviews

My knowledge and understanding of both the history of Indonesian cinema and the more recent developments in Chinese Indonesian filmmaking have been deeply informed by the writing of several key scholars, upon whose work this thesis will build. These writers include Krishna Sen, Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn and Khoo Gaik Cheng. Krishna Sen and Karl Heider have both produced book-length studies of the history of Indonesian cinema from the perspective of national cinema studies. Salim Said and David Hanan have also contributed significantly to the scholarship on Indonesian cinema studies.

Krishna Sen provides a comprehensive review of Indonesian national cinema in her book, *Indonesian Cinema: Framing the New Order* (1994). This book was the first critique to map out the development of Indonesian cinema from its infancy in 1926 until 1966, and the consequences of President Suharto's New Order. In the first part of the book, the focus of Sen's discussion is the historical and political contexts of Indonesian cinema. She highlights the contributions of ethnic Chinese as theatre owners, importers of Chinese films and financiers of the early Indonesian film industry (1994, pp. 14-15). However, the main purpose of the book is to frame Indonesian cinema in the context of the New Order, during which time the government took over censorship, subsidies,

awards, distribution and the regulation of the importation of foreign films. In the second part of the book, Sen's discussion of the films of the New Order period is organized around three main themes: historical films; social transformations in contemporary Indonesian films; and the image of women in men's fictional film (1994). Sen's work is thus important in establishing the historical contexts of Indonesian Cinema, particularly those that relate to the contribution of the Chinese in Indonesia. Sen's research is used as a key resource in Chapter One of this thesis in the examination of the early participation of the Chinese in the formation of Indonesian cinema

The focus of Karl Heider's study of Indonesian cinema, which is primarily written from a visual anthropology perspective, focuses on how cultural principles inform Indonesian movies and how such productions may influence film culture. In his book, *Indonesian Cinema: National Culture on Screen* (1991), Heider works through numerous Indonesian films to provide an analysis of the patterns of Indonesian culture, as they appear in film via genres, narrative conventions and film as a model for promoting modernization. Importantly, for this project Heider discusses how Indonesian national films have upheld the production of a 'national' culture. He notes that Indonesian cinema is a powerful intermediary for the development, formation and dissemination of a national Indonesian culture. In his discussion of the inter-ethnic feature of the film, *Putri Giok* (The Jade Princess, 1980), Heider argues that the film ostensibly exemplifies the national integration of the ethnic Chinese with the local indigenous culture. Nevertheless, he argues that the emphasis of such integration was upon_compelling the ethnic Chinese to assimilate with the indigenous culture and to compulsorily convert to the national Islamic religion (Heider, 1991, p. 135). Ethnic tensions between the Chinese Indonesians and the indigenous peoples persisted even though Chinese Indonesians had lived in Indonesia for generations. Under the New

Order, Heider explains, they were subjected to special restrictions and even faced the threat of ethnic cleansing, an erasure reflected in their virtual absence from the national films of the time (Heider, 1991, p. 73). Heider's work contributes a great deal of material with regards to Indonesian inter-ethnic relationships and how they are framed in the national cinema. Building on Heider's work, my emphasis is on the complexity of ethnic Chinese identity and surveying the Chinese-themed films made in the contemporary era.

Salim Said (Said, McGlynn, Siagian, & Boileau, 1991), on the other hand, writes about Indonesian cinema from a sociological perspective in his book, *Shadows on the Silver Screen: A Social History of Indonesian Film*. First published in Indonesian in 1982,[1] this work provides an insightful commentary on the social and political forces that have shaped the history of Indonesian cinema. Said stresses his apprehension about Indonesian cinema, which, he argues, is overwhelmed by the influence of Hollywood movies (portraying luxurious life styles, eroticism, violence and exaggerated sadness), that results in the creation of Indonesian movies that bear no relationship to Indonesian social norms and customs (Said et al., 1991, pp. 3-5).

Said identifies two tendencies in Indonesian cinema: the first emerged under the Dutch ethnic classification policy, where the Chinese were classified as "foreign easterners" and as not belonging to the "indigenous Indonesian race", a categorization that led to an assumption that ethnic Chinese in Indonesia were unable to produce authentic Indonesian films (Said et al., 1991, p. 5). But, as we will see in Chapter One, in time Chinese Indonesians were to become the pioneers of Indonesian cinema and the producers of Indonesian movies. The second tendency, identified by Said, emerged after Indonesia gained independence in 1949 when a group of filmmakers associated with the

[1] It was translated into English by Toenggoel P. Siagian, and became available to English readers in 1991.

National Film Company (*Perusahaan Film National Indonesia*) were inspired to produce a 'real' Indonesian film that showed the every-day lives of Indonesians on national screens. The group headed by Usmar Ismail, who was known as the father of contemporary Indonesian cinema, introduced idealism into the national cinemas of Indonesia by the end of the 1950s. But, unfortunately their portrayal of idealism on the national screen was unsuccessful, for as Said argues Indonesians were not ready to see themselves on the screen. In addition, the failure of this group was attributed to the lack of capital and to the imposition of stringent censorship regulations by the government film censorship board (Said et al., 1991).

Said's work, which effectively provides a broad survey of the Indonesian film industry, acknowledges the contribution of the ethnic Chinese during the foundational years of the film industry. His work explores early Chinese filmmaking and reveals how Chinese filmmakers were victimized for being unable to create a 'real' Indonesian film, notwithstanding the fact that indigenous crews participated in their film productions and their films were made for consumption by Indonesian audiences. A study such as this thesis, which foregrounds the contemporary films made by both indigenous and ethnic Chinese filmmakers in Indonesia, will further underscore the diverse parameters of Indonesian cinema. It will provide the groundwork for a better understanding and re-articulation of Chinese films in the contemporary era.

David Hanan, who has a long research background in Indonesian cinema, published a scholarly article entitled "Innovation and Tradition in Indonesian Cinema" (2010). In his article he examines the history of Indonesian cinema and the political situation in Indonesia from 1949 up to the present and discusses how the evolvement of Indonesian film genres strengthened the country's popular cinema. Hanan argues that despite the fact that the Indonesian nation has the largest population of Muslims in

Southeast Asia, there have been inconsistencies regarding the cinematic representation of religion, as a foundational principal in nation building since independence in 1949. The history of Indonesian cinema has been represented by various types of films with a mix of Indonesian cultural traditions that has informed the development of film genres, alongside Islamic themes. Hanan claims that Asrul Sani is the only Indonesian director that has made a large amount of Islamic-themed films, which were produced in 1980s. He further states in his article: "… numerous other popular Indonesian genres reached their height in the commercial cinema of Indonesia in [the] 1970s and 1980s, among them … the martial arts genre (*silat films*), the teenage romances (*remaja films*), the Hindu-Buddhist legend films, and stories from the colonial period" (Hanan, 2010, p. 116). While these films were made for local consumption, there was also a great demand for films from America, Hong Kong and India by the Indonesian market in the 1980s (Hanan, 2010, p. 116). Hanan thus observes that Chinese culture is absent from the formation of Indonesian genre films. This is surprising considering that ethnic Chinese have been in Indonesia for many decades and that they are both producers and financial supporters of Indonesian films. His work questions the position of ethnic Chinese in the Indonesian film industry, an issue that complicates the very notion of Indonesian national cinema.

The *reformasi* period witnessed the emergence of several key figures in contemporary Indonesian cinema, such as director Garin Nurghoro, who has made numerous internationally acclaimed films. During this time a significant, independent filmmaking sector emerged in Indonesia (Hanan, 2010, p.121) and as a result attracted the attention of several Southeast Asian film scholars. Khoo (2009), discussing the status of Chinese ethnicity in relation to film authorship, relates the rise of young ethnic Chinese independent filmmakers in Indonesia to a crucial historical event. The May

1998 anti-Chinese riots not only marked the peak of ethnic discrimination in Indonesia but they also inspired the production of a number of Chinese-themed films and Indonesian-language films by ethnic Chinese Indonesians. This proved to be a remarkable contribution by the ethnic Chinese minority to diasporic filmmaking in Indonesia and more broadly, to independent filmmaking in Southeast Asia. Khoo claims that the birth of these films complicated the meaning of 'Chinese cinema', a definition used to describe mainland Chinese and Hong Kong films within a broader signifying paradigm (Khoo, 2009, p. 70). While ethnicity remains an issue in independent films, Khoo argues that independent Indonesian filmmakers of Chinese descent might not necessarily want their films to be categorized purely along ethnic lines. For example, according to Khoo (2009), Edwin's short films cover a variety of subjects pertaining to Indonesian society, as well tackling the political conditions after the *reformasi.* Drawing on Khoo's work, my study examines Edwin's short and feature films from the paradigmatic perspective of 'diasporic Chinese film', by framing the works in Hamid Naficy's theory of accented cinema.

In addition to Khoo's work, Indonesian film scholar Krishna Sen has also raised important questions regarding the ambiguous position of Chinese Indonesians in the national cinema framework. In an attempt to explore the positionality of the ethnic Chinese, vis-à-vis the development of the national film industry, Sen's article, entitled "'Chinese' Indonesians in National Cinema" (Sen, 2006a) traces the "presence, the erasure, [and the] absent-presence" of the Indonesian Chinese minority in the film industry, from its inception in the 1930s through to the political upheaval post the New Order. With the dismantling of the New Order in 1998, following the fall of President Suharto, public expressions of Chinese identity were finally made possible. With the *reformasi,* came the re-emergence of ethnic Chinese culture and the recognition of

Chinese identity. However, as Sen argues, the openness of today's Indonesian politics and culture does not ensure actual transformation in the representation of ethnic Chinese in the political system, as well as in film industry in contemporary Indonesia (Sen, 2006a). It is not surprising then that diasporic media, like the films made by Chinese Indonesians, frequently manifest the qualities of ambiguity, ambivalence and anxiety that mark diasporic consciousness. Thus, according to Wanning Sun, it is essential to seek appropriate strategies for Chinese diasporic subjects to maintain their legitimacy in the national culture of Indonesia (Sun, 2006, p. 12).

Various scholars have explored this quality of ambiguity in regards to the ethnic Chinese identity in Indonesia and how this has affected their capacity to contribute to the Indonesian film industry. For example, Sen critiques the manner in which Chinese Indonesian filmmakers negotiate 'Chineseness' in their films. Having examined Indonesia's most prolific filmmakers (the ethnic Chinese) of the 1970s, Sen notes that 'Chineseness' is often present via, what Ariel Heryanto refers to as "thematic silence" (Heryanto, 1997). The ambivalence of Chinese identity and the denial of 'Chineseness' in these films, made by ethnic Chinese persists throughout the New Order period (1966-1998), up until the release of *Ca-bau-kan* in 2002. Directed by indigenous Indonesian film director, Nia Dinata, the film is more centrally about Chinese Indonesians than any other film ever made in Indonesia. Sen argues that while the film foregrounds Chinese identity and finds a place for the Chinese in Indonesia, its representation ultimately "demeaned and disenfranchised" Chinese Indonesians (Sen, 2006a, p. 182). My thesis acknowledges the work of Sen but adopts a different reading of the film. My analysis of the film, that features in Chapter Two of this thesis, focuses on how the film offers a useful perspective on the diversity and multiplicity of Indonesia. Importantly, it takes

into the consideration the way *Ca-bau-kan* foregrounds the formation of family relationships and connectivity (*guanxi*).

The place of ethnic Chinese and the issue of 'Chineseness' in relation to the films made by Chinese Indonesian filmmakers is also explored by Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn, author of the article titled "Filming Ambiguity: To be 'Chinese' Through the Eyes of Young Chinese Indonesian Filmmakers" (2009). Although the termination of President Suharto's regime in 1998 meant that Chinese Indonesians were permitted to liberally express their traditions and cultures in the public sphere, Setijiadi-Dunn argues that re-assuming a Chinese identity has not been unproblematic (Setijadi-Dunn, 2009, pp. 20-21). One of the reasons she cites is that most Chinese Indonesians have no knowledge of a Chinese language, and have lost their links to their Chinese culture and heritage through assimilation. Setijadi-Dunn claims that the films made by Chinese Indonesians (such as *Sugiharti Halim* (2008) by Ariani Darmawan, *The Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) by Edwin, and *Letter of Unprotected Memories* (2008) by Lucky Kuswandi), represent the ethnic discrimination and state of ambiguity experienced by Chinese Indonesians. Unlike Sen, who views Chinese Indonesian cinema from the standpoint of the political sphere and the upheaval post-1998, Setijadi-Dunn approaches the topic via an anthropological perspective, claiming that the relationship between cultures and media is complex. She quotes Ien Ang to further her case:

> The field of culture – where hybrid identities are formed, articulated and contested in and through artistic expression, media representation, popular cultural consumption, cultural criticism and intellectual expression – is an extremely complex and uneven one, a space governed by contradictory forces of

> approach and avoidance, identification and disidentification, collusion and conflict (Ien Ang, 2000, p. xxx, cited in Setijadi-Dunn, 2009, p. 22).

In the context of Indonesia, the epoch of the New Order has provided, what Setijadi-Dunn calls, a cultural "space": for the articulation and disputation of Chinese identity. She claims that the films made by ethnic Chinese offer a cinematic space as an alternative medium in which Indonesian 'Chineseness' can find a voice (Setijadi-Dunn, 2009, pp. 22-23). Setijadi-Dunn's scholarly work indicates the importance of the ethnic Chinese minority's cinematic output, in their attempt to lay claim to their ethnic identity. Her work also signifies the need to further investigate the representations of ethnic Chinese in the films that have been so far produced. My understanding of Chinese films in the contemporary era is enriched by Setijadi-Dunn's work and an objective of this thesis is to further consider the works of ethnic Chinese filmmaking, and adopt Edwin's oeuvre as a case study.

Ariel Heryanto, an Australia-based Indonesian cultural anthropologist provides yet another perspective. Heryanto, who has researched Indonesian popular culture and ethnic minorities in Indonesia, stresses the relative absence of scholarly work on ethnic Chinese Indonesian cinema. In his article "Citizenship and Indonesian Ethnic Chinese in Post-1998 Films" Heryanto (2008) discusses the portrayal of Chinese identity in two Chinese-themed films; *Ca-bau-kan* (2008) by Nia Dinata and *Gie* (2009) by Riri Riza. According to Heryanto, both films attempt to challenge Chinese identity within the pluralist state, wherein ethnic Chinese communities have never been included or recognized as a national ethnic group. Heryanto agrees with Sen that *Ca-bau-kan* is more essentially about Chinese Indonesians in post-colonial Indonesia in contrast to Riza's *Gie*. He explains that *Ca-bau-kan* found a place for the lead male in the ethnic

Chinese character, Tan Peng Liang, whereas while *Gie* is concerned with the life of the ethnic Chinese figure, Soe Hock Gie, the film is more invested in representing an Indonesian patriot striving for a nationalistic agenda (Heryanto, 2008). According to Heryanto, one of the major motives behind the erasure of the ethnic Chinese from Indonesia's screens was the suspicion that they were still deeply attached to communism, this was despite the Suharto government still wanting to maintain a strong business alliance with the Chinese (Heryanto, 1998b, pp. 98-102). An understanding of the motives behind Indonesia's exclusionary representational practices and the endurance of the ethnic Chinese living as 'foreign' citizens is essential here and worth further investigation to better understand how their experiences in Indonesia may be embedded within their films. In Chapter 2, my thesis constructs a new reading of *Gie,* focusing on the context of an obscured family *guanxi* and a Chinese ethos that is embedded in the film.

My research thus builds upon the work of the above-mentioned key scholars. Although their research has primarily focused upon the issue of 'Chineseness' in Indonesian cinema, in the main it has been confined to the political and socio-cultural spheres. This study adopts an approach that combines film studies frameworks, such as accented cinema theory and close-textual analysis, with some of the key concepts in cultural studies such understandings of cultural hybridity, fragmented identity, interstitial space and liminality. In effect, this dissertation aims to make a significant contribution to the field of South East Asian film studies, Indonesian cinema studies, as well as to the study of diasporic Chinese cinema.

Methodology

Chinese Indonesian films are produced within a specific historical context in which the aspects of the social, political and cultural frameworks are vital to understanding the film narrative, form and style. The research methodology in this thesis is guided by David Bordwell's "historical poetics of cinema" in which the emphasis is on "text" and "context", with the film narrative situated in specific socio-cultural circumstances that affects the style and aesthetic practices (2008, p. 15). He employs a methodology that combines film analysis with historical context (p. 17). He distinguishes three main objects in the study of film, namely; thematic, narrative and stylistics elements (2008, p. 17). In Bordwell's words, "a historical poetics of cinema is likely to consider themes as given material that are transformed by traditions of form and style", while narrative patterns are the fundamental principal contributing to the stylistic mode of the film (Bordwell, 2008, pp. 18-19).

Bordwell's work is beneficial in providing a framework for reading Chinese-themed films made in Indonesia, particularly in examining the themes that have shaped the stylistic practices of the film in the post-*reformasi* era. The argument engaged in the "historical poetics of cinema" does not require a particular model of theory or 'scientific' explanation to govern the interpretation of films. Instead, as Bordwell explains, "poetics has the explanatory value of any empirical undertaking, which always involves a degree of tentativeness about conclusions" (2008, p. 16). Chinese cinema in Indonesia once flourished and was celebrated, but under the implementation of the political sanctions, it was completely expunged. In the *post-reformasi* era, Chinese Indonesian films have changed greatly in term of their mode of production, aesthetics and thematic concerns. This study is therefore framed by the context of the collapse of

Suharto's government as a means of examining how Chinese film in Indonesia have altered after the New Order Policy and why certain themes have emerged after over thirty-two years of ethnic erasure. The combination of the historical context and the textuality of the film are important as a means of analysing Chinese-themed film narration and allow us to situate the films within a historical and stylistic context.

The primary goal of this research project is to investigate what constitutes Chinese-themed films in contemporary Indonesia and to analyze the cultural and aesthetic significance of Chinese films in the context of contemporary Indonesian filmmaking. In order to do this, a range of practical and conceptual research methods have been employed. These have included: primary fieldwork designed to gain a deeper understanding of production practices; historical research into the Indonesian film industry and socio-political context; and, the close analysis of specific films informed by film studies methodologies. This thesis employs the method of close-textual analysis to examine the themes, narrative structures, representations, and aesthetic strategies in the films made by both indigenous and ethnic Chinese Indonesian filmmakers.

In addition, this thesis interrogates the value and significance of 'Chineseness', as represented in the Chinese-themed films made by both indigenous and ethnic Chinese filmmakers. The assessment of Chineseness, as represented in these films, will be integrated within the scholarship and will adopt both cultural studies and film studies perspectives. The examination of Edwin's films will be drawing upon Hamid Naficy's concept of "accented cinema" and the relevant scholarship on displacement and fragmentation. Through this film theory, and the inscription of Edwin's personal biography, this thesis delineates an accented mode of production in Edwin's short and feature films.

Thesis Outline

Most of the chapters in this thesis are structured around the examination of a director's approach in their representation of Chinese Indonesian identity and cultural hybridity, as well their treatment of Chinese experiences in their indigenous homeland. Chapter One, *Recuperating Chinese Indonesian Film History,* provides a more historical overview of Chinese involvement in the Indonesian film industry. It argues that Chinese participation in early Indonesian filmmaking indicates the presence of diasporic cultural production. This is shown in the stories and genres of the films, as well as the local language used in the films. This chapter examines the contributions and involvement of ethnic Chinese in the development of the Indonesian film industry in order to situate Chinese-themed films and Chinese filmmaking practices within a socio-political history of Indonesia. This chapter examines the hybridity and marginalization of the Chinese and the implications of this for the filmmaking industry, including the financing and importing of Chinese films. This discussion is supported by the inclusion of case studies of early films that represent aspects of ethnic Chinese hybridity in the Indonesian film industry.

Chapter Two, *The Re-Emergence of Chinese Stories in Post-Suharto Indonesian Cinema* is devoted to an account of the return of Chinese faces, themes and cultural practices to Indonesian screens. It performs a close analysis of three key films made in the first decade of the twenty-first century, all directed by indigenous Indonesian filmmakers. These films, which will be discussed in chronological order, are *Ca-bau-kan* (dir. Nia Dinata, 2002), *Gie* (dir. Riri Riza, 2005) and *The Photograph* (dir. Nan Achnas, 2007). Through these films, this chapter discusses the cinematic strategies adopted by the indigenous directors to represent Chinese cultural identity via the

embodiment of central Chinese characters. This chapter argues that these films contributed to a much needed re-imagining of Indonesia as a multicultural and multi-ethnic society, one in which difference can be embraced and various cultural practices acknowledged for their contributions to the fabric of Indonesian society.

Chapter Three, *Fragmentation and Displacement: Edwin's Accented Film Practice,* examines Chinese Indonesian filmmaker, Edwin and the expression of his unique cinematic style and themes as characterized by his short films. This chapter argues that Edwin's films are deeply informed by his personal biography as a Chinese Indonesian, and that this ethnic background appears indirectly, producing an "accented" form of filmmaking (Naficy 2001). By engaging with Hamid Naficy's theory of "accented cinema" and analyzing Edwin's short films, this chapter discusses an accented mode of production and explores the sense of fragmentation and displacement that are evident in Edwin's early work. It also argues that the development of the filmmaker through his early short films has paved the way for his controversial debut feature, *The Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and the more subtle and poetic follow-up, *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012).

Chapter Four, *Speaking in Accents: 'Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly' and the Inscription of Edwin's Personal Experience*, examines the development of Edwin's cinematic style in his first feature film *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008). This chapter argues that *Blind Pig* is an "accented film" that is deeply informed by the filmmaker's own situatedness and the experience of being Chinese in a state that still prioritizes indigeneity and assimilation, over cultural and ethnic diversity. It argues that Edwin draws from his personal experience as a part of ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesia, and identifies three main themes: disoriented identity, disjointed family and the fragmented narrative. This chapter thus explains that Edwin's experimental story telling

approach and fragmentary narrative style is crucial for conveying the "structures of feeling" and experiences underpinning the film. The analysis of the *Blind Pig* is performed through an "accented reading" in order to demonstrate how the three central themes operate at the level of style and content.

Chapter Five, *Interstitial Filmmaking, Spatial Displacement and Quasi-Family Ties in 'Postcards from the Zoo',* examines Edwin's second feature film. This chapter explores the way in which *Postcards* extends the notion of displacement to include the common experience of marginalization in various Indonesian communities. This chapter argues that in *Postcards*, Edwin is interested in questions of spatial displacement and the potential of forging quasi-family ties that are not based on ethnic or racial identity, but rather on the shared experience of displacement. Here displacement also denotes exclusion through the rapid urban development of Indonesia's cities and the manner in which this impacts homeless and lower socio-economic communities. In this chapter, the examination of spatial displacement and quasi-family ties will underscore Edwin's interstitial mode of production and situate *Postcards* within Naficy's schema of "chronotopes of imagined homeland" (Naficy, 2001, p. 153).

This thesis furthers the study of contemporary Chinese-themed cinema in Indonesia. The examination of Chinese stories in the selected films deepens the understanding of Chinese Indonesian cinema, not only through the study of its narrative and thematic concerns, but also via a discourse of displacement. This study thus aims to shed light on the importance of the production of Chinese-themed films and ethnic Chinese productions. It hopes to deepen and extend the current knowledge regarding Chinese Indonesian stories, the extent of their historical and cultural assimilation and the practices of the Chinese Indonesian filmmaking industry. Additionally this study

aims to contribute to the discourse of Chinese filmmaking, particularly in the local region where ethnic Chinese are presented as a minor community and their productions are predominately produced in the mode of independent cinema.

Chapter One

Recuperating Chinese Indonesian Film History

From the 1920s through to the beginning of the New Order period in 1966, filmmakers of Chinese ancestry produced hundreds of films for the consumption of both indigenous and Chinese Indonesians. The Chinese had played a crucial role in the foundation of Indonesian cinema and formed a production system that paved the way for the development of the nation's film industry. This included the establishment of various production companies, the institution of film distribution channels and the training of a skilled industry workforce. Indonesia's ethnic Chinese worked closely with local *pribumi* artists and business people.[2] In addition to making important investments in the country's filmmaking infrastructure, their films featured a hybrid combination of local Indonesian folk tales, Chinese classical stories and Indonesian theatrical performance styles. Many films drew on the popular Chinese *Wuxia* genre, a mode that adapted to a cross-cultural audience of both ethnic Chinese and *pirumbi* viewers. Although Chinese Indonesian films were only made in the local Indonesian language or *Bahasa Indonesia,* those that depicted a mixture of Chinese and Indonesian cultures played a pivotal role in reconnecting the Chinese Indonesian diaspora with their cultural roots. To a large extent, Chinese participation in the foundation of Indonesian cinema led to the establishment of a mainstream entertainment industry aimed at a broad, ethnically mixed Indonesian audience.

Despite playing a crucial role in the formation of the early industry, Chinese Indonesian filmmaking is barely accounted for in histories of Indonesian cinema. This is largely a result of the country's socio-political history, which has been shaped by

[2] *Pribumi* is an Indonesian term means native or indigenous

waves of nationalism and rising anti-Chinese sentiment that swept Indonesia in the 20th century. As such, Chinese Indonesian filmmaking from the end of the 1920s until Indonesia's independence in 1949 has almost entirely been erased from accounts of the country's cinematic history. Discussion has largely minimised Chinese participation in the Indonesian film industry, especially in the post-independence era when Indonesian indigenous nationalism was rapidly ascending (Said, 1991). Racism, xenophobia and cultural discrimination have also contributed to the erasure of all but a few discussions of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking.

The significant underplaying of Chinese involvement in accounts of pre- and post-independence era filmmaking is best emblematised by the views of H. Misbach Yusa Biran (2009), a leading figure in the Indonesian film industry.[3] In his book, he stated that Chinese Indonesian films made between 1926 and 1949 couldn't be considered Indonesian because these productions failed to represent Indonesian culture and nationalist values. Hence, he proclaimed that Indonesian cinema begins in 1950 with the first film from Usmar Ismail, *Darah dan Doa* (*The Long March*) (2009, p.45). Biran's statement appears to be influenced by the general negative perception toward the ethnic Chinese, in part created by Soeharto era government policies. This kind of misperception has led to the erasure of an important part of Indonesian cinematic history from the official record, despite the fact that a great number of Chinese-produced films drew on local stories and folklore, and were made in Indonesian languages for the consumption of mostly Indonesian viewers. These films also recorded

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[3] H. Misbach Yusa Biran (1933-2012) was actively involved in the Indonesian film scene from the 1950s as a film director, scriptwriter, journalist and writer. From 1956-1956 he worked for the Indonesian National Film Company (PERFINI) under Usmar Ismail. From 1987 to 1991, he held a few important positions in the film industry, including Director of the National Film Centre, Chairman of the Film and Television Employees and member of the National Film Council. The most noteworthy of his contributions to the national film industry was his success in establishing an Indonesian film archive in 1975 – Sinematek Indonesia – the only such archive in Southeast Asia at the time. (http://www.sinematekindonesia.com/index.php/insan_perfilman/detail/id/27)

the diversity and multiplicity of Indonesian society in the early days and documented the vitality of cross-cultural film production between Indonesian locals and the diasporic Chinese community.

On the other hand, Biran's statement also expunges from history the vast financial investment made by Chinese Indonesian to the Indonesian film industry. From the late 1920s the Chinese community largely financed theatres, film equipment and the training of creative and technical crews. Biran's account not only marginalizes decades of Indonesian filmmaking history, but it also deprecates the exploration of various local and cross-cultural films, with diverse filmic techniques attempted by ethnic Chinese prior to the 'official' commencement of the national film industry in 1950. Krishna Sen (2006a), in her article "'Chinese' Indonesian in National Cinema", contends that Indonesian cinematic history, especially the history that is written by *pribumi* writers, is marked by a tendency to obscure the history of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking by beginning with the national cinema in 1950. Such an act not only undermines the richness and diversity of Indonesian film history, more critically, it highlights the way that processes of ethnic marginalization have led to the partiality of film history, which has been shaped within an exclusionary nationalist agenda (Setijadi-Dunn & Barker, 2012).

This chapter seeks to redress this erasure by briefly tracing the history of Chinese Indonesian involvement in the film industry from the early years through to independence. In doing so, it will situate this history alongside other historical and political developments to show how Chinese involvement in the film industry was affected — both positively and negatively —by major historical events. These not only include Dutch colonisation, World War Two and the rise of nationalistic fervour, but also the deeper cultural dynamics that emerged in response to the various waves of

Chinese migration to the archipelago. For this reason, a brief history of Chinese settlement and establishment in business and industry will be provided, as this closely parallels and assists in explaining why the Chinese became such crucial players in the film industry. It will be argued that Chinese participation in the early Indonesian film industry bears many of the hallmarks of diasporic cultural production, such as hybridity and connection with homeland. This is particularly evident in the manner in which we can observe the incorporation of Chinese elements, including culturally-inflected stories and genres, told via the local language. The chapter therefore highlights the significance of cross-cultural production and the contribution of Chinese Indonesian in building the nation's film industry. This chapter concludes by questioning the eligibility of their diasporic identity, by examining their, integration and assimilation within Indonesia's own socio-political transformation. Ultimately, this chapter sets down the historical foundations for the discussion of contemporary Chinese filmmaking in the following chapters.

Cross-cultural Film Production in the Pre-war Period

Chinese Indonesian filmmaking can be divided into in three phases: (1) the pre-war period from the 1920s through to the 1940s during the Dutch colonial era; (2) the period after the end of Japanese occupation (1942-1945) running until the introduction of the name-change policy of 1961, when Chinese Indonesian identities were forced into a state of ambiguity[4]; and (3) the post-New Order era commencing in 1998. This chapter will focus on the first two phases, with an emphasis on the formation of diasporic filmmaking and cross-cultural production in relation to Chinese identity within the

[4] Under this policy, all Chinese Indonesians were compelled to adopt an Indonesian-sounding name in order to conform to the 'assimilasi' or assimilation.

Indonesian socio-historical context. In the following chapters, it will turn to look in detail at the post-New Order era.

The Chinese first established the filmmaking industry shortly after the Dutch introduced film exhibition to the archipelago in 1900. As mentioned earlier, there is limited discussion of ethnic Chinese filmmaking in the historical record generally. Evidence of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking may be gleaned from a small number of books, chapters and articles. This historiography therefore depends heavily on this limited collection including Salim Said's *Shadows on the Silver Screen: A Social History of Indonesian Film* (1991), the work of H. Misbach Jusa Biran (2001, 2005, 2009), as well as discussions by Krishna Sen (2006a) and Karl G. Heider (1991). Indonesian cinema scholars Salim Said (1991) and Krishna Sen (1994) both establish that the mid-1920s were a period in which films from Mainland China – especially Shanghai - were first imported to Indonesia. It is possible that Chinese films were also imported from Hong Kong at this time, but there is limited information on this aspect of importation. Film imports from Hong Kong and Taiwan were more significant in the New Order period (Sen 1994). There is, however, undeniable evidence that Chinese Indonesian films, adapted from original Chinese classical tales and cinematic productions, were produced during this period.

As previously noted, film exhibition in Indonesia was introduced by the Dutch around 1900, although there was no dedicated exhibition infrastructure at this time. Initially screenings took place in rented buildings or other temporary locations, rather than properly built theatres (Biran, 2001, p. 211). This presented a business opportunity for Chinese Indonesian, who had already demonstrated keen business acumen in other areas of the Indonesian economy. In the early 1920s, Chinese Indonesian began trading and establishing businesses. According to J. Mackie (Biran, 2001), they aspired to

elevate themselves out of unskilled occupations on plantations and as mining coolies. The Chinese thus aimed to improve their societal status within the Dutch colony. Income tax records showed that the economic strength of the Chinese placed them ahead of the *pribumi*, although they still lagged behind the Europeans. Suryadianta (J. Mackie, 1991, p. 84) explains that ethnic Chinese tax payers represented 7.13% (wholesalers and intermediate traders) of the community, compared to Europeans, at 40.6 % (wholesalers, importers and exporters), and the *pribumi*, at just 0.17% (retail traders, fishermen, and peasants). With a strong financial position and a keen interest in film, Chinese Indonesian managed to establish a film industry in the Indonesian archipelago. Conceivably, Mackie's remarks on the changes to ethnic Chinese professions are also applicable to the Chinese Indonesian filmmaking industry, as he writes:

> The changes in occupations and economic roles that unfolded between 1900 and 1930 [for the Chinese in Indonesia] … must be seen as the beginning of a long process of adjustment and adaptation to constantly evolving economic and political conditions that can be traced to the present day (1991, p. 84).

While the pattern of theatre ownership in Indonesia is unclear in the early twentieth century due to lack of documentation, film advertisements suggest that Chinese Indonesian owned many of the theatres (Sen, 1994). Sen notes that by 1927 they owned more than two-thirds of the theatres in Bandung (1994, p. 14). As the pioneer of theatres, T.D. Tio Jr., who owned the popular performance auditorium, Miss Ribut's Orion in Batavia, gained an opportunity in the filmmaking business. By this time, two European filmmakers, L. Heuveldrop (a Dutchman) and G. Kruger (a

German), had established a film production house – the Java Film Company – in Bandung, and had initiated the production of the first locally-made feature film in 1926. It was their passion and enthusiasm for film that resulted in the first film production in Indonesia, entitled *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* (*The Enchanted Monkey*), a Sundanese folklore (Said 1991). Based on a legendary tale from West Java, the epic silent picture was a domestic hit. The following year Java Film made another high-budget production, *Eilus Atjih* (*Sister Acih*, 1927), a tale based on Indonesian society. The film, *Eulis Atjih*, is about a woman and her children living in poverty after the husband has left her for another woman. The film was screened at the Orient Theatre in Surabaya and all around Java. Before this Hollywood films had already been circulating in theatres across the archipelago and most Indonesian viewers were accustomed to the narrative pattern and style of these films. Thus, when Heuveldrop and Kruger's films were screened, they were judged against the same criterion as Hollywood productions. As a result, *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* was criticized as 'far from perfect' when juxtaposed with foreign films (Armijn Pane cited in Said, 1991, p.16). The film, however, was praised for its cinematic achievement. After just two productions, the Java Film Company was forced to cease operations altogether due to financial constraints. Both films were eventually remade by Chinese Indonesian production companies; *Lutung Kasrung* (The Lost of Lutung in Sundanese language) was released by Touw Film in 1952, and *Eulis Atjih* (Sister Acih), was made by Ardjuna Film (owned by Tan and Wong) in 1954.

At around the same time, T.D. Tio Jr., the owner of most of the movie theatres in Indonesia, was aware of the opportunities for filmmaking and was keen to venture into domestic film production. He subsequently invited the Shanghai-based Wong Brothers, who already had had some filmmaking experience, to Batavia (Jakarta) to

make a movie featuring the theatre performer Miss Ribut (Tio's wife).[5] The plan would have been realized had Miss Ribut successfully passed the screen test. The Wong Brothers instead consolidated their expertise, and with the capital injected by Indonesian-born *peranakan* Chinese businessman David Wong (an employee of General Motors)[6], who had a keen interest in art, formed the Halimoen Film Company. The first feature film produced by the company was *Melati van Java* (*Lily van Java*/*The Lily of Java*, 1929). According to the records of *Katolog Filem Indonesia* 1926-1995 (Indonesian Film Catalogue), the film was initiated by an American production company under Len H. Ross, but was completed by the Wong brothers, with Nelson Wong undertaking the roles of both director and director of photography.[7] *Melati van Java* tells the story of a young lady bound to marry the man her well-to-do father has chosen for her. Indonesian-born Chinese actress, Lily Oey, a college graduate, played the role of Melati. Biran notes that the story was designed by David Wong, who was familiar with the concerns of his Indonesian *peranakan* Chinese audience and the type of story that appealed to them (cited in Said 1991, p 17). In spite of the 'well-planned' story, the film dedicated much of its running time to a tennis match – a western sport that was unfamiliar to most Indonesians. As a result, this pioneering collaboration between mainland and Chinese Indonesians did not turn out to be successful, due to the unpopularity of the story. The flop caused the partnership between the Wong Brothers and their *peranakan* Chinese sponsor, David Wong, to be terminated.

Melati van Java is one of the earliest examples of a Chinese Indonesian film, produced or directed by ethnic Chinese. It depicts the diasporic Chinese community in

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[5] Nelson Wong immigrated to Indonesia andfollowed soon by his brothers, Joshua and Othneil Wong

[6] *Peranakan* Chinese are the descendants of Chinese immigrants who came to Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and Malay archipelago between the 15th and 17th centuries. They retained most of their ethnic and religious origins but assimilated the language and culture of the Malays.

[7] *Katalog Filem Indonesia 1926-1995,* published by PT Grafiasri Mukti, Jakarta, (1995), recorded the participation of Americans in the production of *Melati van Java*, however no further information is available in the Katalog.

the Indonesian indigenous landscape under the rule of European administration in the Dutch East Indies. *Melati Van Java* offers a glimpse into the diasporic Chinese community and their identity formation in the archipelago. The dispersal of Chinese immigrants began as early as the 6th century. This diasporic community then adapted to the local cultures and lived a diverse life style in the indigenous land. The formation of Chinese identity in Indonesia is further complicated by the influence of western culture introduced by Dutch colonizers. *Melati Van Java* provides a record of how the identities of the Chinese in Indonesia were shaped not only by their ethnic Chinese background and the culture of their host country, but also by the Dutch colonisers. It depicts the predicament of the diasporic Chinese community and the indigenous government in the post-colonial era. In the period of the New Order (1966-1998), the issue of Chinese identity in Indonesia becomes amplified by the hazards of being an ethnic minority.

Lily van Java, nampak peran utama wanita: Lie Lian Hwa dan Li Bo Tan

Figure 1: A scene from the film *Melati van Java* (1929)

Figure 2 : A scene from the film *Melati van Java* (1929)

The Dutch colonizers classified the Chinese Indonesian as lower-class in the social hierarchy. As previously noted, engagement in filmmaking can be seen as an attempt by the Chinese to elevate their social status. Kwui Tek Hwei remarks that during the colonial era, film viewing was associated with high culture practices by the Dutch (cited in Said 1991, p. 19).[8] Therefore, by partaking in the business of filmmaking, the Chinese were expecting to elevate their societal status and change the way they were being perceived by the colonizers. However, discrimination against the Chinese remained, in part due to the Dutch segregation policies that were underpinned by the concept of 'divide and rule'. Ethnic Chinese were classified as 'Foreign Orientals' and restricted to living in specific areas. However, the limitations never seemed to hinder the Chinese in their pursuit of business activities, owing to their flexible identity and their ability to identify gaps in culture and the economy.

Ethnic Chinese filmmaking continued for the next few decades. For their second feature, the Wong Brothers gained monetary support from Jo Eng Sek, a Chinese Indonesian businessman, who helped facilitate the production of a commercially appealing story aimed at a general viewership (the Chinese and the

[8] Kwui Tek Hwei was a prominent Chinese Indonesian writer in the early days.

pribumi) in Indonesia. They set up a production company called Batavia Motion Pictures. The first production of this new company was *Si Tjonat* (1930) – a popular, true story published in the Indonesian newspaper, *Perniagaan,* in serialized form in 1930. The eponymous *Si Tjonat*, played by Lie A Tjip, is an unruly teen who flees to Batavia (Jakarta) after the murder of his comrade. There, he is employed as a houseboy or servant to a Dutchman whose wealth he eventually seizes. Si Tjonat soon becomes a professional bandit. He meets Lie Gouw Nio (played by Ku Fung May), the daughter of a businessman, and falls in love with her but the affair is forbidden by Gouw Nio's dictatorial father.

The Wong Brothers, who were unsuccessful in their previous production, injected *Si Tjonat* with plenty of action and comedy sequences, in order to ensure its good reception. While the Chinese filmmakers were unsure of what kind of story and film genres Indonesian viewers preferred, the success of the formula used in *Si Tjonat* apparently set the trend and more films in this style followed. The film is also an example of a Chinese Indonesian production that combines local stories with stylistic action scenes influenced by both Hollywood and Chinese martial arts. It depicts a 'subjectivity' that is diverse and multicultural, reflecting the diasporic background of its ethnic Chinese filmmakers.

The use of action sequences in *Si Tjonat* was heavily influenced by the Chinese martial arts genre *Wuxia Pian*. The term *Wuxia* is made up of two Chinese characters that can be translated as martial arts (*wu*), and a chivalrous martial arts practitioner in olden times (*xia*). *Pian*, meanwhile, means movies (1986, p. 83). When Chinese filmmakers from Shanghai migrated to Indonesia, they brought their expertise in making *Wuxia pian*, which they incorporated into the films they produced for local audiences in Indonesia. The genre is distinctively significant in its cinematic

characteristics, that highlight visual effects and action sequences (Ngo, 2011, p. 75). In her article "The Shaw Brothers' *Wuxia Pian*: An Early Identity and Business-Cultural Connection for the Chinese in Malaya", Ngo emphasises the nexus between overseas ethnic Chinese identity and the popular *Wuxia pian*. Her argument focuses on the British colony of Malaya in Southeast Asia (now Malaysia). She highlights the cultural role of *Wuxia Pian* in the mediation of overseas ethnic Chinese subjectivities and identities within the local socio-political context. Ngo writes:

> … *Wuxia pian* has long been associated with the social memory of the Chinese overseas: The Chinese diaspora share a strong sense of traditional history and philosophy and their experiences of political marginality and crisis around ethnic identity; and they enable dynamism and mobility, which are interwoven with syncretizing and juggling the construction of new identity through the use of fantastic and imaginary elements within the genre (2011, p. 76).

The connection of the popular genre *Wuxia* and ethnic Chinese in British Malaya, illustrated by Ngo, is also discernible in the context of ethnic Chinese film production in Indonesia during the colonial era. Ngo writes: "Where the Chinese go, there *Wuxia* fiction goes" (2011, p. 77). There are significant parallels between the Chinese that migrated to British Malays and those who settled in the Indonesian archipelago. First, both of these migrant Chinese groups can be considered diasporic communities that migrated from Southern China long before the settlement of Europeans. These groups of migrants preserved elements of their ethnic origins, while also becoming deeply hybridized and syncretized with the indigenous culture. Over time, both diasporic communities were subjected to different phases of socio-political and cultural

marginalization in their host country. Second, Chinese filmmakers from Shanghai, who relocated their filmmaking business to Southeast Asia, both arrived in *Nanyang* (meaning South Sea or what we now call Southeast Asia) during the 1920s (Ngo, 2011, p. 77). These include the Wong Brothers (working in the Indonesian archipelago) and the Shaw Brothers (in British Malaya). This was a time when China was undergoing an economic crisis and its filmmaking industry collapsed. The prosperity and resources of *Nanyang,* along with the large population of Chinese immigrants, offered better conditions for the Shanghainese to expand their filmmaking businesses (Ngo 2010, p. 77).

Other films that were made in the distinctive style of *Wuxia* by Chinese Indonesian production companies, included *Si Pitoeng* (1931), *Delapan Djago Pedang (Pat Kiam Hap)* (1933), *Poei Sie Giok Pa Loei Tay* (1935) and *Pembakaran Bio "Hong Lian Sie"* (1936). While most of these films' stories were taken from Chinese legends or based on Chinese fables, the core elements were adapted for local consumption. As recorded in the *Katalog Film Indonesian 1926-1995* (1995), the film *Poei Sie Giok Pa Loei Tay* (1935) is based on a Chinese legend and produced with the intention of stimulating interest in the skills of *silat* (Malay martial arts) within local indigenous Indonesian youth. The genre of *Wuxia* that exists in these early Chinese Indonesian films most importantly serves as an arbitrator in the inauguration of a new identity formation for the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia

After the production of *Si Tjonat,* the collaboration between the Wong Brothers and Jo Eng Sek ended, even though a sequel had been planned. The split caused the Wong Brothers to experience a major financial crisis. In order to resume film production they revived the Halimoen Film Company. In 1929 filming recommenced with the production of *Rampok Prianger* (*The Robbers from Priangan*) and

subsequently *Lari Ka Arab* (*Running Away to Arabia*) in 1930. Both films were made according to the formula established in *Si Tjonat*. Unfortunately the films, though still adhering to the action formula, failed to entertain either the Chinese or *pribumi* viewers. The reason for this was that Indonesian viewers who were familiar with Hollywood films expected Indonesian productions to be presented in a similar style. The experimental approach that put together local subject matter and martial arts was unable to satisfy the tastes of the local viewers.

Along with the Halimoen Film Company, two other Chinese production companies were established in 1928 and 1929 respectively: the Nancing Film Company and Tan's Film (owned by Tan Koen Yauw). Nancing Film Company produced *Resia Boroboedoer* (*The Secret of Borobudur Temple*) in 1928 before ceasing production (as a result of the cost to the company of inviting Shanghai actress, Olive Young, to play the lead role in their first picture). Tan's Film Company, however, having learnt from the experience of its counterpart, aimed for the lowest cost possible to produce movies that could be popular among Indonesians. Accordingly, the company produced *Njai Dasima I* (*Mistress Dasima I*) in 1929 – the true story of an Indonesian woman, Njai Dasima, who became the concubine of an Englishman. The story of *Njai Dasima I*, set between 1813 and the 1820s, is based on an 1896 novel by G. Francis. The film turned out to be a success among Chinese and indigenous Indonesians, for the story shared the experience of many Chinese and local women who were not legally married to Chinese men in the archipelago. Regardless of some technical shortcomings, two sequels were produced in the following year: *Njai Dasima II* (*Mistress Dasima II*) and *Pembalasan Nancy* (*Nancy's Revenge*), both were made in 1930 and achieved great success with audiences.

Until the 1930s, the Indonesian film industry was dominated by ethnic Chinese: either the *peranakans* or newer migrants. They made films that engaged with local tales and catered to both *peranakan* and *pribumi* viewers. Currently there is no significant evidence documenting the participation of the *pribumi* in the costly and highly technical industry, although some were involved as actors. By the time sound technology arrived in the early 1930s, Tan's Film Company was the only production firm to have survived through the silent era. This is a testament to the company's strong financial footing and the persistence of its owner, Tan Koen Yauw, and his adept director Lie Tek Swie, formerly an employee of a film import and distribution company. In addition, Tan Koen Yauw's ownership of two theatres – the Rialto Cinema, located in Jakarta (Senen area) and the Tanah Abang theatre – allowed his films to be screened without the additional costs of distribution.

While other production companies might possibly have overlooked the role of indigenous actors and actresses, Tan recognized an opportunity and involved *pribumi* performers. The result was a cross-cultural production that appealed to both *pribumi* and the *peranakan* Chinese. In the publicity of *Njai Dasima*, the poster slogan boasts "All Roles Are Exclusively Played By Indonesians" (Ngo, 2011). Perhaps this can be seen as concrete evidence of cross-cultural production by a diasporic Chinese filmmaker in the diverse Indonesian society. Furthermore, this is an important strategy by the diasporic filmmaker to indigenize their production. The process of indigenization had hitherto occurred in many aspects of the *peranakan* Chinese lifestyle. Indigenization in film production is understood as an attempt to stimulate the interest of indigenous viewers to watch locally produced films. In engaging with indigenous actors, Tan's Film contributed to the film industry in terms of artist training, as well as the investment of capital, equipment and expertise. In addition, the Chinese producers also played an

important role in nurturing the culture of viewing Indonesian films among the indigenous spectators, who idolized western films.

Although the arrival of sound technology could have been disastrous for Chinese filmmaking in Indonesia, especially in terms of the language adopted in the script, it does not seem to have damaged the Indonesian film industry sustained by the ethnic Chinese. Prior to this, local films made by non-*pribumi* filmmakers, whether they were ethnic Chinese or European productions, had never been produced in languages other than Indonesian ones (Heider, 1991). As much as Indonesian viewers enjoyed Hollywood films, when sound films such as *Fox Movietone Follies* (David Butler, 1929) and *Rainbow Man* (Fred C. Newmeyer, 1929) were first screened in Indonesian theatres in 1929, the reception was poor as the majority of audiences were unable to understand English and subtitles were unavailable.

Following Tan's Film Company's success, more production companies were set up to take part in the burgeoning film industry. In 1931, a Jakarta-born *peranakan* Chinese, The Teng Choen, established a film company named Cino Motion Pictures. According to Said (1991, p. 22), the film enthusiast opted for film training in Shanghai, instead of business school in New York. Together with his film background, he also acquired a film camera from Shanghai, in order to commence his filmmaking career in Indonesia. Before long, his company produced several Indonesian films adapted from Chinese mythologies, including *Sam Pek Eng Tay* (1931), *Pat Bie Fo* (1932), *Pat Kiam Hiap* (*Eight Swordmans*, 1933) and *Ouw Phe Tjoa* (*White Snake*, 1934). All these films contained elements of *Wuxia,* mainly to gratify both *peranakan* Chinese and *pribumi* viewers, who had become accustomed to the Chinese action style presented in *Si Tjonat*. The films were also well received among Indonesian viewers and the production company expanded rapidly. The company then changed its name to an Indonesian name

– The Java Industrial Film Co. (JIF). The name change was presumably an attempt to gain recognition from the *pribumi.* This is seen as an act of indigenization or 'Indonesianisation', in order to attract Indonesian viewers and maintain the economic sustainability of the company. Arguably, diasporic Chinese films did indeed penetrate the Indonesian market, and Indonesian viewers were acculturated to the combination of Chinese and indigenous elements in films.

Apart from appealing to indigenous Indonesian viewers, the films derived from classical tales appear to have also offered a site for 'escapism,' especially for the Chinese in Indonesia. Diasporic Chinese may have exhibited a desire to remain affiliated with their homeland, as a way of alleviating feelings of loss and displacement. Film images that related to Chinese stories and Chinese culture may have assisted in recollecting the memories of homeland and provided a means of connection for diasporic communities. In other words, the films played a role in 'suturing' (Bowman, 2010) the feeling of longing for the homeland, through the stories in the films. This experience was applicable not only to the diasporic Chinese viewers but also for the diasporic Chinese filmmakers.

As I have demonstrated, the Indonesian film industry in the 1930s can be characterised by the presence of Chinese Indonesian films, which drew upon both indigenous and Chinese stories. The Wong Brothers returned with the production of their first sound film, *Indonesia Malaise,* with Halimoen Film in 1931, after almost a year of gathering financial aid. For their new film, the brothers adopted a different approach that centred on melodrama, intermixed with comedy and *teater bangsawan* [9] music, instead of action and slapstick comedy. The story of *Indonesian Malaise* revolves around a young lady (played by M. S. Ferry), who has been forced to marry a

[9] *Teater Bangsawan* (Malay aristocratic theatre).

man she does not love. The unhappy marriage causes her to lose her baby. While the young woman is in a fog of grief and despair, her lover (played by Oemar) returns.[10] He sings a *kerongcong* song, accompanied by music of *teater bangsawan*. The film also features comedic sequences. The Wong Brothers designed the film mainly for the consumption of the *pribumi*. The film's publicity slogan on poster reads "*Tjeritanya menarik hati dan peoeh dengan keloecoean. Penonton tontoe misti ketawa terpingkel-pingkel dari permoela sampe pengabisan*" or "The story of the film is interesting and filled with great comedy; audiences will have good laugh from the beginning until the end of the film" (Said, 1991, p. 20). However, *Indonesian Malaise* was a failure because the *pribumi* were unable to accept and witness their *kemelaratan* (poverty and filthiness) on the cinema screen (Kristanto, Ardan, Suwardi, & Jauhari, 1995, p. 3). While The Teng Choen of the Java Industrial Film Co. was working on the action genre adapted from Chinese legendary tales, the Wong Brothers appeared to have developed the genre of Indonesian melodrama that fit the tastes of local *pribumi*. Despite being a box office flop, a new genre of Indonesian film had been introduced. This genre was based on melodrama and led to many more such films being produced, either by the Chinese producers or *pribumi*-owned production companies in later years.

The Dutch filmmakers, who had prior to this been inactive for a long period in Indonesia, re-emerged after the introduction of film sound technology. In 1934, Albert Balink, the Dutch journalist heading the Java Pacific Film company, started to work on the film, *Pareh* (*Song of the Rice*) – an anthropological film or documentary-based drama. The film was aimed at upper class Dutch audiences. Set against the backdrop of the Indonesian rice paddies and highland landscapes, the story centred around a tale of forbidden love between a young man from a *kampung nelayan* (fishing village) and a

[10] The only two actors' names recorded in Katalog Film Indonesian 1926-1995, were M. S. Ferry and Oemar, thus I presume that they played the female and male lead roles in the film.

farmer's daughter (both roles were played by amateur native actors). The film also contained poetry and song. Engaging with the expertise and film equipment of the Wong Brothers, the inexperienced producer also imported Mannus Franken from the Netherlands, as the screenwriter and art director for this ethnographic fiction. It is unclear how *Pareh* appealed to elite Dutch viewers; Said observed that the selling point of the film may perhaps have been the magnificent landscapes of Indonesia that were captured in the film (Said 1991, p 24). The film was well-received when it was released in Europe but the reception was poor in the Indonesian market, because the *pribumi* considered that they were being degraded as primitives, living in *kampung nelayan* and *kampung padi sawah*. Although *Pareh* was a flop in the Indonesian market, the film highlighted the technical achievements of the Wong Brothers, who were responsible for the roles of director of photography and sound design. Their expertise in filmmaking once again brought them success at the Indonesian box-office with *Terang Boelan* (*Full Moon*) in 1937.

Balink, who had gained some experience through producing and directing *Pareh,* once again engaged the Wong Brothers and screenwriter Saeroen (a well known journalist and head of the Dutch news agency in Indonesia), to make *Terang Boelan*. Inspired by the American musical hit, *The Jungle Princess* (Wilhem Thiele, 1936), Balink employed the same formula as the Hollywood production to make *Terang Boelan,* featuring dazzling landscapes and a romantic narrative, accompanied by songs and fights. The Indonesian script was written by Saeroen and *Keroncong*[11] music replaced the Hawaiian musical sequences of the original *The Jungle Princess*. The film was produced under the *Algemeene Nederlandsch Indie Film Syndikaat* (ANIF) or the Netherlands Indie Film Syndicate that was formed a year before its production. The

[11] *Kerongcong* music is a blend of indigenous and foreign rhythms that was very popular at the time and remains so today.

Wong Brothers were assigned several important technical roles in the production, namely director of photography, editor and sound (Kristanto et al., 1995, p. 3). The success of the Indonesian version of *The Jungle Princess* set the trend for this new 'genre' that was adopted by many subsequent production companies. It also created stars within the Indonesian film industry, which prompted the migration of theatre actors into the film industry. While the achievement of *Terang Boelan* is a key factor in the flourishing of the domestic film industry at this time, the film production companies also owed their burgeoning success to other historical influences. These included the fact that investors from Shanghai shifted their capital to Batavia, as a result of the economic and political chaos caused by the Japanese invasion of China (Kristanto et al., 1995, p. 5). It is also arguable that the Chinese filmmakers who had gained a foothold in the film industry were the backbone of every Indonesian film production of the 1930s. Although *Terang Boelan* is a joint production with the Dutch, the Wong Brothers were accountable for the main components of the film including the visual composition (via the role of director of photography) and the music (via the composition of sound) and were thus able to shape the film according to the tastes of their projected audience.

By the end of the 1930s the filmmaking business in the archipelago was still monopolized by the two major Chinese-owned production companies: Java Industrial Film (owned by The Teng Choen) and Tan's Film (owned by Tan Koen Yaw), although now they were joined by the efforts of European filmmakers. More players of ethnic Chinese origin entered the film industry in 1940 and 1941. These film companies were Union Film Coy (Ang Hock Liem), Action Film (The Teng Chun and Java Industrial Film), New Java Industrial Film (The Teng Chun), Oriental Film Coy (Tjan Hock Siong), Star Film (Jo Eng Sek), Populer Film Coy (Jo Kim Tjan), Majestic Film Coy (Fred Young and SI Liem) and Standard Film (Touw Ting Iem). Collectively, from the

period of 1926 to 1942, ethnic Chinese filmmakers produced at least eighty titles for the Indonesian film market (Said, 1991, p. 27). The flourishing industry and the boom in Chinese-owned production companies at the end of 1930s marked the golden period of Indonesia's film industry before the invasion of the Japanese Army.

In 1942, just when the Indonesian film industry was at its pinnacle, with many *pribumi* artists taking part as actors and actresses, the outbreak of World War II disrupted its success (Kristanto et al., 1995). During the war, the Japanese Army invaded Indonesia and took over the archipelago from the Dutch East Indies, occupying it from March 1942 to August 1945. While the Japanese occupied the archipelago, Chinese film producers were forced to close their production companies and cease production due to the "fierce dislike of the Japanese towards Chinese" (Said 1991, p. 33). The film industry was abandoned and all production activities were abruptly terminated. Many indigenous film actors who were previously employed by Chinese Indonesian studios were out of a job. The Japanese occupation represents the first time that the Chinese were forced out of the film industry[12], the second time occurring during Suharto's era (1966-1998), when anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia reached its zenith. Although the Japanese occupation lasted for three and a half years, Chinese producers recovered in its aftermath and the filmmaking business resumed after the Japanese Army retreated. Nonetheless, ethnic Chinese producers did face the impact of the occupation as Indonesian indigenous nationalism ascended after Independence.

When the Chinese were excluded from the film industry during the Japanese occupation, the *pribumi* were invited by the invading army to produce films for its publicity. Some important indigenous Indonesians, including Inoe Perbatasari, Raden Arifin, and Roestam Soetan Palindih, benefited greatly from the training they received

[12] The animosity between the Japanese and Chinese stemmed from the first (1894-1895) and second (1937-1945) Sino-Japanese wars prior to the invasion of the Indonesian archipelago.

from *Nippon Eigasha* (Japanese film studio). These three years of training, including the making of propaganda films for the Japanese Army, changed Indonesia's filmmaking landscape. The training not only stimulated a heightened awareness of nationalism among native Indonesians but also opened the eyes of the *pribumi* to the use of film as a means of disseminating nationalist ideas (Biran, 2009; Said, 1991). Consequently, after Indonesia gained its independence in 1949, there was an upsurge of nationalist sentiment. The nationalist movement led to a series of patriotic films being produced by native Indonesians and a rejection of Chinese-made films.

Post-Independence to the Pre-New Order Period (1949-1960s)

In August 1945, when the Japanese Army fled the archipelago, the Dutch returned to take over the administration of Indonesia. The filmmaking industry was in a state of dormancy, while the aftermath of the war prevailed. During the war, the country's film production had ceased; by 1948, when the industry resumed, more *pribumi* filmmakers joined the profession. Two Chinese-owned production companies recommenced film production; Tan & Wong Brothers and Bintang Surabaya (previously the Java Industrial Film Company) (Said 1991). In the same year *Air Mata Mengalir di Tjitarum* (Tears Flow in Citarum, 1948) was produced by Tan & Wong Brothers. The film was directed by Roestam Soetan Palindih, who had previously worked in a Japanese film studio. Within the same year, the Dutch-owned South Pacific Film produced two pictures: *Angerek Bulan* (Orchid, 1948) and *Dijauh Dimata* (Out of Sight, 1948), both directed by Indonesian indigenous filmmaker, Andjar Asmara. Subsequently, in 1949, Bintang Surabaya also released two films: *Saputangan* (Handkerchief, 1949) and *Sehidup Semati* (Til Death Do Us Part, 1949), both melodramatic love tales written by

peranakan Chinese Fred Young. In the post-war period, the industry saw an overwhelming increase in the variety of films being produced. Additionally, more *pribumi* were engaged as apprentices in the Chinese and European production companies. The film companies that the Chinese invested in provided the training, and further prepared Indonesian *pribumi* as filmmakers; later most of them would be involved in nationalist filmmaking.

By 1950, when Indonesia had gained its independence from the Dutch, the film industry had undergone a radical shift. This transformation was rooted in the increased nationalist sentiment felt among the Indonesian *pribumi,* that was at least in part inspired by the occupation of the Japanese Army. Hence, the decade began with increased participation by indigenous filmmakers, with their films centred on the issues of patriotism, indigenous cultural identity and the everyday life of indigenous society. In March 1950, Usmar Ismail – a director who had worked under Andjar Asmara (the director employed by the Dutch-owned South Pacific Film) – established the National Film Corporation (Perusahaan Film Nasional, PERFINI). Prior to this Usmar had directed two melodramas, *Harta Karun* (Treasure, 1949) and *Tjitra* (Shadow, 1949), for South Pacific Film. He was unsatisfied with the films because of the control exerted by the Dutch producer.

PERFINI was established primarily to make films with idealist content and to promote nationalist sentiment. Usmar's first film for PERFINI was *Darah dan Doa* (*Blood and Prayer or The Long March,* 1950) made in the same year the production company was formed. The film portrayed the historical event of the Siliwangi Division army's long march from Yogyakarta to West Java, after the Dutch took over Yogyakarta in 1948. According to Usmar, "PERFINI's first film was made with no commercial consideration […], it was pure idealism and the public reacted to the film in

a variety ways" (Said 1991, p. 51). He then proclaimed *Darah dan Doa* to be the first genuine Indonesian film. The focus of Usmar's idealism was self-expression and representing the everyday realities of Indonesian life by showing genuine Indonesian faces on cinema screens (Said, 1991). Nevertheless, Said highlights that the local indigenous community were "unwilling to see the realities of their life, whether good or bad, [being] depicted accurately […] [on the screen]" (1991, p. 51). As a result, Usmar's early films were not well received among Indonesian viewers.

The upsurge in nationalism led to the Chinese in Indonesia being marginalized by the indigenous society (Setijadi-Dunn & Barker, 2010). This broader socio-political phenomenon is reflected in the film industry: for example, the Chinese were criticized for being unable to produce Indonesian films that represented genuine Indonesian culture and identity. This judgment also caused Indonesian *pribumi* to renounce the films that had produced by ethnic Chinese in the pre-independence era. Additionally, the decades of ethnic Chinese participation in the film industry were dismissed as mere commercial exercises, lacking production merit and technical quality. Regardless of this accusation, the contribution of Chinese Indonesian, who were now marked as 'foreigners' in Indonesian society, remained crucial. Said claims that the first Indonesian idealist film *Darah dan Doa* (1950) was completed with the financial support of the Chinese Indonesian movie theatre owner, Tong Kim Mew (Said, 1991). With their strong financial position, the Chinese remained key players in the Indonesian film industry.

During the post-war period, the Chinese played an important role in reviving the country's industry, which had thrived under their leadership. More Chinese-owned film studios were established in the 1950s, alongside the *pribumi*-owned PERFINI and Persatuan Artis Indonesia (Indonesian Artists Company, PERSARI – owned by

Djamaluddin Malik, a *pribumi* businessman). Within five years, from 1950 to 1955, Chinese-owned film companies produced about 140 titles.[13] Although the number of *pribumi*-owned film companies increased, most of the film companies that were actively producing films during the post-war period were Chinese-owned. The *pribumi* productions were generally centred on political ideology, and concerned with the policies of the nationalist and the communist parties.

Among the ethnic Chinese filmmakers, the Wong Brothers (only the two younger brothers were now active, as the oldest brother, Nelson Wong, was unwell) participated in the film industry as directors and later producers, from 1948 to the 1960s (Biran, 2005, 2009; Said, 1991; Setijadi-Dunn & Barker, 2012). Likewise, Fred Young, who had produced two films for Majestic Film Coy - *Air Mata Iboe* (A Mother's Tears, 1941) and *Dijantoeng Hati* (Heart and Soul, 1949) - turned out to be one of the most prolific film directors of the 1950s (Sen, 2006a, p. 173). He produced and directed a significant number of films for various Chinese-owned production studios and remained active throughout the period when the name-change policy was introduced. The name-change policy (Act No. 4/1961) was introduced by President Sukarno in 1961 as a plan to assimilate Chinese Indonesian into the broader Indonesian society. Under this act Chinese Indonesian were required to adopt *pribumi*-sounding names. The act was reinforced later by Sukarno (under the Presidential Decree No. 127 of 1966)[14] to accelerate the assimilation process. Most Chinese Indonesian conformed to the name-change policy and attempted to assimilate into Indonesian society. Nevertheless, the policy had a profound effect on the historical record of ethnic Chinese identity in Indonesia, as it became difficult to distinguish between *pribumi* and *peranakan* Chinese. This was also the case in the filmmaking industry dominated by the Chinese.

[13] Tabulated from film titles recorded in *Katalog Film Indonesia* 1926-1995.
[14] For details of the decree refer to Coppel (2002, p. 33).

For example, Fred Young changed his Chinese name to the *pribumi*-sounding Utomo to conform to the assimilation policy, as well as to continue his filmmaking career (Sen, 2006a, p. 173-174). Following the implementation of the assimilation policy, Chinese Indonesian participation in the film industry is difficult to trace through name origin. Clearly, this can be understood as an act of identity erasure.

Subsequently, Chinese contributions to the Indonesian film industry have been obscured, despite their active participation that lasted from the colonial era through to the early years of Independence. Sen remarks "[f]rom their complete dominance of the industry in the 1930s, Chinese Indonesian writers, directors and technicians had become a small minority by the 1960s, and even that relatively small presence was disguised under adopted names and identities" (2006a, p. 174). In order to continue working in the industry some Chinese Indonesian adopted indigenous names. One remarkable example is Tan Sing Hwat who had been using his indigenous name, Tandu Honggonegoro, interchangeably since the 1950s. In 1961, he used his indigenous name on two films he directed: *Dilereng Gunung Kawi* (In the Valley of Mount Kawi, 1961) and *Lagu dan Buku* (A Song and A Book, 1961) (Sen, 2006a, p. 174). Alongside Honggonegoro, Wim Umboh (Liem Yan Yung) is another prominent film director of Chinese-Indonesian background, who emerged in the film industry in the 1950s using an indigenous name. His filmography as a director began in 1955 with *Dibalik Dinding*, a film produced by a Chinese company Golden Arrow (owned by Chok Chin Hsien or CC Hardy). Either intentionally or otherwise, Wim Umboh had disguised his Chinese identity before entering the film industry. In 1960, he founded Aries Film together with Annie Mambo, with the first production *Istana Jang Hilang* (*The Missing Palace*) made in the same year. Subsequently, from 1955 through to the 1990s, the director produced more than fifty films under the same film company (Sen, 2006a, p. 173), including one –

Pernikahan (*Marriage*, 1973) – that won eight categories of Citra Awards at the 1973 Indonesian Film Festival. However, none of his films ever featured Chinese characters or centred on Chinese Indonesian stories, like those films that had been made earlier by other Chinese Indonesian producers between the 1930s and 1950s.

In the New Order, although Chinese Indonesians remained active in the film industry, most of them abided by the assimilation policies by avoiding including Chinese characters, Chinese themes and other elements that related to their ethnic origin. Their creative output in the medium of film had been subjected to what Sen identified as, citing Ariel Heryanto (2006a, p. 171), "thematic silence". This erasure of Chinese identity in film production can be seen throughout the New Order period. Sen claims, "Teguh Karya[15] […] [did not have] a single Chinese character across the body of his work" (2006a, p. 171).

The pivotal role played by Chinese Indonesian filmmakers in the development of the state's film industry at the inception of the country's cinematic history needs to be documented and celebrated. Over the past few decades, the contribution of Chinese Indonesian has been crucial to the building of the nation's film industry and fostering a vibrant filmmaking culture. It is valid to claim that most of the films that foreground the tales of Chinese and indigenous Indonesians exemplify the real imaginaries of Indonesian people, as well as Indonesian culture and identity (Setijadi-Dunn & Barker, 2012). Most of the films were based on Indonesian stories and the roles were played by indigenous actors. Indeed, Chinese Indonesian films of the pre-New Order era reflect an integrated and multicultural Indonesian society, that never existed in other Indonesian films made later in the New Order period.

[15] Teguh Karya was an ethnic Chinese who had significant impact on the film industry at this time.

Chinese Indonesian made a crucial contribution to the establishment and continued viability of the Indonesian film industry. They did this through various political and historical eras, even when they were forced into virtual invisibility under the name-change and assimilation policies. Meanwhile, what is evidenced by the subject matter and styles of films that they developed in the 1920s and 1930s, is a sense of a connection to the Chinese homeland. This affiliation through the subject matter and style of the films is seen as a response to the experience of displacement through diaspora. Consequently, it is arguable that their films, to an extent, exhibit this sense of diasporic consciousness and the hazards of essentialism in diasporic formation. Thus, while the Chinese-made films function as commercial products, their films also register certain diasporic qualities. Hamid Naficy (2001) defines this as "accented cinema". The "accent" is a result of the experience of the displacement of the filmmakers and their diasporic identity. Taking into account their profound assimilation, diasporic consciousness and cultural marginalization, the questions that need to be asked are can the Chinese in Indonesia be classified as a diasporic community and can their films being categorized as such?

Tracing the Chinese Diaspora in Indonesia

The history of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking reveals the long-term settlement of ethnic Chinese in the archipelago and their contributions to the film industry. This is evidenced by the significant number of films produced and directed by Chinese Indonesians during the colonial and post-independence eras. While their films were initially made as entertainment for the *peranakan* and *totok* Chinese, these productions established a site for the formation of a shared identity among the displaced Chinese. As

the demand for films among Indonesians increased, Chinese producers created cinema that not only appealed to the Chinese, but also to indigenous viewers. As previously discussed, a range of cross-cultural films were produced in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, featuring both indigenous and Chinese stories and their cultures. Among some of these hybrid films, elements such as *Wuxia*, the indigenous theatrical style or *teater Indonesia*, and *kerongcong* music were significant. The films they produced represented their ethnic origin and cultural inheritance, along with a new identity that emerged from the influence of indigenous culture and values.

There are two ways of approaching the history of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking and its connection to the notion of diaspora. First, it can be recognised that the historical films play a role in broadening the notion of Chinese identity, by linking Chinese Indonesian experience to the cultural heritage and collective memory of Chinese identity. This is achieved in the films through the projection of familiar and memorable images of the homeland. These images allow the imagining of a distant and unreachable China to be envisaged. The connection through film images underscores the presence of a Chinese diaspora, and allows the dislocated Chinese Indonesian audience and community to reconnect with their identity of origin. Another way of examining this is to look at the cross-cultural Chinese-made historical films as processes of cultural syncretism, as they reflect a blend of Chinese and indigenous elements. This cultural syncretism reveals that the Chinese community in Indonesia had to some extent relinquished their cultural heritage through the processes of adaptation and integration into the native Indonesian culture. As a result, they may be categorized as a community that possessed the ability to live between two different cultures.

As I have already highlighted, it is necessary to acknowledge the amount of work and capital invested by the Chinese during the inception of the Indonesian film

industry. Their investment brought about a range of films centring on cross-cultural subject matter and intermixed filmic styles that became significant in the Indonesian film industry. As a result of their experiences living in two different countries, their films were influenced by the consciousness of two different cultures. Nonetheless, the relationship between the Chinese Indonesian and their host country was always complex and multifaceted. The next section aims to examine the nexus between Indonesian identity and the notion of diaspora to better understand the complexity and implication of being an ethnic minority in Indonesia. This will also assist in consolidating the account of contemporary Chinese Indonesian filmmaking in later chapters of this thesis. The following section is also intended to show how diasporic identity informed the Chinese-made historical films and filmmakers discussed above.

Early Migration of Ethnic Chinese and the Formation of Diasporic Identity

Chinese migration to Indonesia can be traced from as early as the sixth century, long before Dutch colonization in the archipelago. The first generation of Chinese immigrants travelled mainly as merchants and craftsmen. They settled in the archipelago and many married local women (J. A. C. Mackie, 1976, p. 3). Their offspring were known as the *peranakan* Chinese. A much larger mass migration of Chinese peoples to Indonesia occurred between the 19th and 20th centuries during the period of Dutch colonization. The European rulers dominated the Indonesian archipelago for about 150 years. The Dutch fled Indonesia during World War II, when the country was under Japanese occupation and did not return to the administration of the Indies until 1949. Under Dutch rule, several factors accelerated Chinese migration, including the demand for labour within the Dutch economy in the archipelago (mainly

in the fields of tin mining and rubber plantation) and the relaxation of the European colonizers' policy of restricting Chinese immigration after 1900. As a result, the number of Chinese immigrants settling in Indonesia increased significantly from a quarter of a million in the mid-nineteenth century to one and a quarter million in 1930 (Ang, 2001, p. 26).

Most of the Chinese who migrated to Indonesia became engaged in trade and business. They worked as tax farmers,[16] pawnshop operators, salt merchants and opium traders. The Dutch colonizers permitted them to establish businesses, commercial networks, money-lending ventures (such as pawnshops), wholesale and trading activities and the overseeing of the import and export of primary products. As for filmmaking, the colonizers did not apparently impose any restrictions on ethnic Chinese film production or their monopoly of the cinema business. Instead, the colonial government welcomed the tax revenues generated by the cinema operators through levies on admissions. On the other hand, however, the ethnic Chinese were unable to penetrate certain sectors of the Indonesian economy, such as agriculture and banking, which were strictly controlled by the Dutch government until very late in the colonial era (J. A. C. Mackie, 1976, p. 4).

The Chinese Indonesian in the Colonial Era – Chinese Early settlement and the Formation of *Peranakan* Culture

The strategic location of the Indonesian archipelago, especially Port Banten, located at the west of Batavia, had long been the meeting point for merchants from China, India and the Middle East. In the 16th century, when the Europeans reached the Indies (the

[16] Mackie (1976) describes the role of immigrant Chinese Indonesians as middlemen appointed by Dutch government to collect revenue from the local population.

name 'Indonesia' was only adopted after its Independence in 1949), there was already substantial Chinese settlement in the local port cities and rural areas. The Chinese settlers often took the role of *Syahbandar* [17] (J. A. C. Mackie, 1976, pp. 4-5), collecting the levies of transactions at ports and supervising traffic in the name of the ruler. Banten – a port city in Batavia (now known as Jakarta) – for example, was ruled by the Sultanate of Banten. In terms of social formation, some Chinese were well integrated with the local indigenous populations, especially the rulers, while others married into the local elite and converted to Islam.

During the colonial period, when the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC) developed Batavia into an *entrepot* in 1619, Chinese labourers became essential to the operation of the port. The increase in Chinese merchants, labourers, traders and shopkeepers assisted in facilitating Dutch business transactions, and made the community of ethnic Chinese the largest in Batavia. Simultaneously, Chinese communities in the countryside, who were mostly involved in agricultural activities, were the main providers of fresh produce, as well as being the source of coolies and artisans. While inhabiting the space between the native rulers and the Dutch colonizers, the Chinese settlers were organized into groups led by a Chinese officer, appointed by the Dutch government. These Chinese officers were called *Kapitan* (Captain or *Kapitein* in Dutch); they were the representatives of the Chinese community and managed Chinese affairs, such as collecting taxes on behalf of the Dutch government. They were the richest and most influential men in the Chinese community and socialized well with the Dutch (Pan, 1999).

A major influx of Chinese migrants to Indonesia occurred between the 19th and 20th centuries, during the period of Dutch colonization, in part due to the great demand

[17] *Syahbandar* is a Malay term meaning admiral, in this context it refers to Chief of the Harbour.

for labour in the areas of mining and plantation. In general, Chinese Indonesian have been differentiated into two groups: the Indonesian-speaking and Indonesian-born Chinese (*peranakans*) and the Chinese-speaking and Chinese-born descendants of ethnic Chinese (*totok*) (Skinner, 1996). These two terms are used by ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to describe the fundamental socio-cultural disparities that exist between the groups. The term '*totok',* which literally means "pure blood", is used to describe those who were born in China, speak the Chinese language, are culturally oriented towards China, and migrated to Indonesia later than the *peranakan* communities.

Apart from Batavia, Chinese settlers also dominated most of the northern coastal areas of Java, such as Pasisir, Cirebon, Semarang, Surabaya and even smaller and rural regions such as Pekalongan, Tuban, Rembang and Japara. About forty percent of the Chinese immigrants eventually settled in Java, while the remaining sixty percent were found in the outer regions such as Sumatra, Bangka, Belitong and Kalimantan. Taken as a whole, Chinese settlement extends throughout the entire Indonesian archipelago. However, when the Chinese population began to outnumber the European settlers, the Dutch government implemented an enforcement policy to segregate ethnic Chinese from both the local people and the Europeans. As most of the Chinese migrants were male and often married to *pribumi* non-Muslim women, their descendants remained Chinese and maintained aspects of their Chinese identity such as Chinese surnames. However, they were deeply influenced by Indonesian culture. They were known as the *peranakan* Chinese – a term that implies cultural creolization or hybridization. However, the separation policy ghettoized ethnic Chinese from the local community by prohibiting them from marrying natives. It could be said that the Dutch policy 'otherized' the Chinese minority as foreign Orientals. This, to some extent, ensured that their ethnic identity and many of their cultural practices would remain distinct from that

of the native peoples across the archipelago. Even those who converted to Islam were not necessarily fully assimilated into the local population.

While the Chinese settlers were being treated as an alien community in the Indies, the process of cultural assimilation or syncretization had already been entrenched among the *peranakan* Chinese. The Indies-born *peranakan* Chinese developed a distinctive, syncretized *peranakan* culture, especially in their languages, literature, clothing and cuisine. Like other local cultures, this *peranakan* culture was accepted as part of the fabric of the diverse Indonesian community. Many adopted the Malay language, which was combined with their Chinese Hokkien dialect, while others spoke the Indonesian regional language, especially those that had settled in the outer regions of Batavia. In the 19th century, *peranakan* culture extended into literature. A large amount of Chinese literature was written in the Malay language. There were novels, short stories and *syair* (poetry), some of which were translated from Chinese classics and popular stories like the *Romance of the Three Kin*gdoms (*Sam Kok or San Guo Yanyi* in Mandarin) and *Sampek Engtai* (Coppel, 2002; Suryadinata, 1998). This literature served as a precursor for the adaptation of Chinese literature and myths for many of the successful films made by the Chinese during the colonial period. In 1931, the Chinese classical romance story, *Sampek Engtai,* (The Butterfly Lovers) was adapted for the screen in *Sam Pek Eng Tay* by Cino Motion Pictures (owned by The Teng Chun). The film, also directed by The Teng Chun, was very popular and well received in the Indonesian market. As for their attire, *peranakan* Chinese clothing is also deeply influenced by the local culture, like the use of the *sarong*[18] and *batik* print in their costume. On social occasions, mingling with the *pribumi,* the *peranakan* men (*Baba*) would often appear in batik shirts and the females (*Nyonya*) would come in

[18] A piece of unsewn cloth of multi-coloured pattern or batik print used to wrap as a skirt.

sarong-kebaya. Their cuisine has also been acculturated to the local taste, thus the creation of Indonesian Malay-Chinese fusion cooking – the *Nyonya* cuisine.

Due to the demand for labour, the numbers of *totok* increased during the waves of migration to Indonesia in the 19th and 20th centuries. The arrival of the new Chinese migrants altered the nature of the existing Chinese community in Indonesia. This group of foreign-born Chinese, *totok,* was called *Singkeh*, or newcomers, and they were culturally distinctive from their *peranakan* counterparts. Culturally, the *totok* Chinese practiced a lifestyle very similar to the way they had lived in China. They considered themselves the 'real' Chinese and maintained a strong connection to the idea of the Chinese homeland, to which they imagined an eventual return. They retained their Chinese language and Chinese dialects such as *Hokkien, Hakka and Teochew*, wore Chinese dress and conserved certain customs; most importantly, they preserved Chinese culture over many generations. In terms of occupation, the *totok*, as newcomers in the archipelago, were mostly wage earners because they lacked capital compared to the Indonesian-born *peranakan* Chinese, who were mostly self-employed and engaged in various trades and businesses. Within the Chinese community in Indonesia, the bifurcation of Indonesian-born *peranakan* and foreign-born *totok* was caused by their social disparities and different perception of their ethnic backgrounds. The *peranakan* Chinese, who had a stronger socio-economic background, tended to spurn the *totok* Chinese, whereas the *totok*, who claimed to be the genuine Chinese, reviled the *peranakan* for being heterogeneous and having little knowledge about Chinese culture, Chinese language or their home country. Nonetheless, the *peranakan* still identified themselves as Chinese and yearned for association with the values of 'Chineseness'. This identification was further strengthened by the Dutch colonial policy of preventing them from assimilating with either the indigenous population or the Dutch. In the film

industry, which was mostly dominated by *peranakan* Chinese, Chinese cultural influence – such as the use of Chinese classical folk tales and the application of *Wuxia*, as well as the mixture of Chinese and Indonesian indigenous stories – could be observed. These cultural elements, that emerged in the early Chinese films, demonstrate their affiliation to China, and at the same time reflect the heterogeneity of the *peranakan* Chinese in Indonesia.

By the early twentieth century, the Chinese were economically more prosperous than the native Indonesians, but they had no political power in the archipelago. This was largely due to the racial distinctions that were maintained in Indonesian society. Therefore, the Chinese community, whether *peranakan* or *totok*, were categorized as a minority race. As we will see, throughout the 20th century the Chinese in Indonesia became at times even further marginalized, making it difficult to maintain a strong sense of Chinese identity. This marginalization contributes to the definition of this community as diasporic.

The Dutch administration in the Indies played an important role in the segregation of the Chinese from the indigenous *pribumi*. Their discriminatory segregation policy distinguished between the Europeans, the 'foreign Orientals' or ethnic Chinese and the indigenous people. The Chinese, who were marked as foreign Orientals, were subjected to rules and regulations implemented by the Dutch to determine how much tax they pay, where they could live and what they should wear. This prejudicial treatment of both *peranakan* and *totok* caused them to unite and they formed a number of Chinese organizations. These associations attempted to protect cultural, economic and political rights. Central to this was the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK) Chinese Organisation, which was formed in 1900 in Batavia. The formation of this Chinese association was also influenced by the rise of the Chinese nationalist

movement in China at the beginning of twentieth century, demonstrating further evidence of the continuing ties between this diasporic community and the homeland. Primarily the association was founded to address the issue of cultural dilution among *peranakan* Chinese, as well as to teach Confucianism and was initiated by the western educated *peranakan* Chinese. Subsequently, the mission of the THHK shifted to focus on the development of Chinese education across the archipelago. The THHK established the first Chinese school in 1900 and by 1911 there were 93 such schools in Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan (Pontianak) and Sulawesi (Makasar) to provide Chinese education to Chinese Indonesian (Suryadinata, 1997, p. 199). Teachers from China were also employed by the THHK to teach in the schools. This educational initiative provides further evidence of an active attempt to preserve Chinese cultural identity in the host land, despite official policies aimed at marginalizing them.

Following the establishment of the THHK and the growth of the Chinese business community, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1908. The chamber played an important role in protecting the business interests and opportunities of ethnic Chinese by boycotting Dutch companies. As the chamber developed into an ardent and devoted association, participated in by most Chinese Indonesian business entrepreneurs, it functioned as an intermediary to connect overseas Chinese to their homeland. With the Chinese united under such associations and the Chinese community establishing a link to the Chinese nationalist movement, the Dutch colonial government became unsettled.

In response to the growing cohesion of the disparate Chinese communities, the Dutch colonial administration introduced a range of initiatives, aimed at regaining the allegiance and confidence of the Chinese community. First, the Dutch established *Hollands Chineseesche Scholen* (Hollands-Chinese School, HCS), which provided

education exclusively for Chinese children. At that time, Dutch education was perceived to be of better quality, compared to the Chinese language institutions (Coppel, 2002. p. 22). Although many Chinese Indonesian children had the opportunity to already receive a high quality education, *Hollands Chineseesche Scholen* (HCS) – which included a fully Dutch curriculum – also served the prerogative of the colonial policy to fracture and ghettoize the Chinese community.

Second, the colonial government amended the nationality law in 1910, which awarded Dutch nationality to the parents of Indonesian-born Chinese who resided in the Indies. In the following year, the Dutch government reached a consensus with the Chinese Imperial Government in a consular agreement that the nationality of the Chinese in the Indies should be interpreted in accordance with the policy imposed by the host country, thus the Dutch law of nationality. The implementation of this new legislation reassured the Chinese community and the uncertainty felt by many *peranakan* and Indonesia-born *totok* Chinese.

Third, in the 19th century, the Dutch Civil Law had imposed the "pass and quarter" system, applicable only to ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to restrict them from travelling across the city and outer city. As a result, the Chinese who wished to travel across a city were required to apply for a permit. In addition, the quarter system had also ghettoized ethnic Chinese by forcing them to live within a designated zone in the town. In 1910, the Dutch government abolished the pass and quarter system and granted the Chinese free passage to travel across the city and outer city, with the intention of boosting Dutch business activities. Additionally, they were also permitted to reside elsewhere if necessary, essentially to promote activities in the fields of agriculture and industry.

The concessions made by the Dutch government had a dual objective; on the surface the amendments were made to accommodate ethnic Chinese, but more strategically they were deliberately planned for the benefit of the Dutch colonizers. Also, despite the perception by the Dutch that the influence of Chinese nationalist sentiment had united the Chinese community, ethnic Chinese in the Indies remained considerably heterogeneous. The reach of the Chinese nationalist movement was significant among the Chinese speaking *totok,* but less influential when it came to the *peranakan*. The *peranakan* Chinese had a different perspective and were more interested in the local politics. Also contributing to the divide in the Chinese Indonesian community, was the fact that Chinese language education, provided by the THHK, catered primarily to the Chinese-speaking *totok*, whereas most of the wealthy *peranakan* children attended Dutch-Chinese schools, where lessons were conducted in Dutch. The educational system thereby produced yet another group of *peranakan* Chinese, who spoke Dutch. We can see, therefore, that despite being ostensibly ghettoised under Dutch colonial rule, the community continued to be heterogeneous, hybridized and fragmented. This heterogeneity is further evidence of the complex and multi-layered Chinese diasporic community in Indonesia.

While the fervour of Chinese Nationalism certainly reached Chinese Indonesian, especially the *totok*, the *peranakan* Chinese, who were mostly Dutch educated, were more supportive of the Indies' colonial politics. As a result, Dutch-educated peranakan intellectuals and businessmen formed the Chung Hwa Hui (The Chinese Association of the Netherlands East Indies, CHH) in 1928. At the same time, the nationalist movement among ethnic Chinese Indonesians also stimulated greater patriotism among the natives of the Indies. A number of educated and professional indigenous Indonesians began championing the cause of nationalism. By 1920, when

the Indonesian nationalist movement was on the rise, the awareness of the sovereignty of *bangsa Indonesia* (the Indonesian nation) was beginning to challenge Dutch colonization. However, in the process and development of Indonesian nationalism, Chinese Indonesian – both the pro-Indonesian *peranakan* and the pro-Chinese *totok* – were entirely excluded. Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia were considered foreigners and an alien community, as they did not originate from Indonesia. Moreover, the racial politics created by the Dutch to segregate ethnic Chinese from the natives and Europeans, played an important role in the exclusion of the Chinese in Indonesian nationalism. The racial consciousness in the notion of *bangsa Indonesia,* and the colonial rules of separation, widened the gap between Chinese Indonesian and the indigenous community. Their differences were again highlighted during the New Order, creating a sense of confusion, ambiguity and the insecurity for the Chinese in Indonesia. This history of their marginalization and treatment at various political moments contributed to their re-emergence as contemporary Chinese filmmakers, with a particular focus on the negotiation of their diasporic identity.

Tong (2010) observes that *peranakan* and *totok* had varying political views. While the *totok* were attracted by Chinese nationalism, the *peranakan* were more interested in local political developments. In 1932, the Partai TiongHoa Indonesia (PTI) (Chinese Indonesian Party) was founded by Indonesian *peranakan* Chinese. While the party was supportive of both Indonesian independence and the anti-Dutch movement instigated by the Indonesian native political parties, the PTI was also active in maintaining the cultural identity of the Chinese community. Nonetheless, the PTI did not gain co-operation from the Indonesian nationalist parties, due to the intense racial divisions between Chinese Indonesian and the *pribumi* political leaders.

Further marginalization of the Chinese occurred during World War II under Japanese occupation, when anti-Chinese sentiment intensified. Many Chinese political leaders were interned and others went into hiding. The Japanese treated the Chinese, whether *peranakan* or *totok*, as a unified group, separate from the indigenous Indonesians. As a result, the Chinese in Indonesia were reviled, whereas the *pribumi* were given opportunities to work for the Japanese Army. As previously discussed, the Japanese also shunned ethnic Chinese filmmakers, despite their expertise and stronghold in the industry. Instead, the Japanese recruited and trained the local indigenous Indonesians to produce propaganda films for their army. This period, while relatively short, foreshadowed a move toward even greater marginalization and discrimination against the diasporic Chinese community in Indonesia in the decades to come.

Chinese Indonesian in the Independence Era (1949-1960s)

With the defeat of the Japanese and the end of the Second World War in 1945, the Dutch returned to rule Indonesia until 1949. In December 1949, Indonesia officially received its sovereignty from the Dutch colonizers. Following independence, the Indonesian government introduced new citizenship laws. Citizenship was granted automatically to native Indonesians or *orang-orang Asli Indonesia*, whereas other races were confirmed as citizens by law. Although most Chinese in Indonesia received Indonesian citizenship, they were distinguished as WNI (*Warganegara Indonesia*) or Indonesian citizens of foreign descent and WNA (*Warganegara Asing*) or aliens, such as Chinese residents of China and Taiwan (Coppel, 2002). Chinese Indonesians born to families that had resided in Indonesia for centuries were categorized as WNI. Under the

law, ethnic Chinese with WNI still had to comply with certain rules or they were marked as 'alien' as opposed to the Indonesian *pribumi*.

To a significant extent the political, economic and social discrimination against the Chinese led many to become more involved in political parties. Subsequently the BAPERKI (*Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegara Indonesia* or Consultative Body for Indonesian Citizenship) was formed in 1954, with the aim of fighting for racial equality for ethnic Chinese. While membership was open to all Indonesians, regardless of race, participation was largely limited to ethnic or *peranakan* Chinese. With its growth, the political party managed to establish several schools and a university in Jakarta for all races of Indonesians. It became the largest Chinese Indonesian political party during Sukarno's Guided Democracy (1958-1965) period. Throughout Sukarno's administration, ethnic Chinese discrimination and the expression of anti-Chinese sentiment and related violence were to some degree less prevalent. This was due to Sukarno's close relationship with Peking (the Chinese Government), as well as the President's political strategy for a multi-racial state to remain in power (Tong, 2010, p. 123). Nevertheless many local indigenous people rejected the ideal concept of a multi-racial state and much anti-Chinese sentiment remained. Furthermore, many ethnic Chinese in Indonesia became associated with communism, with participation especially marked in the activities of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). During the 1965 military coup that led to the end of Sukarno's Guided Democracy, the Chinese in Indonesia were accused of supporting communism, a situation that led to the massacre of a million people. This was one of the most horrific and significant events in the history of the Chinese in Indonesia. Those who were executed between October 1965 and 1966 were mostly Javanese, Balinese and ethnic Chinese who supported the PKI (Suryadinata, 1998). Although ethnic Chinese were not directly targeted in the

massacre, a large number of them were killed as part of the violence and as a result many fled the country. The massacre served as a racial purge and was pivotal in preparing for the institution of the next leader, President Suharto (1966-1998).

Chinese Indonesian under the Rule of Suharto and the New Order

The mid-to-late 1960s was a politically tumultuous time in Indonesia. Following the overthrow of Sukarno, Haji Mohamed Suharto was named as President in 1966. His reign came to be known as the "New Order", a term that was used to distinguish his time in power from that of Sukarno's. President Suharto regarded the Chinese Indonesian as an alien minority, thus significantly intensifying the racism that they had been subjected to during the latter years of Sukarno's presidency. Under the New Order, ethnic Chinese were placed in a state of uncertainty. In one sense, they were forced to assimilate to the indigenous culture, however, they were constantly reminded of their difference, especially with the enforcement of the WNI label, that distinguished them from their *pribumi* counterparts. Primarily, apart from being criticized as the culprits of the source of various cultural problems, they were also blamed for the broadening gap in economic inequality between their community and the *pribumi* (Tong, 2010, p. 115).

One of the most significant impacts the New Order period had on Indonesia's Chinese population was the introduction of the mandatory assimilation policy. This policy was designed to deal with the so-called "*masalah cina"* or "Chinese problem". The policy, "*Pembauran total*" ("complete assimilation"), aimed to integrate Chinese Indonesians fully into the indigenous population, with national unity privileged above cultural difference (Suryadinata, 1986). In less than a year after coming to power, Suharto ordered the elimination of all forms of Chinese cultural practice and Chinese

expression in public. In doing so, his regime abolished the three main pillars of Chinese culture: language, education and organizational exchange. Following this, the use of Chinese language, Chinese writing and other Chinese forms of cultural expression – including in film - were banned from public life. The public practice of age-old Chinese customs and religious rituals were prohibited, including the celebration of Chinese New Year.

For Suharto, both the *peranakan* and the *totok* were "Chinese". The discriminatory policy not only required them to change their Chinese names to Indonesian-sounding names (Tong, 2010), it also encouraged intermarriage between ethnic Chinese and indigenous Indonesians. In addition, the President also promoted their conversion to Islam (Setijadi-Dunn, 2009; Suryadinata, 1986). The policy of "*Pembauran Total*" was based on the indigenous Indonesian or *pribumi* as the model, if the Chinese wanted to be Indonesians, the only way was to fully assimilate into the indigenous population. This required them to relinquish their Chinese identity, culture and practices. Legally, however, the assimilation policy did not help Chinese Indonesian to be "Indonesian"; instead it marked out the Chinese by branding them as either *Warganegara Indonesia* (WNI) or *Warganegara Asing* (WNA). Chinese Indonesian remained foreigners, aliens, and an ethnic minority.

The assimilationist policy both overtly suppressed Chinese identity and culture and highlighted the issue of the "Chinese Problem". The Chinese were prohibited from identifying with their "Chineseness" and expected to comply with the new policy. However, the government encouraged them to take part in business. Their keen business aptitude and achievements in commercialism substantially boosted the country's economic status. The strength of the state's economy, supported by the Chinese business efforts, nevertheless was one of the strategies Suharto adopted to consolidate

the political power of his government (Lindsey, 2005; Setijadi-Dunn, 2009; Suryadinata, 1986). The authoritarian President, who administered the country on a platform of favouritism, nepotism and cronyism, manipulated and controlled the state's economy to benefit his family. He thus favoured some Chinese businessmen – allies in commerce - who in return were expected to promote the *pribumi* state controller. As Ariel Heryanto states, the Chinese minority were preferred by the government, instead of the local indigenous entrepreneurs, because of their capital, business network and experience. Certainly, the business acumen that is still exhibited by the Chinese in Indonesia today, is the result of a long history of division of labour according to race by the Dutch colonial economy (Purdey, 2006, p. 21). Nevertheless, when the country's economy was in crisis at the end of the 1990s, the Chinese were blamed as the cause of the economic downturn, which then led to the anti-Chinese riots in 1998.

The erasure of the presence of Chineseness, in an attempt to resolve the *masalah Cina* (or the Chinese problem) is marked, especially in the domain of foreign film imports. While Chinese media was banned, the importing and screening of Chinese films was prolific. In the 1980s and 1990s Chinese films outsold Indonesian-made films at the box office (Heryanto, 1997, p. 28). Under the New Order, film imports were placed under the responsibility and command of the Ministry of Information. The minister reserved the power to authorize the license for the importing of Mandarin or Chinese films, as well as Hollywood, European and other Asian films, to a company that was personally associated with him or with the president (Sen, 1994). Apparently the large number of Chinese films from Hong Kong and Taiwan, screened in Indonesian cinemas at the time, was due to the arrangement of an import deal authorized by a family member of President Suharto. The film import company, Suptan Film, was also partly owned by a wealthy Chinese businessman, Benny Suherman. Eventually the firm

monopolized all film foreign import businesses in Indonesia by the end of 1980s. At its peak, the number of imported Chinese films screened in Indonesian cinemas totalled 400 per year, a figure far outnumbering the Hollywood films shown (Sen, 1994).

The above example demonstrates that the assimilation policy did not aim for a culturally integrated Indonesian society, but rather intended to increase the gap between the ethnic Chinese and the indigenous. The division between Chinese Indonesian and the local indigenous Indonesians, instigated by the Dutch colonizers, was intensified in the New Order period, as a political strategy to consolidate the hegemony of Suharto's government. According to Christian Chua (2004), the government did not intend to resolve the "Chinese problem" but wanted to manipulate the issue of ethnic difference in order to conceal social division in the country. Under Suharto's regime, the Chinese became a scapegoat of political power and the victims of the political economy.

The End of Suharto's Era

The New Order regime constantly questioned the status of the Chinese, their citizenship and their "belonging" to the Indonesian nation. The Chinese have been portrayed as the dominant community in the Indonesian economy, against their poorer indigenous counterparts, by the government, and via the strong anti-Chinese sentiment among the *pribumi* which contributed to the violence acted out against the ethnic minority. On 13 May 1998, Indonesia erupted in mass disorder when large-scale riots broke out. The unrest first started in Jakarta and very quickly spread to many provincial towns throughout Indonesia. The riots were primarily ignited by the onset of the Asian economic recession, which had caused the Indonesian economy to collapse earlier that year. Chinese Indonesians were targeted by the indigenous rioters, making them victims

of the social unrest. Many Chinese shops and businesses were burnt and destroyed, and many Chinese people were killed, especially Chinese women, who were gang-raped and murdered. The majority of the Chinese community were terrified and ready to flee the country. About 100,000 ethnic Chinese migrated abroad during this time, while others moved to new areas of Indonesia, where the ethnic Chinese issue was less heated (Chua 2004, pp. 472-473). The unrest, which was inspired by the country's economic downturn, became a protest against the Chinese population in Indonesia. Thus, it presents the questions; if the Indonesian government was intent on integrating the ethnic Chinese and the *pribumi*, why would the ethnic Chinese become the main target of the economic unrest? Should the Dutch administration policies be held liable for the cause of ethnic discrimination between the Chinese and *pribumi*?

The *Reformasi*

Following the political and economic crisis that triggered the mass violence and racial rioting against ethnic Chinese, Suharto's government was overthrown. When the Indonesian Presidency was assumed by Megawati Sukarnoputri, under her open and democratic administration, she subsequently restored all forms of Chineseness that had been suppressed for many decades. Since then, the expression of the Chinese language and Chinese press has been permissible in public. Chinese schools were re-established and Chinese customs and religions were allowed to be publicly celebrated. The restoration of all forms of Chinese expression in public was greeted by a jubilant and overwhelmed Chinese community. The celebration of Chinese New Year was permissible in 2002 for the first time, after more than three decades, and other activities such as the *Barongsai,* or the "Chinese Lion Dance", became visible once again.

Chinese religions, such as Confucianism and Buddhism, which had been rejected in the Suharto period, have since been recognized again in this new era.

In terms of Chinese organizations, many of which were previously banned because they were suspected of being associated with mainland Chinese communism, a significant number of Chinese political and non-political parties have now proliferated in Indonesia (Purdey, 2006, p. 12). Among these parties are *Partai Reformasi Tionghoa* (Parti), *Partai Pembauran Indonesian*, and *Partai Bhinneka Tunggal Ika Indonesia* (PBI) - which are all led by the ethnic Chinese minority. These political parties were predominately set up to represent ethnic Chinese in Indonesian politics. The ethnic minority had never been permitted to participate in the country's politics since independence in 1949, however, this opportunity did not guarantee Chinese Indonesians representation in the indigenous dominated politics. Thirty-two years of Suharto's administration and the enforcement of an assimilationist policy had a significant impact on the cultural identity of Chinese Indonesian. Most of the Chinese community has been *Indonesianized* and *totok* Chinese have been *peranakanised*, hence most of the contemporary ethnic Chinese minority had lost their command of Chinese languages (Suryadianta, 2008, p. 3). Under the *reformasi*, Chinese education is one of the features of Chinese culture that has been revived. Nonetheless, the presence of Chinese education did not alter the fact that most Chinese Indonesian had been primarily exposed to Indonesian education for more than three decades and thus they had been integrated into the *pribumi* education system. Chinese education, under the new government, is considered a foreign language. Encouragingly, however, Indonesian national schools are permitted to teach Chinese as a subject and the curriculum of Chinese language has been adopted in the Indonesian National Plus Schools program for limited teaching hours (Suryadianta, 2008).

Another key representation of Chineseness that has been revived is the Chinese Indonesian media. There is an apparent connection between Chinese education and Chinese media. The closure of Chinese schools and the banning of Chinese education in the New Order period, largely reduced and obstructed the production of Chinese educated readers. Under the new government, although Chinese media has been rejuvenated, there has been a lack of Chinese readers to consume. (Suryadinata, 2008) notes that there are at least five Chinese newspapers in Indonesia, namely *Guoji Ribao, Yindunixiya Shang Boa, Heping Ribao, Shijie Ribao and Qiandao Ribao* (Suryadinata, 2008). At present, most of the Chinese press tends to be connected to American Chinese and Taiwanese newspapers. There is also circulation of Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese newspapers in Indonesia for the consumption of local readers. Nevertheless the main challenge of the Chinese press is the lack of readers and, of course, Chinese journalists (Suryadinata, 2008, p. 8). The younger generation of Chinese Indonesian, who attended Indonesian national schools, are accustomed to the Indonesian language and thus do not readily consume Chinese-language media.

The liberalization of Chinese media has indeed emancipated contemporary Chinese filmmaking, an aspect of Chinese culture that had been suppressed since the emergence of the Indonesian *pribumi* nationalism. However, as indicated earlier, unlike other Chinese forms of media, film was consigned to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information under the New Order. Later, when Suharto was in power, film was controlled and manipulated as a device to publicize his government. Ethnic Chinese involvement in film production was obscured under the repressive regime and the name-change policy.

After the *reformasi* Chinese filmmaking begun to revive. Chinese Indonesian films in the new era have centred on Chinese themes and have started to approach the

issue of Chinese identity in Indonesia. The revivification of Chinese filmmaking in the contemporary era is the central focus of this thesis. One observable fact is that, although the Chinese-themed films that emerged during the post-Suharto period interrogate the issue of Chineseness, none of the films were made in a Chinese language. A number of Chinese-themed films have also been made by several young Chinese Indonesian filmmakers to commemorate the victims of the 1998 anti-Chinese riots. The anthology film *9808*, released in 2008, consists of Chinese-themed short films by ten different filmmakers, produced under Project Umbrella, and questions the historical treatment of Chinese and the issue of Chineseness in Indonesia. Following this, more International Award-winning films were produced, including ethnic Chinese filmmaker Edwin's[19] *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012). Some non-Chinese Indonesian filmmakers have also been drawn to Chinese subjects and several films were released soon after the dissolution of the oppressive government. Examples include *Ca-bau-kan* (2002) by Nia Dinata, *Rie* (2005) by Riri Riza and *The Photograph* (2007) by Nan Achnas, all of which are *pribumi*-made films centred on Chinese subjects in Indonesia. For the first time in Indonesian filmmaking history, Chinese themes have become central in Indonesian indigenous production.

It must be emphasized that the re-emergence of these Chinese-themed films is significant, as it represents the cultural rebirth of the long-embattled Chinese diasporic community in Indonesia. Cinema has provided a platform for the re-articulation of diasporic experience and the representation of a marginalized community. However, despite their diasporic background, the Chinese community in Indonesia has undergone a great deal of cultural adaptation and assimilation. As long-term settlers, the Chinese Indonesian lost some of their heritage in the course of integration and assimilation to the

[19] The Chinese Indonesian film director prefers to use his first name.

indigenous culture. Hence, this community is essentially heterogeneous and hybrid. This thesis attempts to investigate the ways in which this diasporic culture and hybridity have become important themes in the films of contemporary Indonesian and, Chinese Indonesian independent filmmakers. The following chapter examines the re-emergence of Chinese Indonesian stories in post-Suharto Indonesian cinema, via three contemporary Chinese-themed films made by indigenous Indonesian filmmakers. Through a close textual analysis of the films, the chapter discusses how Chinese stories are narrated and how the elements of Chineseness are represented from the perspective of indigenous filmmakers.

Chapter Two

The Re-Emergence of Chinese Stories in Post-Suharto Indonesian Cinema

The previous chapter provided an historical overview of the important contributions made by people of Chinese background to the early formation of the commercial film industry in Indonesia. An account of the stages of Chinese migration to the Indonesian archipelago was provided, and it was established that the Chinese who settled in this region might be aptly described as a diverse diasporic community. Importantly, it was also demonstrated how this Chinese diaspora was subjected to the changing policies of various colonial and national administrations, and how these socio-political changes shaped the various roles the Chinese would play both in Indonesian society and in the film industry more specifically. Most significantly for this thesis was the period under which the Chinese, and other non-Indonesian ethnic minorities, were forced to conform to the assimilationist policies of the Suharto government. Among other policies, this administration enforced a name change policy and limited the open participation of the Chinese in the public and cultural life of the Indonesian nation. This thesis thus argues that this led, not only to a sharp decline in Chinese participation in the Indonesian film industry, but also to the virtual erasure of Chinese faces and stories from Indonesian cinema screens. Even Chinese film technicians working behind the lens fell into obscurity.

With the overthrow of President Suharto in 1998, a more open socio-political environment was established. This paved the way for the emergence of a new and vibrant wave of independent filmmaking. In particular, many of the restrictions that had led to the erasure and obscurity of Chinese-Indonesian filmmakers over a thirty-year period were removed, and as a part of this new wave of independent filmmaking, a

number of indigenous Indonesian filmmakers also turned their attention to Chinese stories. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to account for the re-emergence of Chinese faces, themes and cultural practices on Indonesian screens, through a close analysis of three key films made in the first decade of the twenty-first century, all directed by indigenous Indonesian filmmakers. These films, which will be discussed in chronological order, are *Ca-bau-kan* (The Courtesan, dir. Nia Dinata, 2002), *Gie* (dir. Riri Riza, 2005), and *The Photograph* (dir. Nan Achnas, 2007). Later chapters will discuss films made by Chinese-Indonesian filmmakers, but the main purpose of this chapter is to examine the various ways in which indigenous Indonesian filmmakers have chosen to represent the place of the Chinese in contemporary and historical Indonesian society. It will be argued that these films contributed to a much needed re-imagining of Indonesia as a multicultural and multi-ethnic society.

The first two films examined in this chapter adopt an historical perspective. While *Ca-bau-kan* (The Courtesan), begins in the contemporary period, it largely plays out as a series of flashbacks, in which a young woman, adopted and raised in the Netherlands, returns to Indonesia to recover her family history. It could be argued that the film takes part in the processes of recovering and re-tracing the lost history of the Chinese in Indonesia through the narrative of one family history. The second film analysed in this chapter, *Gie*, is set during the 1960s, a volatile era of Indonesian history. The film recounts the story of Chinese-Indonesian journalist and activist, Soe Hok Gie. Based on the journals of this historical figure, the film celebrates its central Chinese character as a national hero, but avoids placing emphasis on his Chinese background. *Gie* is depicted as a national hero first, and a Chinese-Indonesian second. The third film, *The Photograph,* is set in the contemporary era; however, it is underpinned by a great sense of nostalgia for traditional Chinese cultural practices, such

as ritual prayer for the ancestors and family inheritance. At the same time, by tracing the developing relationship between its central characters, an ageing Chinese photographer and a young Indonesian former prostitute, the film reveals how strong, familial-type bonds may be forged across ethnic lines. It could perhaps even be argued that the film is an attempt at imagining a reconciliation between ethnic Indonesians and the Chinese-Indonesian communities, after a long period of identity erasure and cultural discrimination. Through a detailed analysis of these three films this chapter will identify the ways in which these very different films represent diverse perspectives on Chinese characters, and Chinese cultural and social practices, in the Indonesian context.

***Ca-bau-kan* (2002)**

Ca-bau-kan is significant for being the first Indonesian historical epic that focalizes the Chinese experience in Indonesia. Indeed, it was the first film to feature the Chinese ethnic minority since *reformasi* in 1998. Directed by Nia Dinata, a female filmmaker of Indonesian descent, the film was made on a considerably large budget by Indonesian standards (five billion Rupiah, approximately US $100,000). Kaylana Shira films independently produced the film, a production company established by Nia Dinata, and the majority of the production costs were contributed by a Chinese-Indonesian investor (Baumgärtel, 2012, p. 207). This investment signified the reactivation of Chinese participation in the Indonesian film industry in the post-New Order period.

The film was well received at several international film festivals. Dinata even attracted an award for Best Promising New Director and Best Art Director at the Asia Pacific Film Festival in Seoul, Korea, in 2002, and *Ca-bau-kan* was put forward for an Oscar nomination the same year. However, the film did not receive a nomination in the

Academy Awards. At home in Indonesia, where it premiered on the first day of Imlek (Lunar or Chinese New Year), the film received mixed reviews and had moderate success at the box office with around 200,000 viewers (Anwar, 2002), although it did not come close to recovering its production costs during its theatrical release. Dinata, however, was not disappointed, by the more modest reception at home, believing in the crucial importance of the film and its reinsertion of Chinese Indonesian experience on screen (Anwar, 2002). As we will see, this historical epic is structured through a series of flashbacks and reminiscences. The film follows the story of a Chinese-Indonesian woman returning from her adopted home in the Netherlands in search of her heritage. Some reviewers observed that this framing story was not well established in the film and the progress of the flashbacks was at points confusing (Anwar, 2002). Despite these shortcomings, Dinata went to great effort to recreate an authentic historical atmosphere in the film, which was shot on 35mm at considerable expense. Most of the filming took place in East Java, where much of the colonial architecture has been preserved, and traditional costumes were produced with the assistance and generous sponsorship of some local fashion designers. In an interview conducted before the release of the film, Dinata remarks, "This is great, because we need an awful quantity of costumes, considering that *Ca-bau-kan* is a film that spans over several decades, from 1932 up to 1951 and on to the present, and set in old Batavia" (Ryanto, 2001). The complexity of the shoot, which began in 1999, and the relatively limited budget, led to a significant delay in the post-production process. Dinata notes that "at times I felt it was hopeless … [a]fter the shoot, we were out of money, so we had to fundraise again for editing" (Baumgärtel, 2012, pp. 206-207). This struggle to secure enough financing is, of course, a common story among directors, who operate in an independent production mode.

Ca-bau-kan was set in the colonial period, an era of which *peranakan* Chinese tales had been written about, by a prominent Indonesian writer, Remy Sylado, and published in 1999. Sylado's stories were then adapted for the screen by Dinata herself, who also conducted a considerable amount of historical research into the Chinese community during the colonial era. The film's title, *Ca-bau-kan*, literally means 'woman' or '*Ca-bo'* (a term that carries a pejorative meaning of prostitute) in the *Hokkien* dialect, a common Chinese dialect spoken by the Chinese in Indonesia (Ryanto, 2001). The main story, which is told in a series of flashbacks, is set in the vibrant landscape of the Dutch colonial period, amidst the colourful world of Chinese commerce in the 1930s. It centres on a Chinese-Indonesian tobacco merchant, Tan Peng Liang (played by renowned *peranakan* Chinese actor, Ferry Salim) and his romance with an indigenous courtesan, Tinung (played by Indonesian actress Lola Amalia). The film depicts the volatile life of the family-oriented Chinese man, as his story takes dramatic turns from merchant, to fugitive, to arms trader, to pro-nationalist and finally to the position of a banker. This historical story is embedded within the contemporary narrative, that follows the middle-aged woman, Giok Lan (played by Niniek L. Karim), Tan and Tinung's daughter, who returns from the Netherlands to Indonesia to trace her family history. Giok Lan had been adopted at a young age, and raised in the Netherlands, with little knowledge or memory of her Chinese-Indonesian background and family. Towards the end of the film, we return to the contemporary framing story, in which Giok Lan learns that her father was murdered in a conspiracy, which she then vows to "forgive and forget". On a more emblematic level, this ending may be read as a bold proposal to forgive the painful past of ethnic Chinese discrimination and marginalisation. Therefore, this Chinese-themed feature may be understood, not only as the first film after the *reformasi* to restore Chinese faces to

Indonesian screens, but also as an appeal to Indonesians of all backgrounds to heal the wounds of the past caused by ethnic discrimination.

This broader significance has been noted by Krishna Sen, who recognises that *Ca-bau-kan* represents an important moment in the Indonesian film industry, where the capability for Chinese representation was beginning to be reclaimed (2006a, p. 180). Sen goes on to acknowledge that the film was celebrated for being "more centrally about Chinese Indonesians than any other film, not just in the New Order but in [the] post-colonial Indonesian [period] more generally" (2006a, p. 182). However, Sen criticises the negative, stereotypical portrayal of the Chinese in the film, including the central character, Tan Pang Liang, describing him as "ruthless" and "corrupted" (Sen, 2006a, p. 181). Perhaps Sen places too much emphasis on this character as a potential, and long-awaited, reinterpretation of Chinese-Indonesian identity. She argues that, despite his wealth and participation in the pro-independence nationalist movement, the Chinese hero remains a second-class citizen. She further asserts that the film successfully locates Chinese-Indonesians within the context of capitalism "yet the place it finds is just one very small space, that of a rich businessman, playing 'younger brother' to 'ethnic' Indonesian bureaucrates". Thus Sen argues that Chinese-Indonesians, as a whole, remain "demeaned and disenfranchised" in the film (2006a, p. 182). Sen is clearly critical of how the film maintains an essentially racist and marginalising ethnic power play between the Chinese businessman and the dominant Indonesian officials.

Referring to Sen's argument, Ariel Heryanto (2008) discusses the portrayal of negative and stereotypical Chinese-Indonesians in the film: "I see *Ca-bau-kan* as a sincere, albeit awkward, and only partly successful attempt, to defy the decades long stereotyping of Chinese Indonesian" (Heryanto, 2008, p. 80). Through his reading of the

film, which focuses on Tan Peng Liang, Heryanto claims that "[d]espite all his morally questionable characteristics and behaviour, Tan Peng Liang is presented with consistent sympathy as a near-hero, and viewers are expected to identify with him" (2008, p. 80). Heryanto continues by arguing that Tan's actions, as an arms trader supplying firearms to the country's nationalist movement, signify an act of anti-colonialism that eventually leads to Indonesian independence. Heryanto's analysis is useful in providing a different perspective of the film, and indeed Chinese Indonesian history more broadly

Both Sen and Heryanto's readings of *Ca-bau-kan* are focused on the central Chinese character of Tan Peng Liang, however, their analyses are primarily concerned with questioning the legitimacy of ethnic Chinese representations, and thus they do not delve into other aspects of the film. It may be true that the characterisations in the film are highly stereotyped, however, neither reading offers an analysis of the film in terms of how it plays a role in the re-imagination of a different kind of Indonesian society in the *reformasi* era, and crucially how this manifests via the perspective of an Indonesian filmmaker. The next section of the chapter will therefore look at how the complexity of ethnic Chinese cultural practice in Indonesia is represented in the film. It will be argued that *Ca-bau-kan* attempts to provide a new perspective on the diversity and multiplicity of Indonesian society. The next section will also demonstrate the ways in which traditional Chinese practices are evoked in the film, not only through narrative and character development, but via other elements such as the use of flashbacks and *mise-en-scène*, which serve to foreground a long-disconnected family relationship (*guanxi*). As the film recollects the story of one family, it also alludes to the tumultuous history of Indonesia more broadly, and attempts to recall the role played by Chinese-Indonesians within that history. The following analysis will be focused on examining the presence of familial *guanxi* and non-familial *guanxi* in the film.

Flashbacks and the Family *Guanxi* link

Ca-bau-kan is structured around a series of lengthy flashbacks. The contemporary, framing story of Giok Lan, who returns to Indonesia from the Netherlands to learn about her ancestry, is only briefly introduced at the beginning of the film. It nevertheless presents an important theme of family connection (*guanxi*) and also contextualises the colonial history from a contemporary vantage point. This perspective is important, particularly given the long erasure of the Chinese from official Indonesian history and the policy of forced assimilation. Even the very brief, contemporary moment shown at the beginning of the film, allow viewers to connect the past with the present and links colonial history with contemporary times.

The flashbacks are stimulated by Giok Lan's desire to understand her past, having been adopted at a young age and taken to the Netherlands, where she has spent most of her life. We might say that Giok Lan's personal desire to know her family's story serves the dual purpose of also recollecting the socio-political history of colonial Indonesia and its eventual emergence as an independent nation. A close analysis of the film's opening sequences will demonstrate how this connection between personal and political history is achieved.

The film opens with a brief credit sequence. Numerous red and white Chinese lanterns frame yellow text on a black background. Various images of lanterns appear, as well as a boat, adorned with lanterns, which fade in and out. This paints an impressionistic picture of a night festivity at the riverbank of Kalijodo, Batavia, where Chinese merchants seek prostitutes. As the name of Niniek L. Karim (the actress who plays Giok Lan) appears on screen, we hear Giok Lan, in voice-over, beginning to

narrate the story of her mother, Tinung, as the credits continue. Images of festivity then give way to a sepia-toned image of the young Tinung, in Indonesian traditional wedding dress. Giok Lan's voice-over continues, explaining: "The story began with my mother, Sit Nurhayati, known as Tinung, a *Betawi* Indonesian." The sound of celebratory firecrackers interrupts the voice-over, as the image cuts to a traditional *Betawi* Indonesian wedding parade, with *Betawi* instrumental music also playing. The images reveal Tinung's first marriage to an elderly *Betawi* Indonesian, who died soon after they wed. The death of her husband has caused Tinung, who is now pregnant, to be accused of bringing bad luck upon the family. Giok Lan's voice-over continues, explaining that her mother lost her first child in pregnancy, while the visuals shows Tinung resting in the bed at her aunt's house. As Tinung turns toward the camera, the title, *Ca-bau-kan,* appears against a black screen, as dramatic music swells.

This brief title-sequence gives way to the scene of Giok Lan, arriving at her brother Ginandjar's house. She is greeted warmly by family members as she enters the home, and is directed by her brother to a traditional Chinese altar. Framed photographic portraits of her parents hang on either side of the altar. Ginandjar gestures to each of the photographs with his hand, as though to introduce Giok Lan to the parents. A cut to a close-up of the mother's portrait reveals this to be a photograph of the young Tinung, looking directly at the camera, much as we had seen her in the last shot in the opening credit sequence. Giok Lan gently caresses the photograph and a shot-reverse-shot reveals the great emotion she experiences at finally standing face-to-face with her mother after many years. Following Giok Lan's nostalgic and emotional gaze, the film then makes one final, brief cut-back to the photograph before the image dissolves into the first extended flashback and a title announces 'Kalijodo, Batavia, 1933': Indonesia under Dutch colonial rule.

In this brief sequence, composed of shots of Giok Lan and her mother's photograph, which dissolves from present to past, Dinata manages to subtly suggest a mystical reunion of family *guanxi* (relationship), between Giok Lan and her mother. The same technique of moving between the present and the past is applied consistently throughout the film, and each time serves, not only to bind together past and present in a narrative sense, but also to emphasise the theme of family *guanxi*. The flashback method allows this theme to be expressed cinematically. This conceptual reconnection of the Chinese family of two different eras is sustained by the cinematic expression of the flashback, which allows the family to metaphorically reunite. Hence, it may be argued that cinema provides not only a site, but also a means, to nurture the formation of family *guanxi* in the film. Although Giok Lan's role is relatively minor, the techniques of flashbacks and voice-over, bind her inseparably to the larger, historical narrative of the film.

In order to better understand the role of the flashback in evoking and emphasising family *guanxi*, it is useful to consider Dinata's use of the flashback in the context of cinema more generally. In her book, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*, Maureen Turim discusses how flashbacks in film can merge "two levels of remembering the past, giving large-scale social and political history the subjective mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience" (Turim, 1989, p. 2). Here, in *Ca-bau-kan*, the flashbacks are motivated by personal experience – Giok Lan reconnecting with her family – and thus they expand the narrative and imbue it with a more epic and socio-political level of history.

There are three key moments in the film where flashbacks are interwoven into the plot. The first moment is when Giok Lan gazes into the picture of Tinung, which produces the mystical family reconnection. The next moment occurs in the middle of

the film when a scene of Giok Lan, who is visiting an old business rival of Tan's (named Oey Eng Guan) at the nursing home, cuts to Tinung at the Kalijodo riverbank, where she returns to be a courtesan, just as Tan flees the country. The flashbacks of her mother, via Oey's remembrance of the past, form a conceptual tie of the family *guanxi* between Giok Lan and Tinung. Giok Lan is again reconnected with her mother, when she learns more about her story from Oey. Cinematic flashbacks play a role, not only in terms of creating narrative cohesion between the two eras; but they also close the gap of a long parted family *guanxi* between Giok Lan and her parents. The third key moment that points to the centrality of family *guanxi* in the film, occurs in the flashback that depicts the murder of Tan, of which Giok Lan learns from Oey while at the nursing home. The family *guanx*i is linked by the shockingly loud scream of Tinung, when she learns of Tan's death that 'transcends' the temporal context and can be heard in the nursing home. The cry of Tinung emphasises a psychological connection between mother and daughter – as we see Giok Lan's sudden distress when she hears of the assassination of her father – reinforced by the abrupt cut from the past to the present. The cinematic transitions between the present and past emphasise the link between Giok Lan and her family *guanxi*, despite having been separated by space and time.

From Family *Guanxi* to Non-family *Guanxi*

According to Ying Fan, *guanxi* – a Chinese term - is a special relationship between two persons that depends on their particular bond. The nature of their relationship can be familial and classified by birth or blood, such as family and kinship, or by other factors such as locality, for example, people from the same home town (Fan, 2002, pp. 546-547). In *Ca-bau-kan*, the practice of family and non-family *guanxi* adopted by Tan, is

depicted as one of the key strategies that allows him to survive several hazardous experiences.

Family *guanxi* has already been established as the conceptual idea that underpins the relationship of Giok Lan and Tan Peng Liang. The concept of the blood link, or kinship-based relationship, also pervades other elements of the story of *Ca-bau-kan* (Fan, 2002). Tan's nationalistic commitment and illegal pursuits are to a great extent associated with the practice of family *guanxi*. As an Indonesian filmmaker that emerged after the reform era, director Dinata shows the recuperation of Chinese stories, by focusing on the reconnection of 'lost' family members. In the film, 'family' is the motivation behind most of the business ventures attempted by the lead character, Tan. We see this in one scene when Tan has become a successful Chinese-Indonesian banker in 1960. At the opening ceremony of his bank, Tan is acknowledged for his contribution to the success of the country's nationalist movement, in a speech by his indigenous cousin, Mas Tardjo. Tan responds by explaining that the motivation for his success has been his family. At the same time, the camera pans across a middle-aged Tinung, their sons and Mas Tardjo. Tan is framed in a medium close-up shot, with Chinese lanterns set in the background, emphasising his Chinese origins. Despite his ethnicity, Tan's family not only includes members of Chinese descent, but also extends to include Tinung and his indigenous cousin, as well his mixed-parentage son, Ginandjar. The scene suggests that the intention of the filmmaker was to move beyond the more limited concept of a Chinese-originated family, to represent the intercultural relationships of the Chinese-Indonesian family. The scene not only allows Chinese-Indonesian representation to be understood as an entity of the diverse Indonesian community, it proposes Chinese-Indonesians to be included in the imagining of a national identity.

In reading the film in terms of family *guanxi*, a close analysis of the key character, Tan Peng Liang, is necessary. The prosperous trader inherits his wealth from his family (a Chinese father and an aristocratic Javanese mother), who live in Semarang. It is common in Chinese families that business and wealth is inherited by a close family member, commonly a son. In the film, there is also an emphasis on family obligation at every level of social practice, including the development of the family business. For example, Tan would take Tinung to first visit his parents in Semarang for their blessing, before taking her as a second wife. For his family, Tan is obliged to persevere and further develop the business at all costs. The story of *Ca-bau-kan* thus emphasises family connection and family obligation, which underpins and drives Tan's inheritance of his family's wealth, business and social standing. This story allows the film to expand the concept of family *guanxi* to include interpersonal networks or *guanxi* network.

When Tan's illicit pursuit of a counterfeit currency is discovered by a journalist, Tan is imprisoned. The scene in the jail not only allows the viewer to see how Tan has survived the setback, through the link to his indigenous cousin, his persistence and versatility are also underscored. At one level, this represents the historical strategies employed by the Chinese-Indonesian, in coping with their identity, which is caught between the native Indonesian and the Dutch. Lit by the soft daylight, emanating from a tiny window, and the cold blue light from the hallway, the jail scene begins with a medium panning shot, that includes Tan behind the bars. The vertical bars of the prison cell visually contain Tan, producing an atmosphere of constriction and claustrophobia, and for a moment we believe that the Chinese merchant is frail and overpowered by despair. But his body language – arms up above his head on the bars –can be read as a sign of his aggressiveness and readiness for 'ambush'. Indeed, Tan manages to flee the

jail and escape to Macau (as indicated in the film by a letter Tan sends to his adult son in Batavia) via his connection with his indigenous cousin, Mas Tardjo. Through this blood-link family *guanxi*, the lead character manages to regain his freedom and begin a new phase of life, before he is able to recover as a businessman. In the film, Mas Tardjo (related to Tan through his aristocratic Javanese mother) is presented as a firm ally to Tan. He also plays the role of an intermediary between Tan and his Chinese family, while Tan is an outlaw. Apart from their family *guanxi* stressed in the film, the cross-cultural connection between Tan and Mas Tardjo suggests the filmmaker's more optimistic view of a diverse Indonesian society. In *Ca-bau-kan*, Mas Tardjo plays an influential role in Tan's success as a banker, when he was promoted as a government officer in the post-independence period. Family *guanx*i then is persistently underscored as a custom in the film that governs the social networks among families and kinfolks.

The jail scene also suggests Tan's unique characteristics of persistence and versatility, especially in connection with his Chinese-Indonesian identity. When visited by an independent journalist in the jail, he says, "This is just temporary [referring to his imprisonment]; my [Chinese] zodiac sign is a rat, I could live anywhere, in the dark alley and in any sultry condition." This suggests that Tan's self-conception is underpinned by the characteristics of "flexibility and spatial mobility" (Ong, 1999). This attitude allows him to move between different socio-cultural spaces in society, under various conditions. He absconds from jail and flees to Macau and Siam (Thailand), moving between different locales before returning to Indonesian in the post-independence period. Tan's self-reflection in the jail scene can be seen a moment, in which viewers, especially Indonesians of Chinese origin, are encouraged to identify with his "flexibility and spatial mobility", as a result of their shared diasporic background. In many cases, constant relocation has become part of the identity and

cultural practice of Chinese Indonesians, as they have pursued secured shelter, as well as business opportunities, under various regimes in the colonial and post-colonial era. The Chinese character, Tan, in *Ca-bau-kan,* epitomises the experience of the Chinese community in the archipelago, which corresponds to Aihwa Ong's claim:

> … mobility and flexibility have long been part of the repertoire of human behaviour; under transnationality the new links between flexibility and the logics of displacement, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other, have given new valence to such strategies of manoeuvring and positioning (1999, p. 19).

Tan's declaration in the jail signifies a shift in the ensuing narrative development of the film, that then goes on to focus on the struggles of the protagonist's life. From a prosperous trader to a prisoner, and later as an arms trader, Tan exemplifies the qualities of adaptability and flexibility.

Apart from Tan's connection to his indigenous family, the film also places an emphasis on family *guanxi that* links the central character to his family of Chinese origin. While Tan is in exile in Macau and Thailand, he is involved in drug trafficking and arms trading. With the help of Mas Tardjo, Tan fakes his own death and ensures that the news reaches Batavia. In aiming for the recovery of his wealth, he engages his adult sons in Batavia in drug trafficking while he is abroad. The drug trafficking scene that takes place in the mourning room of the 'deceased' Tan in Batavia, signifies a potent moment of family *guanxi*. The scene, making use of *mise-en-scène,* evokes the atmosphere of a Chinese mourning ceremony. It incorporates a single tracking shot, which follows Tan's sons, as they move from the altar to his casket at a hasty pace. In

the casket they discover the drugs and a note from Tan. Via voice-over, Tan explains: "work hard, this is our capital." Tan's 'presence', through the use of voice-over, reinforces the idea of mutual inter-dependence of family members through family *guanxi.* Tan's message and the urging of his sons to work hard, demonstrates that he continues to be a source of emotional and practical support for his family (Fan, 2002). In the director's attempt to present family *guanxi* in this light, it is understood that the idea of inter-dependence in the Chinese family is central as an element in the film that weaves throughout the story of *Ca-bau-kan*.

As much as family *guanxi* is centralised in the film, the practice of *guanxi* is extended beyond family connection and is also invoked as a social networking strategy. Non-familial relationships play an important role in the film, and govern Tan's personal network, thus aiding the development of the Chinese entrepreneur's character. Tan develops informal political and social networks, that counter the stronghold of the colonial government and the often-unruly society. For example, Tan arranges a meeting with a Dutch official to establish a form of non-family based *guanxi* connection. As a businessman, who has just arrived in Batavia, Tan times his appearance at the Traditional Chinese *Cioko* Festival, with the arrival of a Dutch official, who is also attending the event. Tan arrives at the celebration in a decorated dragon boat that captures the attention of the Dutch official. However, the celebration turns to chaos, when he distributes some opium to the crowd. The disorder is then managed by the Dutch official, who manages to quell the chaos. Tan then promptly moves forward to express his gratitude, with a handshake and introduces himself to the officer, saying, "I'm Tan Peng Liang, from Semarang, just like your wife, Sir…" The Dutch official immediately replies in surprise, "How do you know my wife is from Semarang?" Tan replies, "Everyone knows about it." Place of origin is often seen as a very important

link among the diasporic Chinese community. It indicates that they are related in several ways, such as originating from the same area or village, sharing the same surname and speaking the same dialect. In the case of the *guanxi* network, between Tan and the Dutch official's wife, it is categorised as a relationship based on locality (Fan, 2002), which is termed "*tong xiang* (person of the same native place)" (Yang, 1994, p. 111). Mayfair Mei-hui Yang stresses that "people who come from the same village, town, country, or province, or speak in the same dialect, have an affinity for one another and can be counted on to do a favour or open a back door" (1994, p. 115).

Guanxi, in this sense, is further reflected in the film in a scene where Tan mediates a conflict, brought about by the character, Teo Boen Hiap, a Chinese businessman, who has caused a fire in Tan's tobacco warehouse. The *guanxi,* based on *tong xiang,* allows Tan to invite the Dutch official and his wife to a dinner during Chinese New Year, in which he has an opportunity to persuade the official to reinvestigate the case. The dinner takes place in a busy Chinese restaurant. Tan offers an *angpow* (a red packet filled with cash) to the official, as part of the Chinese New Year celebration. Although the Dutch official refuses the offer by upholding police professionalism, Tan explains that this is a usual practice of traditional Chinese custom. In many ways, this may be seen as an act of bribery. But the filmmaker, Nia Dinata, who perhaps understands much of Chinese culture via her marriage to a Chinese-Indonesian, frames it differently.

To understand banquet hosting and gift giving in the context of Chinese occasions, it is worthwhile consulting Yang's influential writing in her book *Gifts, Favors and Banquets* (Yang, 1994). Yang refers to *guanxi* relations as the art of *guanxi* or *guanxixue*. *Guanxixue* emphasises on the "binding power of personal relationships and their importance in meeting the needs and desires of everyday life" by involving the

exchange of gifts, favours and banquets (1994, p. 6). Gift giving and banquet throwing are customary social practices among families, relatives and close friends within a Chinese community. But, as Yang emphasises "when these two activities are placed into the art of *guanxi*, they impart an aura of *renqing* [or the feelings that are found in families, relatives and close friends] to an otherwise instrumental relationship" (Yang, 1994, pp. 135-136). *Renqing* is understood as a form of social politeness and proper social conduct, where gift giving on an occasion, like the Lunar New Year, is a way to strengthen friendships and *guanxi* relationships between families and relatives. As *renqing* implies helping each other with "reasonable demand[s]", etiquette is observed "to mask or mute the instrumental nature of the gift" (1994, p. 136). In *Ca-bau-kan*, it is thus arguable, that the banquet and gift offered by Tan to the Dutch official, could be perceived as a type of *renqing*, considering the prior establishment of the *tongxing guanxi* and the special occasion on which the exchange take place. By presenting the gift and banquet on Lunar New Year, it "submerges the instrumental nature of gift giving" under the qualities of *renqing,* hence it is a manner of establishing a long-term friendship (Yang, 1994, p. 136). In addition to this, when Tan presents the *angpow* to the Dutch official, he stresses that it is a form of cultural practice, so that the dinner and gift are not regarded as a crude bribe. As a repayment of *renqing*, the Dutch official reinvestigates the case between Tan and Teoh. In the *guanxi* link between Tan and the Dutch official, the pre-existing *tongxiang guanxi* cannot be separated from their relationship. Thus, it allows the exchange to be perceived as 'a favour' between close friends instead of bribery. Without the pre-existing *guanxi*, the banquet and gift would be awkward and could arguably be seen as a corrupt exchange.

From family-based *guanxi* to business-government related *guanxi*, there seems to be a persistent emphasis on *guanxi* in *Ca-bau-kan*. In the film *guanxi,* apart from

being depicted as a unique customary practice in the Chinese-Indonesian community, it has also been developed as a concept that binds the narrative structure of the film. Throughout *Ca-bau-kan*, the story of Chinese Indonesians is recuperated and their culture is represented on Indonesian screens after many decades of suppression. A significant intercultural connection, that is represented in the film via family and non-family *guanxi,* and between the Chinese and indigenous Indonesians, arguably enables this re-imagination of a multicultural society. However, the representation of Chinese-Indonesians by the indigenous filmmaker, is framed within a highly stereotyped characterisation, and narrows their cultural contribution to the country's economic success. Yet, their long history in Indonesia and their involvement in various areas of the country's socio-cultural development, means that Chinese-Indonesian stories remain inspirational to Indonesian filmmakers. The next section will examine another Chinese-Indonesian themed film, *Gie,* which was made in 2005.

Gie (2005)

If *Ca-bau-kan* was the first historical Chinese-Indonesian film to be made after the *reformasi,* featuring Chinese involvement in the economic sector, *Gie* (2005) may be characterised as a biopic, and the first to recount Chinese participation in the political arena. Directed by the prominent Indonesian filmmaker, Riri Riza, and produced by Mira Lesmana, *Gie* was produced by Miles Films, a production company jointly owned by the director and the producer. Made with a budget of $800,000 (US), *Gie* was a film that was highly anticipated by local audiences, especially for its attempt to recount a previously forbidden political story that occurred in the critical years of Sukarno's rule and during the establishment of the Suharto government (Coppens, 2009, p. 115). With

its relatively high production budget, for an Indonesian film, the Chinese-themed work won eleven categories at the 2005 Festival Film Indonesia (Indonesian Film Festival, FFI), including awards for Best Film, Best Director and Best Cinematography (Kristanto & Ardan, 2007). At the international level, *Gie* received a grant from the Hubert Bals Fund of the Rotterdam International Film Festival. It also won a Special Jury Award at the 2006 Asia Pacific Film Festival and a Special Jury Prize for Best Asian Feature Film at the 2006 Singapore International Film Festival. Critics praised the film, both for its historical representation, as well as for its artistic value. Most importantly, the film was widely celebrated for the part it played in the revival of Chinese themes and for featuring the story of a Chinese-Indonesian political hero.

Gie tells the story of a notable Chinese-Indonesian political activist and journalist, Soe Hok Gie, whose story was not widely known to Indonesian audiences before the film's release. The film was based on the diaries of the activist, which were published posthumously in 1983 as *Diary of A Demonstrator* (although this book did not become widely available until the overthrow of Suharto in 1998). The film follows the life of Soe Hok Gie (played by Nicholas Saputra) from 1942 to 1969. It is set against the backdrop of a turbulent period in Indonesian history. The film covers the post-war era and the political volatility under the administration of President, Sukarno, in which corruption, favouritism and inequality were rife. The story focuses on the political struggle of the student activist, Soe Hok Gie and his journalistic activities, political actions and participation in student demonstrations. Cinematically, *Gie* offers an impressive insight into the Jakarta of the 1950s and 1960s. Location shooting was carried out in the old town quarters of Semarang, Jogjakarta and Jakarta and captures the European colonial architecture of these vicinities (Sudiarno, 2004). The authenticity achieved through this location filming heightens the production values and enriches the

visual texture of the film. The faded Jakarta architecture seen in the exterior street scenes and the retro-décor interiors, along with detailed period costumes, constitute important visual elements of the film. As such, this film is a prime example of, what may be termed, the cinematic renaissance of Indonesian film that captured international attention in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The production of *Gie* was led by two of Indonesia's leading indigenous filmmakers, Riri Riza and Mira Lesmana. The duo teamed up under the production company Miles Film, established in 1995, to produce a series of popular children's films. Adopting various genres, these films were responsible for transforming and reviving filmmaking in Indonesian. Their work contributed significantly to the revitalisation of independent Indonesian filmmaking, with their co-directed, independent omnibus film *Kuldesak* (*Cul-de-sac*, 1999). Made with the assistance of Nan Achnas and Rizal Mantovani, this was one of the first of a new wave of Indonesian films to emerge. *Kuldesak*, which was filmed underground between 1996 and 1998, is a compilation of four short stories about the problems experienced by youth in Jakarta. It addresses what were, at the time of its production, taboo themes such as drug use and homosexuality.

In her capacity as a producer of *Gie*, Mira Lesmana also actively participated, along with the director and screenwriter, Riri Riza, in the adaptation of Soe Hok Gie's dairies. Her characterisation of Gie was inspired not only by the diaries, but also from her research and interviews with Soe Hok Gie's family and friends (Kusno, 2012). Lesmana focused on recreating and re-enacting the historical past, with an emphasis on aesthetic detail, while Riza concentrated on the process of dramatizing the story, in order to suit the screen. Inspired by the intellectual contributions of the young political activist, both Riza and Lesmana aimed the film at young audiences, with the intention

that the protagonist would serve as a role model for present-day Indonesian youth. The timing of the film's release was even coordinated to coincide with the school holiday period in July 2005 (Hari, 2005).

While *Gie* was intended primarily as a historical film that depicted the past with a high degree of realism, the filmmakers also exercised some artistic license. They experimented with the perspective from which this story was told and had to exclude certain material from the narrative. This affected how they chose to present the central Chinese-Indonesian character. As Kusno has observed, Riza chose to portray "a 'universal' Indonesian subject … [that] Indonesian viewers recognize[d] and [were able to] identity with' (2012, p. 138). This meant that the ethnic and cultural identity of the main character was downplayed, in favour of presenting Soe Hok Gie as a national hero. Riza remarked of the process: "We're not trying to reconstruct his life. [Instead] we're trying to deconstruct it. We will view him with contemporary eyes and hope that today's generation will be able to digest his message" (Sudiarno, 2004). Ariel Heryanto criticised Soe Hok Gie as being presented as a "morally pure, intellectually superior and politically ideal hero", and "…not someone ordinary Indonesians can easily meet or emulate […]" (Heryanto, 2008, p. 85). The recuperation of Chinese-Indonesian identity in cinema was also not the intention of the filmmakers.

While Riza strove to portray Soe Hok Gie as a national hero and downplayed his Chineseness, there were still elements in the film that pointed to his Chinese background and identity. These can be seen particularly in the film's depiction of family *guanxi*, which is emphasised via the cinematic language of the production. As part of this chapter's objective to recount the Chinese-Indonesian story, which re-emerged cinematically after the reform era, the next section attempts to analyse the hidden family *guannxi* and Chinese ethos embedded in this political epic. Aside from

examining these elements, the following section also intends to discuss the representation of the Chinese-Indonesian identity in the historical film.

The Portrayal of Chinese-Indonesians in *Gie*

Gie is featured in this chapter because of its characteristics as a Chinese-themed film, produced after the reform era. The indigenous production not only foregrounds a Chinese-Indonesian story that occurred in a significant period of Indonesian history, but it also highlights the biography of an Indonesian hero of Chinese descent. However, as previously discussed, the depiction of Chineseness in the film has been partly obscured, owing to the creative decision of the filmmaker to appeal to a wider Indonesian audience. Riza intended to represent the story of a young activist, so that this protagonist could be the model for young students in Indonesia (Ciecko, 2006, p. 96). As he mentioned in an interview, included as a special feature in the DVD of *Gie*, the way the Chinese character is interpreted, represents one of the many perspectives from which the story of the film can be told (*Gie*, 2005). The director has chosen to focus largely on Soe Hock Gie's political adventures, with far less treatment of his personal life.

The film begins with Soe's childhood, portraying him as a stubborn yet intellectual student at a Chinese-Indonesian school. He is always seen with his close friend, Tan Tjin Han, and other Chinese-Indonesian boys on the streets, watching street protests. Soe is the fourth child of Soe Li Piet (played by Robby Tumewu), an ex-writer for a Chinese Indonesian newspaper, who has lost his ability to write. His mother, Nio Hoei An (played by Tutie Kirana) is a housewife. Although his family is presented as not important to his intellectual and political development, the film also infers that a

sense of family *guanxi* has nurtured the young activist. In his adulthood, Soe maintained an idealist political view, often penning his ideas and sharing them with fellow university students. He also participated in the student demonstration that overthrew President Sukarno, at the peak of the nation's political disorder in 1965. Soe fell into a state of disillusionment, however, when the succeeding government was just as corrupt. In 1969, Soe died at the age of twenty-six at the peak of Mount Semeru due to lack of oxygen.

In the process of adapting Soe's diary, however, Riza unfortunately burdens the film with several under-developed subplots. As will be discussed, the friendship between Soe and Han (a character added by Riza), which develops as children, is not fully convincing. When the characters meet again, after an absence when Soe goes to live with his aunt, Han is a member of the Indonesian communist party. Likewise, the relationship between Soe and his parents is also problematic. Kusno claims that:

> …what has made *Gie* an important film is the effort it makes to recognise a Chinese-Indonesian as contributing to the narrative of national 'heroism.' However, the film is confronted with a social field in which the idea of the Chinese as national heroes is not something Indonesia seems completely ready for, even though Chinese Indonesian films are becoming a popular genre (2012, p.138).

Kusno's reading of *Gie* sheds light on the ethnic Chinese issue that continues to underscore the treatment of Chinese-Indonesians as 'Other.' Dinata, who grew up in the period of social unrest, when ethnic Chinese were being been victimised, is only too aware of the relational issues concerning the Chinese and the indigenous majority. But

Riza claims; "I'm a mainstream filmmaker; in a way I'm a conservative filmmaker, I like to touch on some edgy subjects … but basically I believe film is commercial […] [and we] need millions of rupiahs to make film" (Ciecko, 2006, p. 95). By aiming for a wider audience, the Chinese-Indonesian Soe Hok Gie, is re-imagined as a character that is, as Heryanto puts it, 'ideally Indonesian' (2008, p. 85).

The cinematic representation of Soe Hok Gie as a 'universal' national hero in *Gie* indicates that the interests of nationalism played a part in the telling of the story. To reimagine him, Riza downplays the importance of Chinese familial connection, by situating him in a family hindered by lack of communication. Beyond the family unit, his friendship with Han – Soe's only Chinese-Indonesian friend – is presented in fragments. Apart from being a cadre of the communist party - who is executed in the Bali massacre in 1965- Han is depicted only as part of Soe's memories and never as a character in his own right. In contrast, Soe is placed in a social circle that surrounds him with several indigenous comrades – Herman, Danny and Ira – who share his idealistic, political views and interest in mountain climbing. The way that Soe is portrayed - to fit the image of the national hero - conjures up Benedict Anderson's concept of "Imagined Communities" (2006). Marnie Hughes-Warrington recognises Anderson's work in her exploration of collective memory and nation in historical film (Hughes-Warrington, 2007, p. 81). She claims that collective memories and their relation to the nation are conserved through the cultivation of "a body of reusable texts, images and rituals specific to each society in each epoch" (2007, p. 81). In connecting her ideas to *Gie*, we can see that the notion of nation in the film is informed through the cultivation of the national image, by the reconfiguration of the Chinese political activist.

The portrayal of nationalism is observed at several moments throughout the film, particularly in scenes where a portrait of President Sukarno appears prominently,

such as in the Chinese stationery shop and university building. In the film, Soe walks into the Chinese-owned stationery shop, that he used to visit with Han during their childhood. The camera frames Soe in a mid close-up shot as he approaches the counter. He buzzes several times for the owner and then calls and knocks, but the owner does not respond. The camera then cuts to a shot of Soe from behind; before he turns, the shot gradually brings the photograph of Sukarno into frame, alongside Soe. As Soe turns to face the camera, the volume of Suharto's speech, that is heard when he initially walks into the shop, suddenly increases. By bringing Soe into parallel with the Sukarno portrait in the same frame, Riza seems to suggest that the young activist is the only person, who is able to challenge Sukarno's supremacy and authority. In the university building, the President's picture is shown only in a glimpse during a student senate debate, between a pro-Sukarno group and the opposing team represented by Soe and his friends. The depiction of the photo in both set-ups, where Soe is also present, suggests a spirit of nationalism, but one that is distanced from the patriotism of Sukarno. Instead, for Riza, who is profoundly influenced by the idealist view of the young national hero, the spirit of nationalism is instead associated with the programs of social equality and political transparency. Another example is the image of the Indonesian flag, which is small and seems insignificant in several scenes, and is not one that is being consciously waved with fervent passion, it is the flag unnoticed on the public building. Hughes-Warrington terms this as "banal nationalism" (2007, p. 81). This representation of nationalism, depicted from Soe's point-of-view, demonstrates that in the world of the film, patriotism can serve as an inspiration for activist movements. Besides, the "banal nationalism" presented in the film, *Gie* could also be seen as an illustration of Riza's imaginings of an ideal nation.

Mainstream film often presents history as the story of individuals. This, as Robert Rosenstone argues, "becomes a way of avoiding the often difficult or insoluble social problems pointed out by the film" (2001, p. 55). In *Gie*, the reconstruction of Soe's character has implications for his Chinese identity. For example, the film begins its first scene with a medium close-up of the teenage Soe reading a book, before cutting to an establishing shot showing him surrounded by his peers. While in the classroom, Soe is always distinguished by the camera, in a way that emphasises his intellectual standing among the other students. Moreover, by focusing on his political ventures, his ethnic origin is de-emphasised. This is as a filmic strategy employed by the filmmaker to represent the Chinese protagonist in this political film.

Riza carefully crafted the reconfiguration of the national hero through camerawork, the use of setting and the practice of voice-over. The integration of these elements in the film influences the interpretation of the Chinese protagonist's ethnic identity, by directing the viewers to his intellectualism and his self-purported 'humanist' values. To achieve this, the director constructs the scene of Soe's first dialogue in 1963, with his university mates, by placing him in the centre of the lecture hall, surrounded, by other students in a circular form. The mobile camerawork begins with a wide shot behind Soe and gradually shifts to a medium profile shot of him, while he is explaining the volatile political conditions of the country. Several shot-reverse-shots establish the reactions of his audience, before the camera returns to focus solely on Soe again. The fluid camerawork seems to evoke the volatile political scenario discussed by Soe. The scene ends with a front medium, static shot of Soe, but his discussion persists in the form of a non-diegetic voice-over, that assist in the transition to the next scene, where we see him writing. This filmic strategy, that aims to distinguish Soe through the

composition of the *mise en scène* and camera work, serves to accentuate his intellectualism and align it with his political views.

In another scene, Soe's recites his political manifesto via voice-over, while a montage sequence emphasises his political and intellectual undertakings. The montage is also accompanied by instrumental music and includes images of Soe working at his typewriter, a close-up of him reading intensely, the printing and distributing of his written material, as well as scenes of students and the public reading his work. Soe's voice-over is a powerful device employed by Riza, and it aids in his portrayal as a national hero, rendering his ethnic Chinese identity less significant. Viewers are drawn to his personal, cerebral qualities, rather than his ethnic difference. Through the camera work, the film also emphasises his humanist values, with point-of-view shots inviting the viewer to share in Soe's perspective. A good example of this, is a scene in which Soe is walking home after a bus ride. His gaze turns to a lower-class citizen on the street. From his point-of-view, we see an elderly, fragile-looking man, in a sarong, walk past him and Soe's eyes follow. Walking behind the old man is a long line of elderly women, men and children. Soe's point-of-view occasionally falls on the young children and old women, while his melancholic voice-over ruminates on history and the realities of oppression. From these point-of-view shots, viewers are able to identify with Soe's anguish and disappointment in the corrupt government. Such filmic techniques, such as point-of-view and voice-over, invite viewers to witness the scene through Soe's eyes and to participate in his internal monologue. Viewers are thus expected to identify with his concern regarding the socio-political governance of the nation and experience of ordinary citizens.

Although the reworking of Soe's identity turned *Gie* into a commercial hit in Indonesia, the film's success also owed much to the performance of its local star –

Nicholas Saputra, who is not of Chinese descent. As Gloria Arlini notes; "the commercial success of *Gie* relied upon the casting of Indonesian heartthrob, Nicholas Saputra … (Saputra is Eurasian, not of Chinese descent, and the latest edition of [the journal] *Catatan* prominently features Saputra on its front cover…)" (2008, p. 3). In her discussion of *Gie* Arlini compares the film with Soe's written journal and observes some generous allusions to Chineseness that appear in the film. She asserts that the use of colour – in particular the appearance of red on the poster and DVD cover of *Gie* - signifies the "heroic nationalism in Indonesian" and notes that this is also "a colour strongly associated with the Chinese community" (2008, p. 15). Her underscoring of Chineseness in *Gie* does not alter the fact that the film attempts to reconfigure the Chinese political activist as a national hero.

The Obscured Family *Guanxi* in *Gie* and the Representation of a Chinese Ethos

In *Gie*, Riza presents cultural elements selectively, making a Chinese-themed film without an overt display of Chinese culture. However, it might be unfair to claim that the film does not depict a Chinese ethos in any of its content. We do see the incorporation of some Chinese faces, such as Soe's childhood friend, Han. Arlini has also observed the use of the colour red on the film's promotional material, which is seen as a sign of "acceptance" and "appreciation" of the Chinese community (2008, p. 15). Nevertheless, the representation of Chinese culture in *Gie* is more complex than the connotations suggested by colour. As Kusno writes, *"Gie* remains in the problematic of the national culture, which tolerates the moral, Chinese but not the political Chinese." (2001, p. 139) This is the reason Chinese representation in *Gie* is depicted in a state of obscurity. Riza undertakes a personal approach to overcome the perplexing issue

through the expression of 'unspoken' enmity between Soe and members of his family (2001, p. 138) .The director has also chosen to depict Chinese culture through a character that has a less significant role in the film, that is, Soe Li Piet (Soe's father) as a way of concealing Chineseness.

Gie opens with a scene of Soe's family, which indicates that there are various familial tensions at play. The voice of the mother, who is performing house chores, is heard off-screen, while the father is seen quietly attending to his pet dogs. The young Soe observes his parents from a distance and gradually turns to his brother, Soe Hok Tjin, with a hostile look, while his two elder sisters are heard off-screen. In several scenes, the film shows the animosity between the two brothers, caused by a difference of opinion during their early boyhood. Soe confronts his brother for the first time to protect his friend, Han, who had escaped from his domineering aunt, to their house. Enmity between the two brothers is also represented in the film when we see them taking opposite directions to school, in a well-planned sequence of shots. The scene begins with an interior mid-shot, showing the two brothers walking out of the house in school uniform. They both stop in front of the house, before looking sharply at each other, an exchange that is captured in a medium close-up. The scene concludes with a shot, captured from within the house, showing them taking different directions to school. In his examination of this scene, Kusno concludes that "[w]e get a sense that Gie, unlike his 'academic' brother, prefers a different route, one that is close to the street" (2011, p.140). This opening shot, taken from inside the house, implies the absence of family values and the breakdown of family *guanxi* between the brothers. In their adulthood, however, it is the connection of family *guanxi* that allows them to reconcile, and the film shows them joined in a family gathering, eating mango together and engaging in conversation.

The presence of Soe's mother, on the other hand, is less significant, as she only heard in an off-screen voice. But her task in sustaining the family and supporting Soe's education is crucial, especially when the father is unwaged and pays no attention to family matters. Despite her invisible role, his mother attends to Soe's education. On many occasions in the film, the mother is heard making plans for the family. She arranges for the purchase of a sewing machine and works at home, as a tailor to support the family. She also makes Soe's meals. While she is criticised by Kusno for being unable to identify with "her sons' activities, especially, those outside the home", her contribution to the family is of particular importance in sustaining the family and nurturing the young intellectuals (2011, p. 139). While family values appear to be less significant in this Chinese family, the mother plays an important role to keep the family *guanxi* connected through the contribution of her domestic and financial responsibilities. This family *guanxi* is hidden by the lack of communication among family members, however, it is still maintained by the mother, who heads the family and who is often expected to take care of the entire family.

In the film, Soe's father is portrayed as a writer for the Chinese press, however, he has lost his capacity to write. His inability to work has caused him to become withdrawn and lost "in what seems to be an alienated world of post-Independence Indonesia" (Kusno, 2011, p. 139). He spends most of his time at home, attending to his pets and making attempts to psychologically restore his interest in writing. The only time he is seen out of the house is when he purchases a pair of goldfish from a street vendor. The scene is witnessed by the young Soe from across the street. The interconnection of the two shots suggests a tie of family *guanxi,* that allows the bond between the father and son to be sustained. The camera makes a cut back to the father observing the fish, and is followed by a close-up of two goldfish, being released from

the palm of an adult's hand into the water. This scene is connected with a shot of a journal in a rubbish basket and an upward tilting shot of Soe, as he picks up the same journal. If the goldfish, a sign of prosperity, success and wisdom, represent the once successful writing career of the father and his hopes for its restoration, Soe's act of picking up his father's journal symbolises inheritance. It serves to foreshadow his future profession as a writer, which sees him carrying on the family tradition. This scene may therefore be read as an act of filial piety to his father, by continuing on with the profession that his father can no longer practice.

As much as these signs of Chineseness are buried, they do foreshadow the eventual recovery of the father's capacity to write. At the conclusion of the film Soe is asleep on the table, over the books he was reading, while his father sits by the table gazing at him with an expression of distress. When Soe wakes up to see his father by his side, he utters, emotionally: "I've always wanted to tell you … I became a writer because I'm the son of a writer… your example gave me the confidence to become one … this journal of mine…it was once yours." Although the father continues to be non-communicative in this scene, the monologue indicates that he is able to reclaim his writing ability. Towards the end of *Gie*, the film includes an image of clear blue sky, before again showing a pair of goldfish swimming off vigorously from a pair of hands. We then hear an off-screen conversation between the father and a Chinese press editor, which indicates the father's recovery. Riza creatively integrates the subtle signs of Chinese culture into the visual text of this political tale. Family *guanxi* then is shown to be fundamental to nurturing the young activist and is clearly presented as the inspiration for his writing. However, according to Kusno, this theme, is presented in a highly obscured and fragmentary way, and is almost "… irrelevant to the development of [Soe's] political consciousness" (2011, p. 140).

As an historical filmmaker, Riza is obviously highly selective in terms of what he decides to include and exclude from the story. Aside from these very subtle allusions to Chinese customs and practices, he has managed to de-emphasize Soe's Chinese ethnicity in such a way that casts him as an Indonesian hero. This is further reinforced by the casting of a popular Indonesian actor in the title role. In a similar manner to the stereotypical treatment of Chinese characters in *Ca-bau-kan*, *Gie* represents a highly tentative, even shadowy, return of Chinese-Indonesian stories to Indonesian screens after such a long absence. This, in turn, suggests that in the decade following the *reformasi,* and the evolution of a more open political arena, Indonesian representations of Chineseness, in connection to the nation's economic and political history, remained highly limited and circumspect. The next film - *The Photograph* (2007) - however, displays a more open depiction of Chineseness and the practice of Chinese traditional culture is the core of the story.

***The Photograph* (2007)**

Following *Gie* (2005), Chinese-Indonesian stories continued to appear in the resurgent, independent Indonesian film industry. Two years after Riri Riza's biographical epic, *Gie*, the industry celebrated the release of another Chinese-themed film made by an indigenous Indonesian filmmaker. *The Photograph* (2007), written and directed by another female director, Nan Achnas, tells the story of an ailing Chinese photographer and his encounter with a young Indonesian lounge singer. The film, described as, an "art-house movie with an accessible story" was an Indonesian/French co-production and also received financial support from the International Film Festival Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund (Iwan, 2007). As part of The Global Film Initiative project, *The Photograph,*

was the fourth feature directed by Nan Achnas. Her previous films included *Kuldesak* (1997), an independently produced omnibus film; *Whispering Sand* (2000), the FIPRESCI award-winning feature and *The Flag* (2002). Armed with US $400,000 - eighty per cent of which came from foreign investment - *The Photograph* was shot in central Semarang. It starred the Chinese-Singaporean actor, Lim Kay Tong, who played the central role of the aging Chinese photographer, named Johan Tanujaya (Kidd, 2007).

Nan Achnas, who trained as a producer, dedicated a significant amount of time to the preproduction process of the film. From concept development to distribution, the process took a period of four years. Within this time she was challenged with the task of casting an appropriate lead male to play the role of the Chinese photographer, Johan. Achnas noted that there had been no Chinese-Indonesian characters created for Indonesian films over the previous three decades, due to the extensive suppression of the ethnic Chinese. As a result, most actors available in Indonesia, were not appropriate for the role or did not have sufficient acting training (personal communication, 2013).[20] The only notable Indonesian film that featured ethnic Chinese actors in the New Order period was *Putri Giok* (*The Jade Princess*, 1980), a film about inter-ethnic relationships between young Chinese-Indonesians and native Indonesians. Nevertheless, the story of the film modulated the representation of ethnic Chinese identity by centralising national culture. As Karl Heider has noted, "the couple [in the film] are reunited in the spirit of *Pancasila*, the Five Principles of the Republic, and everyone is uplifted in patriotic fervour". (1991, p. 73). In the current reform era, Chinese stories are no longer so restricted in Indonesian productions; however, the paucity of trained Chinese actors remains an issue. In order to obtain an appropriate actor, who could portray the genuine

[20] Personal interview with Nan Achnas conducted in August 2013 during my fieldwork in Jakarta.

characteristics of a traditional Chinese man, Achnas opted for the Chinese-Singaporean actor.

The director's interpretation of the old Chinese photographer, Johan, and the rich cultural undercurrents depicted in *The Photograph*, was to a great extent influenced by Achnas' experience of growing up in both multi-cultural Singapore and Malaysia. Achnas' explanation, that "she was brought up to be colour blind about race and religion" and her experience of socialising with Chinese schoolmates (when she attended a convent school in Malaysia), provides the basis for her knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture. Recognising the differential treatment of ethnic Chinese in both Indonesia and Malaysia, Achnas was motivated to make a film that would envisage a new form of representation for ethnic minorities, such as the Chinese in Indonesia. In this sense, the film is also somewhat didactic in its approach, owing to Achans' attempt to advocate for the expression of cultural difference in Indonesia, where those differences have for so long been suppressed.

Set in the contemporary era, the story of *The Photograph* centres on an enigmatic, elderly Chinese photographer, Johan, who has preserved his memories of the past through a number of photographs. Leading a traditional lifestyle, the old photographer practices Chinese ritual prayers for his ancestors, as well as for his deceased wife and son. The presence of Sita (played by Shanty Paredes), an indigenous Indonesian woman, who moves into the attic room of Johan's photo shop, helps him to cope with his troubling past. The connection between the two allows for the development of an intercultural familial *guanxi*. Through a close reading of the film, this section will discuss the intercultural bond between the two protagonists. The discussion also identifies the inscription of cultural assimilation in some of the photographs featured in the film. Ultimately, this section argues that the film envisages

and promotes a form of reconciliation between ethnic Indonesians and Chinese-Indonesians, based on the development of a quasi-familial *guanxi*.

The Photograph and the Inscription of Chinese-Indonesian Stories

The story of *The Photograph* opens with a tracking shot, bringing us into Johan's photo studio, in which we observe many old photographs mounted on the wall. The camera then pans across a series of photographs in a tighter shot. We begin to understand that the individuals captured within the images are Johan's ancestors. Each photograph is printed with their names in both Chinese and Indonesian characters, together with the years of their lifespan, indicating their family *guanxi*. While the photographs represent the presence of his family history, they also constitute a part of his memory that reflects his life story and cultural identity. As we see his hand slowly moving across the photographs, the film establishes a link to this nostalgic past. The memories that emanate from the photographs serve to remind Johan of where he came from, whom he is and what he needs to do for the family before he takes his last breath. Johan then puts up a mirror to reflect his own image, next to the ancestors' photographs, a sign of his own mortality and imminent end.

This opening sequence, apart from providing a brief introduction to the history of the Chinese family, represents a gesture by the filmmaker to emphasise the cultural identity of the central character. Through the photographs of his ancestors, the film is able to trace the development of cultural assimilation in the country, underscoring the unique identity and experiences of Chinese-Indonesians. In order to understand the significance of the photographs, it is helpful to draw upon Jen Ruchatz's interpretation of the function of photograph as a "trace". Ruchatz claims "… a photograph refers to

the past […] as a trace", thus "[m]aking sense of a photograph as a trace means to take it as evidence of what is shown on it and to reconstruct the situation of its origin" (Ruchatz, 2008, p. 369). Ruchatz's understanding of the photograph as a trace may be applied to several photographs of Johan's ancestors, which depicts them posing next to a camera. These photographs serve to emphasise the familial bond, constituted by the photography business that has been passed down to Johan by a long succession of his ancestors. The central problem of this story, therefore, is that Johan has no living descendants of his own and thus can't bestow the business onto his relatives when his life comes to an end. Importantly, however, his son, who died as a young boy, is preserved as a trace in one of these treasured photographs. The trace of the ancestors' photographs provides evidence of heredity in the Chinese family, as well as functioning as a significant sign of Chineseness. The Chinese character used to represent their names and the tradition of business inheritance are also important cultural markers.

In contrast to *Gie*, *The Photograph* is a film that depicts overt signs of Chineseness. As previously discussed, we regularly see Johan offering ritual prayers to his ancestors and to his deceased wife and son. The old photographer, who runs an archaic photo studio and occasionally practices mobile photography, lives alone, in a mixed Chinese and indigenous area in Semarang. Now in failing health, Johan is desperately searching for a successor for the family-owned photo studio. At this time, he is also preoccupied by three mysterious photographs that cause him sorrowfulness. When Sita (who also works as a part-time prostitute) moves into the attic room to escape her overbearing pimp, she offers to do the cleaning at Johan's photo studio. Sita also assists Johan in searching for an apprentice for his photography business. When they cannot find one, Sita offers herself to be the apprentice but she is dismissed because Johan insists on a male successor. However, when it is clear that they will fail

to find an appropriate trainee, Sita becomes Johan's assistant although she is forbidden to operate the camera. As their relationship grows, a form of non-blood link, family *guanxi* develops between them.

The life story of Johan is represented as closely interwoven with three prominent photographs, that are fundamental to the dramatic arc of the story. These photographs reveal Johan's diasporic identity and the fact that a railway accident caused the death of his wife and son. Most importantly, these photographs evidence the guilt he feels about losing his son, and thus the only male heir to the photo studio. The film exhibits these photographs – a perspective of railway tracks, a wharf and an old camera – at the beginning of the film, in a scene in which Johan in praying, to establish their connection to his life story. In this scene, Johan displays the old monochrome photographs on the ancestor altar, while he offers prayers with joss sticks. He explains mournfully: "Today… I will start dying". His expression suggests a correlation between his memories of the past, as inscribed in the photographs, and his life in the present. As the story develops, we learn that the photograph of the wharf represents evidence of his arrival from China to Indonesia, and too of his hopes to revisit the wharf before he dies. The photograph of the railway tracks represents the location of the railway accident that killed his wife and son. This traumatic incident causes him to live a life of self-reproach, and he repeatedly revisits the track to perform a ritual prayer. Lastly, the photograph of the old camera, represents his hopes and familial obligation to find a male successor for the family photo shop. These photographs respectively form a series of narrative elements that tie the Chinese character to his diasporic background, as well as evoking his family obligations and his traumatic past.

As much as *The Photograph* is aimed at recounting a Chinese-Indonesian story, the filmmaker also intended the film to be a product of cultural diversity. In her attempt

to depict a multicultural society, the intercultural bond between Johan and Sita is centralised. Sita is intrigued by Johan's act of performing ritual prayer at the railway tracks, when she walks into the scene, unobserved by Johan. When Johan has left the scene, she kicks off the burning flame at the prayer site and bites into an apple she picks up from the offering. These acts may be seen as her initial lack of respect towards the other religions. But when Sita escapes from a gang rape, orchestrated by several unknown men, she runs to the railway track, where she met Johan and he assists her to get away. This incident becomes the turning point in their relationship, as Sita begins to understand, not only the meaning of the prayer at the tracks, but also the significant loss experienced by Johan.

For Johan, losing kinship connection at the railway track means losing a heir for the family business. The incident, inscribed in the photograph of the railway tracks, contains details that provoke his memory, each time he looks at it. In his grief, he has been continually performing ritual prayer at the tracks. The details in the photograph that disturb Johan, remind us of Barthes's notion of the *punctum,* in which the detail of the image "shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [one]" (1993, p. 26). Barthes explains, "a photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (1993, p. 27). The *punctum* in the photograph then interrupts its study with a sting. The photograph of the railway tracks causes this very effect on Johan, a significant disturbance that triggers intense feelings of grief and distress.

These personal feelings that Johan experiences are certainly beyond the understanding of Sita, who is from a different ethnic and familial background. However, as she gradually discovers the significance of the loss, both in terms of his family members and of a male heir, through the bond she develops with Johan. Sita eventually even becomes the one to take over the task of prayer at the tracks when

Johan is ill. Later, Sita is shown at the railway tracks in a tight close-up as she faces the camera in deep emotion – mourning for Johan's dead, while the joss sticks burn in front of her. When the camera cuts to a wider shot, we see Sita place the joss sticks on the tracks before walking off. The scene signifies an act of tolerance and acceptance of the religion of another race, that stems from the development of the bond between Johan and Sita. The performance of this cultural rite, aside from suggesting the mending of the broader socio-cultural gap, allows Sita to be seen as a part of the Chinese family, as traditionally only kinsfolk perform prayers for the departed family members.

The Photograph as the Recollection of Homeland Memories

The trust established between Johan and Sita, allows the traditional Chinese photographer to share his memories of his homeland. As an immigrant from China, Johan preserves many of his recollections through the medium of photography. The photographs of his ancestors, for example, are a key symbol of his ethnic identity and cultural roots. One photograph, however, that is crucial in his recollection of homeland memories, is the image of the harbour. It represents the memory of his homeland, by reminding him of the location where he first arrived in Indonesia. As previously noted, Johan longs to revisit the harbour before the end of his life. As a result of his poor health, he has been unable to fulfil this dream, until Sita comes into his life and develops a 'kinship-like' relationship to him. Sita's presence not only facilitates Johan's visit to the harbour, but the bond between them allows Johan to recall his memory of homeland to her, and thus narrate these key biographical moments to a 'kin'.

The crucial scene occurs when Johan and Sita arrive by train to the harbour. As they enter, Johan approaches the harbour with feelings of nostalgia. The film captures

them siting together at the harbour, facing the sea, as a vessel sails across the frame in a horizontal line. The panoramic vista evokes Johan's memories of the past as he explains: "Ships from China arrived here. I remember I almost fell off from the vessel when getting off. Since childhood I have always wanted to travel far, back to China from here [sic]." Sita swiftly replies "You can still do it, I can help you." Her utterance, just for a moment, allows Johan to fantasise about an imagined return to his homeland, China. Although Johan has been imagining this return to the motherland since a young age, unfortunately his fantasy has never been fulfilled. To explain both Johan's imagined homeland return and his nostalgic visit to the harbour, it is useful to refer to Safran's insights on Southeast Asian and Chinese homeland myths. He writes:

> … the homeland myth–and with it, diaspora consciousness - has been attenuated in several locations, but for opposite reasons: where legal and political disabilities have been removed and economic opportunities have expanded, so that the knowledge of the Chinese language and the connection with Chinese culture have become weak […] and where the Chinese community has become so dominant that it has been able to secure an institutionally guaranteed status for its culture – in effect, to recreate a Chinese community outside the original homeland (Safran, 1991, p. 89)

The myth of homeland, as described by Safran, is also observed in Johan's homeland imaginary. Although Johan is able to return to his homeland in the present-day, perhaps he would prefer to maintain the idealised homeland myth and thus not actually return to a 'home' that no longer exists. This is because as a long-term migrant to Indonesia, where his family-owned photography business has been long established in the

archipelago, and most of his patrons are from the local communities, he is no longer closely affiliated to his homeland: it remains a distant, if not idealised, memory; a myth. Moreover, due to the cultural assimilation he and his ancestors have experienced, he has lost his knowledge of the Chinese language, instead he speaks Indonesian. He has also adopted an Indonesian name, mostly likely as a result of the name change laws. As the practice of Chineseness is no longer restricted in Indonesia, he is now able to safely practice aspects of Chinese culture, as depicted in the film. The trip to the harbour enables him to achieve a sense of eternal homeland return, through reciting the experience of his diasporic journey and his imagined homeland. The film shows Johan, with a delighted expression, enjoying an Indonesian pastry on the train ride home from the harbour – a sign of contentment and relief at having achieved this imagined return. Sita attends to him and takes care of him like kin throughout the trip. When Johan falls asleep on the train, Sita moves closer, to allow him to lean on her shoulder; an image of familial companionship and one that emblematises the objective of the film.

Quasi-Familial *Guanxi*

From the representation of Chineseness to the depiction of intercultural bonds, *The Photograph,* also reveals the practice of certain Chinese traditional customs. This is evidenced, for example, by Johan's insistence that he find a male heir for his photography business before he dies. This practice is common in Chinese family-owned businesses. Customarily, a male heir in the family is preferred, as he carries the surname of the family, whereas a female may be considered inauspicious for the family. The film shows Johan upholding this tradition, by forbidding Sita from even operating the camera in his studio. As Johan's health is deteriorating and the search for a successor is

unsuccessful, he takes out a garment from a box, underneath the ancestor's altar, with the help of Sita. As he puts the garment on in the studio, Sita intends to take a photograph of him. However, as she approaches the camera and is about to capture the portrait, Johan turns to her and shouts, "No, you must not take a picture of me, it is bad luck! Only my successor can take my picture, nobody else." Sita, who is stunned by his proclamation, replies, "There is nobody else." Deeply hurt, she then leaves the studio. Johan's perseverance with this tradition evokes the logic of "kinship and heredity", an expression which borrows from Ien Ang (1998, p. 239). These notions imply a sense of belonging and family unity, bound by the heredity of people descended from the same family and carrying the same surname. These concepts are also seen as a mode of self-identification, that is applicable to diasporic communities. Rey Chow explains it as the "myth of consanguinity" (Chow, 1993, p. 24). This myth, as Ang elaborates, "provides […] a magical solution to the sense of dislocation and rootlessness that many [diasporic Chinese] experience in their lives." (1993, p. 239). The insistence on a male heir in the Chinese-owned family business can be see as a way to preserve Chineseness. But, for Johan, whose family heredity ended when his son was killed in the railway accident, this is not possible. The film then suggests a resolution for this dilemma, which is that Johan may be succeeded by a quasi-familial kin and that family ties may be forged across ethnic lines.

Through several visual clues the filmmaker infers how the Chinese-owned photo shop might be transferable to Sita. This is indicated in a sequence of scenes, when Johan makes a routine trip to the railway tracks for his ritual prayers, before commencing his mobile photography business in a town nearby. Sita assists him with this routine, due to his failing health. At the railway tracks, the visual composition of the scene allows Sita to be seen as a potential 'heir' for the Chinese photography

business. The scene is shot using a shallow focus, showing Johan in the background performing the routine prayer, while Sita occupies the foreground of the left frame. Standing against Johan's bicycle, while waiting for him, Sita's posture, with one of her arms pressed against the business sign board on the bicycle, implies that she is in control of the business and entrusted by Johan, who is guiding her from the background. The following shot shows Johan clutching his business signboard, while walking behind Sita, who is hauling the bicycle. He then walks faster to catch up with Sita and transfers the signboard to her. As she receives the signboard, Johan immediately hauls the bicycle and they walk together into the town. The act of transferring the business signboard from Johan to Sita, strongly represents the transferring of his photography business to her. These scenes create a sense that the family-owned business will be succeeded by Sita, who is linked to Johan through a non-blood link familial *guanxi* or quasi-familial *guanxi*.

This quasi-familial *guanxi* between Johan and Sita is fully established before the ailing Chinese photographer passes away. Sita, who has been forbidden from operating the camera, begins assisting Johan in the business by selling photo-frames when his health deteriorates. She takes care of his meals and visits the railway track to ensure that the offerings for the prayer are in place. One night, when Johan knows that he is dying, he slowly moves out of bed to go to the photography studio. Sita, startled by the sound, is woken from her sleep and also rushes to the studio. As she walks into the studio, Johan has already dressed up in the outfit he had stored under the ancestor altar. As he sees Sita, he signals for her to approach the camera that has been set up in front of him. Johan then sits weakly on a chair next to an archaic camera and in a vulnerable tone requests: "Sita, can you please take a photograph of me?". The request seems to point to Johan's final acceptance of Sita, as the successor of the photography studio. Sita is

disconcerted by his request but acts accordingly. As she prepares for the shot, Johan takes his last breath. As she looks up at him, she bursts into tears and takes the photograph. She then decides to take another photograph of Johan, this time with her standing beside him – a family portrait. This photograph inscribes the mutual acceptance of a quasi-familial *guanxi* between Johan and Sita. The quasi-familial *guanxi* is not based on blood-link kinship or heredity; instead it is forged through the kindness and acceptance of two human beings, of different ethnic backgrounds. With an ending that suggests a quasi-familial *guanxi*, the film becomes a model of cultural diversity in Indonesian cinema.

Through an examination of the Chinese characters in the three Chinese-themed films, *Ca-bau-kan*, *Gie* and *The Photograph*, we can see how Chinese-Indonesian characters have been represented in contemporary independent Indonesian cinema. A point of continuity between the films is that they tend to revolve around the themes of familial and non-familial *guanxi*. Both types of *guanxi* have been presented as the fundamental foundation, for the cultural representation of the Chinese characters in the films. Nonetheless, the Chinese-Indonesian identity of the characters in the films, like *Ca-bau-kan* and *Gie,* has to a great extent been de-emphasised, despite their historical contribution to the economic and political development of the country. One film that attempts to restore a richer understanding of Chinese-Indonesian identity to Indonesian screens is *The Photograph*. The depiction of Chineseness, amidst a multicultural society, is illustrated via the inclusion of various traditions and practices. The bond between the two main characters, Johan and Sita, not only exemplifies a quasi-familial *guanxi*, but to some degree, also demonstrates how the paradigm of family *guanxi* needs to be extended to include intercultural bonds.

Chapter Three

Fragmentation and Displacement: Edwin's Accented Film Practice

The last chapter discussed how the reemergence of Chinese themed films in the post-*reformasi* period pointed to the diversity of the Chinese community in the Indonesian nation-state. However, it was also demonstrated that the representations of Chinese Indonesians by Indonesian filmmakers has been largely formulaic and stereotypical, especially in the films *Ca-bau-kan* (2002) and *Gie* (2005). Such films, including to some extent, *The Photograph* (2007), share the common strategy of showing Chinese characters to be closely affiliated with Indonesian culture, depicting them first and foremost as Indonesian citizens. While the films made a significant contribution to recuperating Chinese Indonesian characters and stories on screen, they were still shaped by the legacy of assimilationist policies on ethnic minorities. The Chinese Indonesian independent filmmaker, Edwin, is perhaps one of the most prominent directors to emerge in the post-*reformasi* era. His films rarely address Chinese themes directly; instead they are inflected by a more subtle treatment of the ideas of hybridity, displacement, alienation and the shifting role of family in contemporary Indonesian society.

This chapter will look closely at Edwin's early filmmaking career, the development of his unique cinematic style and some of his recurrent themes. It will argue that Edwin's films are deeply informed by his personal biography as a Chinese Indonesian, but that this ethnic background appears indirectly, producing an 'accented' form of filmmaking (Naficy 2001). It will be argued that Edwin brings his own experiences of hybridity and 'in-betweenness' to bear on his filmmaking practice to produce more complex representations of Indonesian society. This chapter also seeks to

trace Edwin's development as a filmmaker, from his early short films - that helped pave the way for his controversial debut feature, *The Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) - to his more subtle and poetic second production, *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012), that will be further discussed in Chapter Five. This chapter attempts to explore the sense of fragmentation and displacement that is first evident in Edwin's early short films and that becomes a defining aspect of his feature films. This emphasis on dislocation and alienation arguably relates closely to his experience of growing up Chinese in Indonesia during the New Order period. According to Gaik Cheng Khoo, historical and socio-political contexts are crucial to understanding the specific diasporic condition of Chinese South East Asian filmmakers, as the complexity of their ethnic backgrounds deeply influence their filmmaking practice (2009, p. 69). In relation to Edwin, this chapter will argue that his upbringing in the socio-political context of the Suharto era, together with his membership of the archipelago's long-standing Chinese diasporic community, has contributed to his development as an 'accented' filmmaker. More specifically, it will demonstrate how Edwin works, in what Hamid Naficy calls, an 'interstitial mode of production', a key condition of accented filmmaking.

This chapter will begin with a brief summary of Edwin's biography as a filmmaker before turning to look more closely at the themes and aesthetics of his short films. The subsequent chapters will provide a close analysis of his two feature films in order to demonstrate how these tropes develop, from being experimental and amateurish, into a subtly inflected accented mode that culminates in his second feature, *Postcards from the Zoo*.

Edwin's Biography: Identity and Self-Inscription

Edwin was born in 1978 in Surabaya, East Java, to a Chinese Indonesian family. He has since established himself as one of the leading Indonesian independent filmmakers, working within the new wave mode. Edwin has focused his career on stylistic and visual experimentation, "testing boundaries as the country figures out just how liberated it wants to be since a dictatorship dissolved in 1998" (Sharkey, 2012). While Edwin came of age and commenced his filmmaking career in the period immediately after the fall of the Suharto regime, his early life was spent under the shadow of the dictatorship and the harsh policies imposed on ethnic minorities.

Edwin has recalled his family's experiences of discriminatory policies against Indonesians of ethnic Chinese background during the New Order period. He did not speak openly, however, about such marginalization until several years after the *reformasi* (Edwin, 2006). During the peak period of ethnic Chinese discrimination in Indonesia in the early 1990s, his father attempted to hide the family's Chinese identity. His sister, who according to Edwin, had more prominent Chinese features, would hide in the house whenever they had Indonesian visitors, but Edwin himself avoided much of the discrimination due to his darker complexion. Like many other Chinese Indonesians, Edwin and his family unconsciously hid their ethnic identity to protect their personal security. It is likely that the single name, Edwin, used since a young age, may have also been a strategy employed by his parents to hide his Chinese identity. As discussed in Chapter One, the Suharto government imposed a name change policy during the New Order era. Chinese Indonesians were forced to change their names to an Indonesian-sounding name in order to secure their citizenship. However, Edwin has never publicly linked the single name he uses to the official Indonesian name change policy or other

security reasons. In an interview with Betsy Sharkey (2002), Edwin explained that "he's been Edwin since his birth in Surabaya in East Java", pulling out driver's license and credit cards to prove it.

At the age of nineteen Edwin embarked on his university studies that would indirectly lead him to a career in filmmaking. Interested in animation, Edwin signed up to study graphic design at Universitas Kristen Petra in Surabaya in 1997. This was the closest discipline to animation that he could engage with at the time. Edwin had grown up watching Hollywood films, Kungfu films, *Voltus V* and *Megaloman*, like many other Indonesian youth and was often fascinated by the visual dimensions of films and the various animation techniques (Galatio, 2014). In his second year of graphic design, he was exposed to the film, *Daun di Atas Bantal* (*Leaf on a Pillow*, 1998), made by the prolific Indonesian independent filmmaker, Garin Nugroho. It was through a televised interview with Garin Nugroho that Edwin learnt of a film school at the Jakarta Arts Institute (Institut Kesenian Jakarta, IKJ) from which Nurgroho had graduated in 1985. Edwin's recounted, "The day after I watched him [Nugroho] speak, I bought a ticket and went to Jakarta to check out IKJ." After that short visit, Edwin decided to pursue his studies there (Galatio, 2014) and following the completion of his diploma in graphic design, Edwin registered at IKJ in 1999.

Most of Edwin's short films were made when he was a student at IKJ. However, in 2005 the filmmaker dropped out of film school after failing to submit his thesis on time. According to Edwin, the thesis document was lost when he attended the Berlinale Talent Campus in Berlin (Edwin, 2006). Whilst the training at IKJ can be seen as a crucial development in his filmmaking career, attending IKJ also introduced him to a 'family' of film crew that he has continued to work with throughout his career. As we

will observe later in this chapter, this community of crewmembers contributes significantly to Edwin's accented film practice.

Aside from his formal education, Edwin also benefited from various initiatives designed to support young filmmakers. In 2005 he participated in the Asian Film Academy, organized by the Pusan Film Festival. The training at the Berlinale Talent Campus and Asian Film Academy exposed the young filmmaker to several prominent European and Asian filmmakers. These included Wim Wenders (Germany), Walter Salles (Brazil), Christopher Doyle (Hong Kong), Lee Chang-Dong (South Korea) and Hou Hsiao-Hsien (Taiwan).[21] These training events significantly developed Edwin's filmmaking skills and inspired him to embark on his first full-length feature film. Indeed, Edwin considers the *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) as the beginning of his commitment to filmmaking (Galatio, 2014).

Edwin made several short films during his four years at film school, and in the years following. These received numerous international and domestic awards, and established him as a prominent, young Southeast Asian filmmaker. In 2002, his short film *A Very Slow Breakfast* - made during school break with his friends - opened the door to a filmmaking career. The film, which explores the loss of family values within modern society, was screened at least ten different international film festivals, including the Jakarta International Film Festival in 2003, the 7th Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival in 2003, the 9th Pusan International Film Festival in 2004 and the 30th Clermont Ferrand International Short Film Festival in 2007. After the making of *A Very Slow Breakfast* (which focused predominantly on contemporary issues), Edwin embarked on an experimental film based on a legendary folk tale. This seven-minute short, *Dajang Soembi: The Woman Who Was Married To A Dog* (2005), is a black-and-

[21] This information is publised as part of the press release kit of the film *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* and is available on the website: www.babibutafilm.com

white silent film that explores myths and social taboos via the folk tale of a princess. Like *A Very Slow Breakfast, Dajang Soembi* had a successful run at local and international film festivals. In 2004 it won 2nd Prize in the Short Film Competition at the Jakarta International Film Festival and was selected to screen at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in 2005, as part of the SEA Eyes program (a special section devoted to independent and new cinema in Southeast Asia). In the same year, Edwin directed *Kara: Daughter of A Tree* (2005), a film that critiques transnational capitalism and media. Written by Edwin, the film was the first Indonesian short film to be invited to screen at the Director's Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival. It was also screened at the 10th Pusan International Film Festival in South Korea in 2005 and was awarded the Best Short Film at the Film Festival Indonesia (FFI) in 2005. Edwin then continued his filmmaking career with the nine- minute short, *A Very Boring Conversation,* in 2006. This film tells the story of the relationship between a younger man and an older woman purely through the device of a simple dialogue. *A Very Boring Conversation* was screened at the 35th Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2006 and was awarded the Best Short Film at the Jogja Netpac Asian Film Festival in Yogyakarta in 2007. For his next film, *Trip to the Wound* (2007), Edwin turned for the first time to a topic related to his own ethnic Chinese identity, albeit in a highly oblique way. This film, which was part of the omnibus film *9808*, contributed to an anthology of short films commemorating the 10th anniversary of Indonesian political reform and remembering the victims of the May 1998 anti-Chinese riots. *Trip to the Wound* was selected for the International Competition at the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival in 2008. Edwin followed this with the short film *Hulahoop Sounding* (2008), a remake of Joel Coen's *Soundings* (1980). The short was commissioned by the International Film Festival

Rotterdam (IFFR) and was also selected for screening in competition at the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival in 2009.

With a handful of critically acclaimed short films early in his filmmaking career, Edwin soon established himself as a prominent independent filmmaker. His particular sense of aesthetics led him to develop his own unique filmic style, while the thematic emphases of his short films went on to inform his feature filmmaking with the *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012).

Edwin's Accented Mode of Production

In his book, *Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001), the Iranian-American film theorist, Hamid Naficy, sets out to describe a set of characteristics that define exilic, diasporic and post-colonial filmmaking. Naficy argues that "the accented style helps us to discover commonalities among exilic filmmakers that cut across gender, race, nationality and ethnicity, as well as across boundaries of national cinemas, genres and authorship" (Naficy 2001, 39). As well as highlighting a range of stylistic and thematic concerns shared by films from a range of contexts and backgrounds, Naficy places great emphasis on the conditions of production that give rise to the "accented mode". The following section of this chapter thus aims to place Edwin's film practice within Naficy's "accented" cinema framework. It will argue that while Edwin rarely focalises themes or stories that relate directly to his ethnic Chinese background, his films nevertheless exhibit, what Naficy understands as, "structures of feeling"[22], that speak not only to his hybrid identity and sense of in-betweenness, but also encode his cinematic practice in terms of the particular socio-political context in which he works.

[22] Here Naficy borrows from Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of belonging" as set out in his seminal 1977 text, *Marxism and Literature.*

In this sense, Edwin's work engages with his complex identity formation, while simultaneously transcending the film's actual subject matter, granting it the border-crossing qualities that Naficy attributes to the accented mode.

Given the emphasis placed by Naficy on production context, it is useful to first briefly examine Edwin's production methods, which closely correlate with what Naficy calls the "intersitial mode of production." For Naficy, one of the defining aspects of accented cinema is the extent to which this kind of filmmaking takes place outside or at the margins of commercial and industrial filmmaking, and refers not only to production but also distribution and consumption (Naficy, 2001, p. 40). Such filmmakers engage in production and distribution practices that are either "interstitial", "artisanal" or "collective" and in turn, the films they produce give rise to alternate modes of consumption (Naficy, 2001, p. 40). Edwin's filmmaking practice certainly shares many of the characteristics associated with the interstitial mode of production.

According to Naficy, the interstitial mode of production is, variously supported by "rhizomatically interlinked independent, nonprofit, political and ethnoreligious organizations, and by a variety of mediating cultural institutions" (Naficy, 2001, p. 43). All of Edwin's short films undoubtedly satisfy Naficy's criterion. His first few shorts were made during his time at film school on minimal budgets and Edwin has emphasized the non-profit ethos underpinning these films. For example, *A Very Slow Breakfast* was primarily funded by Edwin and his art director, and was also supported by the Kodak Student Filmmaker Program. Edwin contributed (USD) $100 towards the production costs and his art director, Eros Eflin, injected (USD) $150 to be used for set decoration (Edwin, 2006). Similarly, the film *Kara: Daughter of A Tree* (2005), which was written and directed by Edwin, was made with the filmmaker's own savings, together with money contributed by members of the crew. Edwin confirms that "[t]hey

all gave money for the film, [n]ot a big amount of money, but Sidi [Salleh, the cinematographer, also] contributed film stock" (Edwin, 2006). When *Kara* was offered a distribution opportunity with Objectifs Films, Singapore, Edwin turned it down to maintain his commitment to non-profit filmmaking, an ethos that had been collectively endorsed by the crew-members who had invested in the film. Another reason was the lack of an official location permit, with certain scenes of the film being shot in a guerrilla style, especially those located in a McDonald's restaurant. As a result, *Kara* only circulated among close friends (Edwin, 2006). The production viability of Edwin's short films also relied heavily upon the prizes and awards received from film competitions, the funds of which were then used to help finance his next film. For example, part of the production costs for *A Very Boring Conversation* (2006) came from a film voucher (which included film stocks and film processing fees), received from the 2004 Jakarta International Film Festival (JIFF), in which Edwin won 2nd prize in the Short Film Competition category for *Dajang Soembi: A Woman Who Married a Dog* (2004) (Edwin, 2006). The filmmaker was also involved in directing a documentary, a co-production between Miles Film (founded by the producer and director of *Gie*; Mira Lesmana and Riri Reza) and UNICEF. The documentary, *Songs From Our Sunny Homeland* (2006), was produced as part of a video workshop to commemorate children of Tsunami victims. It is clear that in terms of production, Edwin's short films constitute an interstitial mode of production and this is also the case with his two feature films.

As we observed with the case studies discussed in Chapter Two, the more recent wave of independent Indonesian films have been frequently funded haphazardly from multiple sources, including significant self-funding. This is also the case with Edwin's productions, particularly his two feature films that have been made possible through

financial and in-kind support from a wide variety of sources. For example, *The Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* was produced with the assistance of a wide variety of international and domestic financial and in-kind contributions. These included the Hubert Bals Fund and the US-based not-for-profit venture Global Film Initiative (GFI). The Hubert Bals Fund, a venture of the International Film Festival Rotterdam, is designed to foster film production in developing countries. Over the years, an emphasis has also been placed on assisting the development of non-mainstream films in countries, with film cultures that do not readily support independent or minority filmmaking, such as Indonesia. Given the emergence of a new, independent Indonesian cinema in the post-*reformasi* era, young filmmakers like Edwin were prime candidates for such schemes. Similarly, the GFI aims to promote "cross-cultural understanding through the medium of cinema."[23] Both schemes are central to the interstitial mode of production and it was largely due to the success of Edwin's short films at international festivals, that he was able to successfully gain support from these schemes. The film credits also reveal that a number of Indonesian film companies were involved in the production including Miles Films, Elang Perkasa Film, Lynxfilms, Fourmix and Kineforum. *Blind Pig*'s producer, Meiske Taurisa, reported that the film was given a special discount for the loan of film equipment by Elang Perkasa Film, a Chinese Indonesian-owned equipment rental house that supports young Indonesian film production (personal communicaiton, 2013).[24] The owner of the equipment rental house, Hatoek Soebrata, is a known film enthusiast and was the producer of many Indonesian films that featured Hong Kong and Taiwanese artists in the 1980s (Kristanto & Ardan, 2007). In addition,

[23] http://www.globalfilm.org/about.htm
[24] Personal interview with Edwin's long-term producer, Meiska Taurisa conducted in July 2013 during my fieldwork in Jakarta

Edwin also collaborated with the Indonesian-owned Fourmix Audio Post for the film's audio post-production.

Prior to the production of *Blind Pig,* Edwin's films were not produced under a registered company. Meiske Taurisa established Babibutafilm (literally 'Blind Pig Film') in 2008, after the completion of the director's first feature and the company was registered under the names of Edwin, Meiske Taurisa and Sidi Salleh (personal communication, 2013). Through Babibutafilm, Edwin and his team made his second feature, *Postcards From the Zoo* in 2012, which was a co-production between Babibutafilm and a Germany production company, Pallas Film.

As with *Blind Pig*, Edwin's second feature was financially supported by multiple international sources, but on a larger scale. These included: the Torino Film Fund, the Hubert Bals Fund, Goteborg International Film Festival Fund, L'Atelier Cinefondation, Cinemart and the Asian Project Market. In addition, the film also benefited from the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program and was supported by a grant from the Sundance Institute/Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. It was produced by Edwin's now regular producer, Meiske Taurisa (Babibutafilm, Indonesia), together with Lorna Tee (Hongkong) and Thanassis Karathanos and Karl Baumgartner (Germany), which made the film a major international co-production. The film received international distribution via The Match Factory, a world sales company based in Cologne, Germany, dedicated to bringing arthouse cinema to the international market. A distinctive characteristic of the accented mode of production is that of collaboration and in this case, the co-production between Indonesia and Germany. The nature of co-production indicates a commitment of capital investment and distribution by two film companies, paving the way for broader distribution by gaining access to the international film market. In his theorisation of the interstitial mode of production,

Naficy emphasises the tendency toward co-production. Drawing on the work of Manjunath Pendakur, Naficy explains that co-production helps accented filmmakers "to pool capital and labor from around the world and gain market access globally" (Pendakur, 1990 cited in Naficy, 2001, p. 59). This strategy has been used by displaced filmmakers, such as Michel Khleifi, a Palestinain filmmaker who migrated to Belgium. In the case of Edwin, the international collaboration can be seen as an approach that accentuates the state of his liminality and displaced identity, as an Indonesian filmmaker of Chinese origin operating in an independent mode.

Additionally, the production of *Postcards,* via a great variety of international funding initiatives, signifies the film's transnational condition. At one level, this transnationality permited Edwin to make his film with little restriction from local Indonesian film and media policies, which may have limited him from addressing certain themes and cinematic styles. At another level, the transnationality underpinning the film, promotes a shift of Chinese Indonesian filmmaking from the local to the international context, whereby cultural identity can be negotiated.

Another important aspect of the interstitial mode of filmmaking, according to Naficy, is that of the "multifunctional and integrated" director (2001, p. 46). Filmmakers frequently play multiple roles including "producer, director, screenplay writer, editor, and sometimes on-camera talent and cinematographer" (p. 46). They are also often "involved in all phases of their films vertically, from preproduction financing to exhibition" (Naficy 2001, p. 46). Throughout his career, Edwin has played multiple roles in the production of his films. For example, he directed and edited *Dajang Soembi: A Women Who Married a Dog* (2004), he both wrote and directed *Kara: Daughter of A Tree* (2005), *Hullahoop Soundings* (2008), *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008), *Postcards from the Zo*o (2012) and his later short *Someone's Wife in the Boat of*

Someone's Husband (2014). He wrote, produced and directed *A Very Boring Conversation* (2006), and he has also been directly involved in raising the funding for many of his films. By functioning in a variety of roles, the accented filmmaker is able to shape a film's vision and aesthetic, and truly become its auteur. This is especially important as Edwin often develops an idea for a film from a single image, and loads his films with idiosyncratic symbolism that is inexplicable to newly participating team members

Accented filmmakers also tend to work repeatedly with the same on and off-screen talent over several films. This is linked to, what Naficy describes as, the "artisanal" nature of the interstitial mode of film production, where the film is privileged as an art form, before its commercial value (Naficy, 2001, p. 4). For example, in terms of on-screen talent, the Chinese Indonesian actress, Ladya Cheryl, has appeared in five of Edwin's films, including his two features. Edwin initially became acquainted with Cheryl through a friend in the film industry (Edwin, 2006). Cheryl had been a commercial film actress before she featured in Edwin's short film *Kara: Daughter of a Tree* (2005). According to Edwin, it was Cheryl who approached him about appearing in the film. The actress was keen to shoot at Mount Sumel because she had interest in the location (Edwin, 2006). Cheryl's Chinese ancestry also contributes to the accentedness of Edwin's films. In an interview, the filmmaker mentioned that he developed a scene in *Blind Pig* together with the actress. The moment described by Edwin depicts a firecracker bursting into the protagonist's mouth, and it began as just an image before the duo further developed it into the scene. The moment alludes to both Edwin's and Cheryl's ethnic identities as Chinese Indonesians and it represents an expression of their experiences of being marginalized (Edwin, 2006). The long-term collaboration between the two has allowed Edwin to channel his personal experiences,

as a member of the Chinese ethnic minority, through Cheryl's performances, who shares something of his understanding and cultural history.

In addition to Edwin's long-term collaboration with Ladya Cheryl, he has also frequently worked with the same off-screen talent. According to Naficy, this is an important feature of the interstitial mode of production. Together with engaging in multiple roles himself, employing a stable repertory of talent and production crew allows the accented filmmaker to maintain control over "the authorship and the cost of the projects" (Naficy, 2001, p. 37). Edwin certainly employs this strategy, allowing him to have executive control over the style and content of his films (Naficy, 2001, p. 37). In turn, this permits Edwin to inscribe more of his own personal history and obsessions into the films. Some of the key personnel who Edwin has enjoyed long-term working relationships with include Meiske Taurisa (producer), Sidi Salleh (cinematographer) and Herman Panca (cditor). These key players have worked on most or all of Edwin's shorts and features. It is perhaps no coincidence that almost all of the crucial personnel in Edwin's team are of Chinese background, with the exception of Sidi Salleh, who is of Arab origin, a small ethnic group in Indonesia. (Rusdi, 2007). They became a team due to their shared cultural experience and a common sense of interstitiality (Rusdi, 2007). Edwin and Sidi Salleh studied film together at IKJ and became close friends after working on Edwin's second short film, *Dajang Soembi: A Woman Who was Married to a Dog* in 2004. Herman Panca joined the team as a long-standing editor after his involvement in the produciton of *Kara* in 2005. Meiske Taurisa became a ongoing producer after working on *Trip to the Wound* (2007), which is about a traumatised Chinese-Indonesian woman in the post-*reformasi* era. The experiences they have shared and the close friendships they have established has allowed trust to be forged between Edwin and his production crew. It has also permitted the team to develop and establish

artistic continuity and control. This is very important for the accented filmmaker, whose auteurist vision is a defining aspect of the stylistic and thematic dimension of their films.

As a result of this closely tied production team, we see a recurrance in the themes of Edwin's films and a unique uniformity to the style and aesthetics of his ouevre, that is intensely personal to the accented filmmaker. Nevertheless, as Naficy notes, "multiple involvement in all phases and aspects of the film is not a universally desired ideal; it is often a stressful condition forced by exile and interstitiality" (2001, p. 49). Here, Naficy describes not only the condition of exilic and diasporic filmmakers but also the state of intersitiality, that can be observed in Edwin's filmmaking. Being a subject of Chinese Indonesian origin, and at the same time an independent filmmaker in the post-*reformasi* era, complicates Edwin's identity and deepens the state of his interstitiality. The dualism of his identity or hybridity, as an Indonesian of Chinese descent, and the marginalized position of the ethnic minority in Indonesia, has been a core issue that has driven Edwin's practice. While not all of his works are overtly about ethnic Chinese minorities, they are certainly inspired by his background and experience as a Chinese Indonesian. Employing a highly fragmented style, the stories that he tells are often based on personal experience. Thus, his films can be understood as complexly accented, derived as they are from an identity that is hybrid and interstitial.

Another significant dimension of the interstitial mode of production lies in its critical potential. For Naficy, accented films take part in disrupting the hegemonic, industrial conditions of production. Stylistically, accented films also implicitly maintain "a powerful criticism of dominant film practices" (Naficy, 2001, p. 45). Naficy thus highlights the relationship between how a film is produced, and the stylistic, aesthetic and thematic aspects of its final production. For Naficy, the accented mode of

production "encourages the development of an accented and deterritorialized style, which is driven by its own limitations, that is, by its smallness, imperfection, amateurishness, and lack of cinematic gloss (many of the films are low-tech shorts with extremely low budgets and small crews and casts)" (p. 45). In addition to these qualities of imperfection, such films are also characterised by their "textual richness" and "narrative inventiveness" (p. 45). It is possible to locate all of these characteristics in Edwin's short films, as well as within his feature films. Even though *Postcards From The Zoo* displays a much more polished style, it still exhibits a rich and experimental aesthetic. In order to better understand the textual, narrative and thematic features of Edwin's accented style, the next section will undertake a close analysis of some of his short films. These films, which were all made with very small budgets, are undoubtedly stylistically diverse. However, they are all connected by the following key features: the use of no or minimal dialogue, a preference for low-key or *chiaroscuro* lighting, abstract, oblique and partial framing of people and objects, distorted or amplified sounds, and associative montage. Edwin's short films also tend to lack any clear plot structure or narrative progression, and they also resist the conventions of narrative realism. Instead, they hint at a story and gesture towards the social implications of such stories. In this sense, they mount a critique of and resistance to dominant modes of cinematic storytelling, tying them closely to Naficy's characterisation of the accented mode. Thematically, the shorts are also linked in their continual return to the notion of the fragmented, disjointed or alienated family; a theme that stems from Edwin's own experiences of his familial relationships and those he observed around him growing up. Furthermore, this theme is linked in the short films to other forms of social disruption, usually as a result of capitalism. Once again, it is clear to see how the accented mode of production, and its inherent critique of industrial cinema, is emblematised by Edwin's

ouevre and his assessment of an increasingly consumer-oriented society. This chapter will now look more closely at these short films for their treatment of the fragmented family and Edwin's deployment of stylistic innovations in an accented mode. This chapter thus mounts the argument that Edwin's cinematic style in his short films is rooted in his own experience of his Chineseness, an issue that is widely percieved as an Indonesian "domestic' problem", known as "*masalah Cina"* or the "Chinese problem" (Hoon, 2006).

Edwin's Short Films: Stylistic Innovation and the Fragmented Family

Edwin's short films revolve primarily around the theme of the family unit as a dysfunctional institution, as well as exploring sexuality and social trauma. Many of the issues depicted in the films derive indirectly from Edwin's own experiences of hybridity and in-betweenness as a Chinese Indonesian, and as such they also inform the aesthetic dimensions of Edwin's accented style. The filmmaker explained, "we are [as Chinese Indonesians] a minority because of everything that happened in [history]. To call it self-hatred would be too strong. Actually, we don't know how to be ourselves. It's an identity problem" (Rayns, 2008). This psychological state of in-betweenness has inspired many of the central themes that have developed in his short films.

A Very Slow Breakfast (2002) is a five-minute experimental short with no dialogue that explores a dysfunctional father-son relationship. The film is almost exclusively set in an apartment, shared by a father, a mother, a son and a daughter, who never speak and rarely acknowledge each other. The mother only appears very briefly as a silhouette. *A Very Slow Breakfast* is clearly a student work; a filmic exercise made when Edwin was still learning his craft (Galatio, 2014). As such it exhibits the

imperfections common to the accented mode, but as a student work Edwin is able to take risks and experiment with innovative stylistic techniques. Edwin employs a number of strategies to create an atmosphere of estrangement that applies not only to the diegetic world of the characters, but also makes for a highly estranged viewing experience. He has constructed a claustrophobic *mise en scene* reminiscent of German expressionist films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), by lowering part of the ceiling so that neither father nor son can fully sit up straight. This strange and uncomfortable mood is then intensified by a series of unusually framed extreme close-ups and canted mid-shots, together with amplified and distorted sounds and slow motion effects in some key shots.

The film opens with an extreme close-up of a cup of black coffee, accompanied by an amplified scratching sound. Dandruff flakes then begin to drop in slow motion onto the surface of the black coffee. This is followed by a cut to a mid-shot to reveal the son scratching his head, the distorted scratching sound continues ensuring continuity from the previous shot. The film cuts back and forth several times between the two shots, before cutting to an over-the shoulder shot, revealing the presence of the father sitting at the dining table reading the paper. His only acknowledgement of his son is a slow glance in his direction, revealing a look of disdain. Shots of the pair stooped under the unusually low ceiling serve to suggest a strained familial relationship.

Eric Sasono suggests that the oblique staircase above the pair, which occupies a large portion of the screen, seems to place an enormous pressure on the family (Sasono, 2012). Clearly, the *mise en scéne* creates a claustrophobic ambience, intensified by the *chiaroscuro* lighting, that comes from a single source. The atmosphere is one of suffocation and darkness that emphasizes the dysfunctional family, where money seems to be the only way for the apathetic father to communicate with his children. The

amplified sound of the father lighting a cigarette, an action which is then mirrored by the son in a subsequent shot, while the daughter's workout video screeches uncomfortably in the background in a cartoon-like voice-over, creates, what Olivia Khoo describes as, the "social alienation of the urban capitalist family" (Khoo, 2010, p. 137). In the next shot the father can be see framed between the legs of his daughter, an uncomfortably sexualized image that is, according to Khoo, suggestive of his incestuous affairs (Khoo 2010, p. 137). He then reaches over to the cup of coffee with the dandruff and swallows it down, as if to eliminate the problem of his son, before throwing down money for him. Similarly, there is no conversation between father and daughter; instead he merely gestures to the daughter to come over to him to receive money. Khoo reads this as an act of paying for sex (2012, p. 137). The mother, who is attending to a phone-call, passes by them, obscured by the darkness, implying her shadowy role in the patriarchal/familial hierarchy. Edwin claims, "I want to portray a family where the major authority is in the father, and [the] mother usually cannot do anything even [if] she knows that something bad is happening in her family" (Edwin, 2006). Through the use of these techniques audiences are exposed to the isolation and loneliness of each family member (Sasono, 2012). The filmmaker has suggested that *Breakfast* depicts a personal aspect of Edwin's own experience: "I've seen this kind of family in my childhood, in my own family" (Edwin, 2006). In Edwin's films, family is thus frequently depicted as a dysfunctional institution, where family members remain alienated and bound by their socio-economic roles.

The theme of the fragmented family persistently pervades Edwin's short films. *Kara: The Daughter of a Tree* also addresses this issue via the reimagining of a folk tale. Like *Breakfast*, the story of *Kara* unfolds without dialogue. Instead, Edwin adopts ambient sound, the sounds of nature and other sonic effects to help tell the story. Edwin

has said, “sound is very important […], I only choose whether [I will concentrate] on the picture or the dialogue, I cannot concentrate on the two at the same time” (Edwin, 2006). *Kara* opens with a montage of shots of the mesmerizing landscape of Mount Semeru where the film was shot. Sounds of a gentle breeze introduce audiences to the serenity of the setting, where a little girl, Kara, is born in a hut. Soon after she is born, we see an object fall from the sky, crashing through the ceiling of the small hut and killing the mother. After a series of shots depicting blood-splattered objects, drawings and a portrait of a woman, the film cuts to reveal that the object that has fallen from the sky, is a statue of Ronald McDonald, mascot of the fast food outlet. The image of the blood splattered Ronald McDonald, sitting next to the mother’s dead body, in front of the crying baby (who is cradled in her father’s arms) is darkly suggestive of the manner in which fast-food outlets have subsumed the role of parents. The film thus provides a searing critique of the influence of capitalism and globalization on the institution of the family. As Edwin has said “I […] focus on […] globalization and media exploitation” (Edwin, 2006), and this is certainly true for the story of *Kara* and her family.

After this short introduction, the film then flashes forward to observe Kara at about eight years old, when her father also seems to have disappeared, suggesting that she has grown up alone. A photographer then abruptly appears and the clicking sounds of the camera’s shutter dominates the soundtrack, and seems to trigger traumatic flashbacks to Kara’s bloody entry into the world. The photographer, who is symbolic of the media, is represented as invasive and Kara is hostile towards him. After a brief interlude Kara is suddenly transported to a busy city, appearing in front of a McDonalds restaurant. To effect this transition, Edwin uses a hand-held shot moving across a grassy plain. The image is accompanied by the sounds of a film camera. The image then begins to spin rapidly, maintaining continuity of movement as the image changes from the

countryside to the city, where Kara miraculously appears in front of the McDonalds. Kara then walks into the restaurant, where a child's birthday party is in progress. As this happens the point of view switches from a third person perspective, of a mid-shot following Kara from behind, to jerky and disjointed hand-held shots, some of which are upside down and are suggestive of Kara now carrying the camera herself and recording these images. This is interspersed with close-up shots of the little children looking directly at the camera and more general shots of Kara walking through the restaurant. The ticking sound of an old film camera is still ever-present in the sound track throughout this scene. Kara then approaches the statue of Ronald McDonald and begins beating it with a long machete and patrons turn to look in surprise at the girl's strange behavior. A woman gives her a drink, which seems to pacify her and she sits next to the statue, as the photographer appears and looks on. This is followed by a flashback to Kara's parents, sitting and walking serenely by a lake, her mother pregnant with Kara. The film ends on this shot, together with the return of the soundscape of the ticking film camera. The edges of the image begin to bleach out, as if we have reached the end of the film reel before cutting to the end credits.

With this enigmatic short film, Edwin seems to be concerned with the hazards of cultural homogenization, a pervasive effect of global capitalism in Indonesian society, in which the media (signified by the photographer) plays an important role in reinforcing the power of consumer capitalism. This is part of a broader criticism of post-modernity, where familial-cultural roots are destroyed (represented by the death of the mother) and culture and identity are homogenized. The ideal family can only be temporarily represented by a utopian landscape, which is destroyed by the arrival of the fast food 'god' (emblematized via the life-size effigy of Ronald McDonald) which, the film suggests, metaphorically invaded the nation in a violent, bloody manner. This

thematic critique is supported by the film's disjointed style, a fragmented narrative that needs to be actively pieced together by the spectator.

The consumption of western products has long been associated with the construction of Indonesian wealth and social class formation (Heryanto, 2005). Before 1990, as Ariel Heryanto claims, "the popular identification of the rich has been with Westerners and Chinese". (1999, p. 161) Although the Westerners are non-Indonesian, their 'superior' modernity, as represented in the media via advertisements, films and other forms of entertainment, is often privileged by Indonesians culturally. The Chinese of Indonesian decent, on the other hand, are labeled as non-indigenous but they are also considered the richest and most industrious community in the country (Heryanto, 2005). The wealthy in Indonesia, therefore, are associated with the "non-Asian, or non-indigenous, non-Muslims, and *non-rakyat* or non-citizen" (Heryanto, 2005, p. 163). After the 1990s, the Muslim elite constituted the new middle-class in Indonesia. With greater wealth, political patronage and thus more money in hand, the salient feature of the new middle class was their consumer culture and their idolization of western goods. Keniciro (2001) asserts, it was their consumptive lifestyle that stimulated the consumption of new products, and also the construction of new facilities in high-class shopping centers, condominiums, housing complexes, and fast food restaurants, making the new middle-class highly visible (Kenichiro, 2001, p. 482). Their emergence is closely related to the property boom and the expansion of shopping complexes in the 1990s. The presence of a Western fast-food restaurant, like McDonalds, is perceived as adding value to the location of the shopping mall, which is one of the main attractions for patrons.

The fast food outlet was brought into Indonesia in 1991 by Bambang N. Racmadi, the son-in-law of the ex-state secretary (Kenichiro, 2001, p. 501). It became a

major draw-card when it first opened in Sarinah Department Store in central Jakarta. Subsequently, the fast-food chain quickly proliferated into almost every new shopping mall in Indonesia. Edwin's *Kara*, made more than a decade after the burgeoning of the new-middle class in the 1990s and the trend of increasing demand for westernized goods, constructs a strong criticism of the power of capitalism and cultural root destruction. Yet the film also seems to suggest an additional critique of bourgeois hegemony (Heryanto, 2005) that indisputably links capitalism to the consumerism of the ruling classes.

Edwin often represents a problematic dispute in his films, in the form of a fragmented visual motif. For example, in *A Very Slow Breakfast*, the issue of the family in a capitalist society, is represented by the extreme close-up of a cup of black coffee, that is progressively tainted by dandruff flakes. The dandruff can be understood as a kind of affliction, suffered by the son, but eventually gulped down (and thus made invisible) by the father. In *Kara: The Daughter of A Tree*, the invasion of transnational capitalism is represented by the bizarre image of the falling Ronald McDonald, that gruesomely murders the mother, only moments after giving birth and creates chaos. A similar visual symbolism operates in another of Edwin's short films, adapted from a peculiar folk story. *Dajang Sombie: A Woman Who Married a Dog* is based on the legend of Sangkoeriang. It is shot in black-and-white and, like Edwin's previous films, contains no dialogue. In terms of style and themes, the three short films form a loose trilogy, that together mount a damning critique of the family in contemporary Indonesian society.

The legend of Sangkoeriang is an ancient myth of the Sundanese tribe in Indonesia. It tells the tale of the creation of various locations: Lake Bandung, Mount Tangkuban Parahu and Mount Bu. In the film, the complex fable has been simplified to

focus on three main characters – Dajang Sombie (the mother), Toemang (the father or human dog) and Sangkuriang (the son). Edwin places emphasis on the love story between the mother and the son, and thus embeds the film with a social allegory regarding Indonesian society. The filmmaker said, "I choose this […] because […] Indonesia has a very dark culture between the father, mother and son" (Edwin, 2006). If the previous two short films were about the devastating effect of modern capitalist society on the urban family, *Dajang Soembie* takes an ever darker perspective, also exploring bestiality and incest. This film functions as a pessimistic critique of Indonesian society. *Dajang Soembie* is presented in black-and-white and is a silent film, in the sense that it has no dialogue or diegetic sound. Set in the colonial period, the film recounts the tale of princess Dajang Sombie, who is deceived into marrying Toemang, a demi-god, who has taken the form of a dog. Their son, Sangkoeriang, who falls in love with his mother, kills Toemang as his jealousy grows.

Stylistically, *Dajang Soembie* has been made to deliberately replicate the style of a film from the silent era. Indeed, in a trailer for the film, it is billed as the first silent film in the history of Indonesian cinema.[25] The film stock has been aged to mimic the mechanism of a silent-era movie projector. Edwin also uses intertitles and accompanying piano music to complete the effect. More specifically, the artificial and theatrical *mise en scéne*, as well as the low key and *chiaroscuro* lighting pay homage to the German expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) (Khoo, 2010, p. 139). Edwin had first hinted at this stylistic influence with the angular ceiling in *A Very Slow Breakfast*. In as far as the German expressionists were also concerned with bringing folk tales to the screen, Edwin's stylistic choice seems not only innovative but highly appropriate. Indeed, aside from Edwin's aspiration to create the first Indonesian-made

[25] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3mFR2oP80s

silent film, this aesthetic influence also helps to imbue the film with a sense of timelessness (Edwin, 2006). The filmmaker has explained that silent films made in Indonesia were made under Dutch rule, before Indonesia gained sovereignt. Thus *Dajang Soembie* is the first silent film in Indonesian cinematic history to be made by a local filmmaker. As with his previous shorts, Edwin deliberately disrupts dominant modes of film production and creates unique cinematic artefacts.

Dajang Soembi opens with black and white still photographs of the princess Dajang Soembi and Toemang, a demi-god who takes the form of a dog. This is interspersed with intertitles that introduce the characters. Fitted in a white, colonial dress, posing like a beautiful goddess, Dajang Soembi is portrayed as a symbol of beauty, wealth and sensuality. However, as the intertitles state, her "wit matches not her beauty" (Khoo, 2010, p. 139). As a result, she is deceived into marrying the dog, who has been able to transform temporarily into a man, as indicated by a still photograph in the film. We see their son, Sankoeriang (10 years old), laying on the bed in the following scene. When Dajang Soembi approaches him to hunt for deer for her husband, he reluctantly complies. On his way out together with Toemang, he murmurs "she's only my mother". The mocking expression of the mother, posing languidly, while watching Toemang and Sangkoeriang depart, seems to suggest that she is in control of the men. Khoo relates this to her preference for acting in the role of lover, rather than that of a good mother, as exemplified in the scene where she is depicted as gratified when eating her husband's liver that is served to her by her son (2012, p. 139). Dajang Soembi's shirking of her familial duties, is reminiscent of the urban career woman (the mother) in *A Very Short Breakfast*, who is virtually absent from the film. The incest and patricide in *Dajang Soembi,* however, more explicitly challenges the moral and ethical mores of Indonesian society. During the hunting trip, for example, the

conflict between the father and the son is intensified as reflected in their dialogue, when Toemang states "…she is my lover…" and Sangkoeriang responds "…she is his boss…". The conflict comes to a point of crisis later when Sankoeriang is shown peeping at his mother while she takes a shower, the intertitles revealing his thoughts: "she will be my lover eternally…". Moments later Sangkoeriang sees Toemang flirting with a pretty wild boar (a woman wearing a mask with a snout), who Toemang claims is a god from heaven, cast into a boar. Sangkoeraing shouts that he is a liar and without hesitation the son kills his father with a spear and digs out his liver, to be served to his mother. Sangkoeriang's wicked expression and evil smile at the dining table, while watching his mother eating is shown in a high angle close-up shot, that emphasises his rebelliousness and vicious personality (Khoo, 2010, p. 139). Allegorically, Sangkoering's behaviour may be understood as the ultimate act of rebellion by a child from a broken family in contemporary Indonesian society. By adopting and re-working this legendary tale, Edwin yet again places his emphasis on the fragmented family unit that stems from "the rotten root of the family tree" (Jonathan, 2012).

This theme of the fragmented family returns again in Edwin's next film, *A Very Boring Conversation* (2006) but in this production he instead examines a mother-daughter dynamic. The nine minute short film revolves around a dialogue between a fifty year-old woman, who is having a conversation with her daughter's boyfriend, while listening to the music composed by her daughter on a CD. The film creates an erotic subtext via the dialogue between the two, the suggestive camera work and the music (Khoo, 2010, pp. 140-141). While the subject of family fragmentation is central to Edwin's short films, as we will see in the following chapters, this pivotal theme also persists in the young filmmaker's first two feature films, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* and *Postcards from the Zoo*.

Chinese 'Accents' in Edwin's films

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Edwin's films rarely directly represent Chinese stories or themes. However, he consciously crafts stories that derive from or reflect the intricacies of his Chinese Indonesian background, his experience of cultural hybridity and the social-political context of Indonesia. His films tend to inscribe his biography in a subtle and implied way, rather than being an overt portrayal of his personal history. Even when Edwin turns to more explicitly Chinese-themed material, this remains the case. Such an approach imbues his films with cinematic, rather than linguistic, "accents." Edwin's ethnic status and state of liminality, informed by the long-term displacement and erasure of Chinese identity in Indonesian society, are registered as a kind of "lostness" (Naficy, 2001, p. 33) or "longing for something lost" (personal communication, 2013).[26] As outlined in Chapter One of this thesis, the various waves of Chinese diaspora that came to Indonesia have frequently been subjected to socio-political conditions — such as colonial rule, Japanese occupation, New Order assimilation policies — that have resulted in many losing a sense of Chinese identity and culture. This is particularly true for that generation of which Edwin is a member- that were born in Indonesia and who grew up during the New Order period.

It is not until his fifth short film, *Trip to the Wound* (2008), that Edwin could be said to deal more directly with a specifically Chinese theme, albeit still in an oblique and suggestive manner. As stated, the film was made as Edwin's contribution to an anthology of short films to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the *reformasi* and the riots of May 1998, where the ethnic Chinese community was targeted. In this, Edwin's first film to use dialogue, a young woman (played by Ladya Cheryl) talks to a young

[26] Personal interview with Edwin conducted in July 2013.

man (played by Carlo Genta) during a bus ride. She prompts him to talk about the scar on his shoulder and she recounts the stories of the various scars that mark the bodies of her family members. The film seems to avoid talking directly about the 'national' scars — caused by the Suharto years and the anti-Chinese riots —but this political history still allusively informs the film's context. Instead, the scars narrated by the young woman are caused by ordinary, quotidian events, rather than by socio-political conflict. Such broader national wounds are implied, however, not only by their absence, but by the young man's response to the woman's question "How did you get your scar?" His response is simply: "I don't remember." Similarly, when the man begins to touch the woman delicately, feeling for her scar, he is unable to find one. This suggests that such scars may not necessarily be physically evident, but psychologically embedded, alluding to the long period of enforced assimilation during the New Order period, and the mass social trauma experienced by the Chinese during the ethnic unrest of 1998 and beyond. In these moments of the film, Edwin also points to the phenomonon of national amnesia and the psychological erasure of such traumatic events from the national memory. The casting of an ethnic Chinese actress, Ladya Cheryl, in the main role further reinforces this subtle connection. The fact that the events are implied in such a subtle manner highlights the difficulty of speaking about such atrocities, even in the post-*reformasi* period. Edwin states in his director's statement that, "[s]ince 1998, the wound has stayed with us for 10 years [until the year the short film is made]. A wound that we can never forget. A wound that opens an emotional recollection." (Unnamed, 2008)

As Edwin gradually moved into the production of feature films, so too Indonesian films dealing with race-related issues began to increase. This was largely due to the relaxation of media and censorship policies, and was also tied to the

emergence of new, independent filmmaking voices. Among these were Nia Dinata, Riri Riza and Nan Achnas, as discussed in the last chapter. Chinese themes became more overt in Edwin's first feature film, *The Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly,* released in 2008, exactly ten years after the overthrow of the Suharto regime. Edwin declared that the film attempted to convey the "uneasiness, [and] unidentified feeling and confusion" of being Chinese in Indonesia (Rayns, 2008). The highly autobiographical feature reveals his strong attachment to his Chinese origins, and also signifies his first attempt to come to terms with the experience of ethnic marginalization. Intercut with footage of the May 1998 anti-Chinese riots, the fictional story of *Blind Pig* may be seen as a tribute to the Chinese community who suffered during this horrific event. Although the film's dialogue is in the Indonesian language, *Blind Pig* centers on the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Indeed, as a filmmaker of Chinese descent, Edwin's films are never made in a Chinese language, apart from several moments of Chinese dialect in *Blind Pig*. Khoo (2009) claims that films made by ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, including those by Edwin, are often not made in a Chinese language due to forced assimilation policies. Thus, his films offer a perspective on Edwin's diasporic identity, as well as the constraints of "belonging" in contemporary Indonesia, in the aftermath of marginalization, trauma and displacement.

Many distinctive features that are emblematic of Edwin's accented style, that developed in his short films, are also evident in *Blind Pig*. The accented features include inscription of ethnically encoded setting (enabled by location shooting in Chinese dominated areas), and the use of ethnic Chinese characters and cultural props (such as firecrackers and Chinese pork dumplings). More ambiguously, a "structure of feeling", associated with hybridity and liminality, is inscribed in the many claustrophobic spaces of the film and the use of tight framing. Here too, Edwin's films also function as a kind

of "journey of identity" that is also a prominent feature of accented filmmaking. Naficy writes: "Among the most important are journeys of identity, in the course of which old identities are sometimes shed and new ones fashioned" (Naficy, 2001, p.6). As we will see in the next chapter, one character in particular in *Blind Pig* is obsessed with inscribing this journey of identity onto his own body.

If *Trip to the Wound* and *The Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* saw Edwin more overtly engaging with issues concerning ethnic Chinese identity, his second feature, *Postcards from the Zoo,* takes his accented style of filmmaking in yet another direction. As we shall see in Chapter Five, the accented characteristics of this film are derived from the filmmaker's more general sensibility of displacement and state of liminality, as it deals with the issue of loss, or in Edwin's words, "longing for something lost." While the themes of absent parents or dysfunctional families are still present in this film, the location of Ragunan Zoo in Jakarta, where much of the film was shot, becomes crucial to the development of these issues, as it functions as a liminal space, in some ways protected from, but ultimately displaced by, the 'real' world beyond the enclosure.

Chapter Four

Speaking in Accents: *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* and the Inscription of Edwin's Personal Experience

Almost six years after his first acclaimed short, *A Very Slow Breakfast* (2003), Edwin embarked on his debut feature*, Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly.* [27] The production required almost two years to complete, but attracted high praise and recognition at numerous international film festivals. *Blind Pig* premiered at the Busan Film Festival in Korea, which was followed by an extensive run on the international film festival circuit, including events at Rotterdam, BAFICI in Buenos Aires, Hong Kong and many others. The film also received numerous accolades, such as the FIPRESCI prize in Rotterdam in 2009, a Silver Prize at the Festival des 3 Continents in Nantes and a Jury Special Mention in Singapore.[28]

Unlike his previous short films, Edwin's *Blind Pig* focuses more directly on issues of Chinese Indonesian identity, an important topic to not only the director himself but also to many of his Chinese Indonesian crew members. Several stylistic elements that developed during his phase of short filmmaking are preserved in this feature. These include his experimental approach to storytelling and the fragmentary narrative style that he employs when he weaves together the various stories of *Blind Pig*'s eight key characters. The last chapter established that Edwin adopts a non-chronological, fragmentary narrative style to raise issues about dysfunctional family relationships in contemporary Indonesian society. This chapter will look at how Edwin further develops this technique in even more complex ways in his debut feature film, and continues to examine the themes of disoriented identity and disjointed family.

[27] Henceforth referred to as *Blind Pig*
[28] Refer to *Postcards from the Zoo* (Kebun Binatang) Presskit, 2012. Presskit editor: Tony Ryans

Upon its release, *Blind Pig* was met with a mixed critical reception. While several commentators focused on the incoherent narrative form and weighty symbolism, *Blind Pig* was also celebrated for referencing the impact of the 1998 anti-Chinese riots and the state's decades-long marginalization of ethnic Chinese (Lee, 2008; Linssen, 2009). Non-Indonesian reviewers also underscored the importance of understanding the historical and cultural background of Chinese Indonesians, in order to better appreciate Edwin's stylistic approach (Lee, 2008; Linssen, 2009). Maggie Lee, for example, argues that the story of *Blind Pig*, which spans three generations, uses each generation to represent different "facets of an ethnic minority that doesn't want to be Chinese but can't become fully integrated as Indonesians either." Lee explains, that for Edwin, such issues defy literal dramatic representation and cannot be effectively conveyed in a conventional narrative structure (Lee, 2008). FIPRESCI film critic, Dana Linssen shares the same view and stresses that background information is necessary to understand "a pun" and "a punch", in the context of this dark comedy. In her assessment, Linssen refers to Edwin as a prolific Indonesian, underground, experimental filmmaker and praises *Blind Pig* as a film that is "hauntingly mind-blowing." For Linssen, the eight characters in the film represent the state of ambiguity of Chinese Indonesians and their struggle to become truly Indonesian. She notes that although the film at times appears to be didactic, such as the overuse of the Stevie Wonder song "I Just Called to Say I Love You", she recognizes that there is also a kind of "tenderness and willfulness" in the film that emphasizes the inherent ambiguity of ethnic Chinese identity (Linssen, 2009).

From a different perspective, Southeast Asian film scholar, Gaik Cheng Khoo provides a reading of *Blind Pig* in her article "Spotlight on the Films of Indonesian Filmmaker Edwin" (2010). Her assessment of *Blind Pig* is focused on the characters in

the Chinese Indonesian family, spread across three generations. She notes that Edwin uses symbols and an unconventional narrative structure to deal with the status of the ethnic Chinese minority in the film. She underscores the issue of each character struggling with their ethnic identity, as well as revealing how each generation adopt a different coping strategy. Although Khoo credits the film with capturing the impact of ethnic discrimination and the characters' "isolation, loneliness and an existentialist search for something or somewhere to belong", she is critical of the sketchy characterization in *Blind Pig* and Edwin's apparent difficulty in developing characters more effectively in a feature length format. Khoo suggests that the content of *Blind Pig* may have been too personal, preventing the filmmaker from maintaining a critical distance from his characters and their stories (Khoo, 2010, p. 46). Similarly, Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn's assessment of *Blind Pig* suggests that the film's incoherent narrative is a result of the film's over dependence on the filmmaker's own personal experience. She contends that, as an "indie" filmmaker, Edwin made *Blind Pig,* not as a form of entertainment but rather as an opportunity to air his personal grievances, even labeling the film disparagingly as an example of "intellectual masturbation" (Setijadi-Dunn, 2013, p. 73; Siahaan, 2010). Setijadi-Dunn further claims that, in the depiction of ethnic Chinese identity, and representation of the community's generalized sense of insecurity, fear and anxiety, Edwin's film is crucially lacking in specificity. Setijadi-Dunn sees this as a deliberate strategy by the filmmaker to shed light on the ambiguousness of Chinese identity, even using a diffused filter at times to emphasize this sense of obscurity and confusion (2013, p. 75).

Khoo and Setijadi-Dunn's readings of *Blind Pig* highlight the significance of Edwin's personal experience of being Chinese in Indonesia, and argue that this experience motivates many of his aesthetic decisions, as well as his attitude towards

narrative structure and character development. As a film author, who incorporates his own experience so intrinsically into the filmic text, *Blind Pig* can thus be considered a somewhat autobiographical work. This personal inscription is one of the features that allows the film to be situated within Naficy's definition of "accented cinema", whereby an author's biography is a prominent aspect of the film's style and content (Naficy, 2001). However, in *Blind Pig*, this autobiographical element is highly diffuse, based more on the representation of an experiential dimension rather than the inclusion of actual biographical details. Viewers cannot easily decipher 'Edwin' in the film; however, his experiences are peppered throughout *Blind Pig*, featuring in several of the characters' stories. In this context, the empirical experience of the filmmaker is vital, both for establishing the themes of the film and for conveying the feelings of uncertainty and disorientation, that are an inherent part of being Chinese in contemporary Indonesia. As Ien Ang states, "while the Indonesian nation was from its inception imagined as a multiethnic entity, the place of those marked as 'Chinese', in this 'unity-in-diversity' [Indonesia's national motto], has always been resolutely ambiguous and uncertain" (2001, p. 28).

Indeed, *Blind Pig* is dominated by the filmmaker's attempt to express an intense sense of disorientation. This is achieved through various elements of cinematic style that are unique to Edwin's earlier short films. As discussed previously, the effect of this is, what Raymond Williams (1961) has described as, a "structure of feeling" - a key concept that Hamid Naficy (2001) draws on in the development of his theory of accented cinema. In Naficy's theorization, "structures of feeling" are used to describe the experience of displacement that is shared among deterritorialised people and exiled communities. While Edwin is not literally displaced, in the sense of an exile forced to leave her or his homeland, it can be argued that, as a filmmaker of Chinese descent

living and working in Indonesia, he inhabits a condition of internal displacement. As already established in the last chapter, this condition deeply informs his filmmaking practice. Thus, Edwin's internal displacement, combined with the formal characteristics of the film, demonstrates the relevance of the concept of accented filmmaking when approaching *Blind Pig*. Furthermore, it can be argued this condition also produces "structures of feeling" in the film itself, that are intimately linked to the socio-historical context in which it was made. Edwin may be understood as an "accented filmmaker" not only due to the "textual structures or fictions within [his] films", but also as Naficy suggests, because of his experiences as an "empirical subject, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices, who exist[s] outside and prior to [his] films" (Naficy, 2001, p. 4). Although *Blind Pig* is "created astride and in the interstices of social formations and cinematic practices", Edwin's accentedness is also derived from the close correlation between the style and content of his films (Naficy, 2001, p. 4). This chapter thus argues that *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* is an accented film that is deeply informed by the filmmaker's own situatedness and experience of being internally displaced, as a Chinese individual in a country that still prioritizes indigeneity and assimilation over cultural and ethnic diversity. This chapter will advance this argument by focusing on the film's three main thematic and structural characteristics: disoriented identity, disjointed family and fragmented narrative. The analysis of the film will reveal the various ways in which these elements closely correlate with Naficy's theorization of accented cinema. The next section will provide a close "accented" reading of the film, in order to demonstrate how this operates at the level of both style and content. In opposition to some of the critical readings mentioned above, it will be argued that the fragmented, non-linear style is crucial for conveying the feeling and emotion underpinning the film and its meditation on internal displacement.

Disoriented Identity, Disjointed Family and the Fragmented Narrative: Towards an Accented Reading of *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly*

The term "accented cinema" is adopted by Hamid Naficy to refer, not so much to a linguistic accent or the language used in a film, but rather, to the displaced condition of the filmmakers and their artisanal, interstitial and/or collective mode of production. In particular, for Naficy, the term denotes those films made by exilic, diasporic and ethnic filmmakers in western, metropolitan centers beginning in the 1960's. A comprehensive account of the concept and a broad survey of many of the films made by exilic, diasporic and postcolonial ethnic filmmakers is included in Naficy's book, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001). According to Naficy, accented filmmakers often exist within a "state of tension and dissension of both their original and their current homes" (p. 10) to varying degrees. Their similarities, however, lie in their "liminal subjectivity and interstitial location in society and the film industry", and this positionality contributes greatly to the development of their accented style (2001, p. 10). As a result, of what he refers to as their "double consciousness", the films made by accented filmmakers are inclined to "signify and signify upon cinematic traditions by means of their artisanal production modes, their aesthetic and politics of smallness and imperfection, and their narrative strategies that cross generic boundaries and undermine cinematic realism" (2001, pp. 4-5). Accented films also "signify upon exile and diaspora by expressing, allegorizing, commenting upon, and critiquing the home and host societies and cultures and the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers" (2001, p. 4-5). Drawing on Williams, Naficy refers to the displaced experiences of these filmmakers as "accented structures of feeling" (2001, p. 26). These "accented structures of feeling" evoke nostalgia, sadness, loneliness, alienation and paranoia, that accented

filmmakers translate into the characters, themes and aesthetics of their films. While this often means that accented films are highly personal, they are not necessarily autobiographical in a literal sense. In accented films, the experience of displacement often takes the form of "fragmented narratives consisting of ellipses, ruptures [and a] self-reflexive interweaving with the filmmaker's own biography" (2001, p. 271).

Naficy's theorization of accented cinema has made a major contribution to film studies, by theorizing cinema made outside of mainstream film industries and vertically integrated studio systems. Among the filmmakers he discusses are Atom Egoyan, Michel Kleifi, Nancy Tong and Christian Choy, Mira Nair and Trinh T. Minh-ha. In his reading of their films, Naficy takes into account the directors' biographical backgrounds, as well as the historical context and social formations out of which their films emerged. Although Edwin does not reside in a Western metropolitan center, and is not an exilic subject, I argue that - similar to those other accented filmmakers - his cultural identity is no less problematic or complicated by his relationship to a "host" country in which he is not fully at "home." Asuman Suner, author of "Outside In: 'Accented Cinema'" (2006), has expanded Naficy's concept to analyse the emergence of diasporic and exilic non-western filmmakers, such as Kurdish-Iranian director, Bahman Ghobadi, Hong Kong director, Wong Kar-Wai and Turkish director, Nuri Bilge Ceylan. These filmmakers may not be considered ethnic minorities of their country, but their work is consistently framed by a troubled relationship with the places and cultures that they work in, and to which they do not fully belong (Suner, 2006, pp. 366-367). Given the history of Chinese settlement in the Indonesian archipelago, as outlined in Chapter One of this thesis, we may consider Edwin as a member of a diasporic community, residing and working in a metropolitan context, which itself is marked by a long and complicated history of colonialism, dictatorship, rapid

modernization and commercialization. Traces of these elements find their way into *Blind Pig*, marking it as an accented film and helping Edwin to express his sense of internal displacement and fragmented identity, forged out of the assimilationist policies imposed upon many generations of Chinese in Indonesia.

Blind Pig exhibits many of the accented characteristics that Naficy attributes to exilic, diasporic and postcolonial filmmakers, with the latter being of particular relevance to understanding Edwin's practice. In the last chapter, it was established that Edwin works within an interstitial mode of production, in terms of financing his films via multiple funding sources, fulfilling various key roles himself and working closely with a small retinue of on- and off-screen talent over several films. In addition to this, the accented style of *Blind Pig* bears traces of Edwin's personal experiences of marginality, interstitiality and ethnic difference in the Indonesian context. Edwin expresses his experiences of displacement largely through the performance of the characters, thematic preoccupations, narrative style and visual form. Through the processes of production, Edwin reflects his sense of being displaced and *Blind Pig* is therefore "personal and unique, like fingerprints because [it is] both authorial and autobiographical" (Naficy, 2001, p. 34).

Authorial Self-Inscription and Disoriented Identity

In emblematically representing his own experience of being Chinese in Indonesia, Edwin adopts a fragmented narrative form in *Blind Pig* to emphasize the feelings of confusion, paranoia and ambiguity. For Edwin, the disjointedness of the narrative form reinforces his attempt to express what it feels like to belong to an ethnic minority. As he puts it, "*Blind Pig* is essentially about feelings, and […] feelings and logical thinking

don't really go together. I don't think it's possible to 'design' emotion in a logical way" (Ryans, 2008). Tony Ryans accurately identifies the stylized mode of storytelling in *Blind Pig* as "centripetal storytelling" due to its narrative disintegration and puzzle-like structure. The narrative sequence of the film thus evokes the disintegration and fracturing that is symptomatic of the Chinese-Indonesian identity crisis. This experience is clearly described by Chinese Indonesian author, Ien Ang, in her article "To Be or Not to Be Chinese: Diaspora, Culture and Postmodern Ethnicity" (1993). Ang writes, "during that time [referring to her school days in Indonesia] the singing of Indonesia Merdeka did make me feel intensely and proudly Indonesian. Therefore, to be told mostly by Javanese kids - that I actually didn't belong there but […] in China, was terribly confusing, disturbing, and utterly unacceptable" (1993, pp. 7-8). She further states, "I silently rebelled, I didn't want to be Chinese" (1993, p. 8). Ang's personal experience as a child explains the confusion regarding the identity of the Chinese in Indonesia, which resonates with the experience inscribed in *Blind Pig*.

Revolving around the story of eight characters, *Blind Pig* was the first, and at the time, the only post-*reformasi* Chinese Indonesian film that was actually about the marginalized position of the ethnic minority in the nation-state (Khoo, 2012). In this sense, it differs greatly from the films about Chinese characters by indigenous filmmakers, as discussed in Chapter Two. Whereas those films attempted to repair some of the fractures caused by the many decades of discrimination, *Blind Pig* registers an ongoing sense of alienation and fragmentation. Set against the backdrop of the Indonesian anti-Chinese upheavals of 1998, the film depicts several disconnected stories, that privilege confusion and disorientation over unity and integration. The film is centered on three generations of a Chinese Indonesian family, and also incorporates the stories of several other indigenous characters, that are marginal figures in society.

Linda, the girl who eats firecrackers, is the youngest member of the Chinese family. She has been taught to walk with her head down to avoid the abuse from the local indigenous people, in case she is recognized as a Chinese. Her mother, Verawati, is a former national badminton player, who quit her profession after an Indonesian boy questioned her nationality during a match between Indonesia and China. Linda's father, Halim, is a blind dentist, who longs to migrate to the United States by entering America's green card lottery. And lastly, there is Linda's grandfather, who she addresses as "Opa", (which is Dutch for "grandpa") and who we learn has had three different names since the Dutch colonial period.

Among the other cast of characters, there is Cahyono, Linda's Indonesian childhood friend, who has been mistaken as a Chinese Indonesian due to his fair complexion (a distinctive Chinese feature). He works as a video editor in his own studio. There is also Salma, Halim's dental assistant and mistress. Her dream is to gain fame through participating in the televised reality show *Planet Idol*. In order to fulfill her dream, Salma requires the assistance of Romi and Yahya, a gay couple, who ironically wear official government uniforms, and who come to Halim's dental clinic for treatment. Apart from these eight characters, there is also a symbolic figure; the tethered pig, that is left alone in the middle of an open field, against a withered landscape. The pig is emblematic of the sense of restriction imposed on Chinese Indonesians by the government. Presented in a highly fragmented manner, cutting back and forth between these disparate characters, the narrative of *Blind Pig* makes it perhaps the most "accented" film to emerge from a minority filmmaker in the Southeast Asian region.

Thematically, the film considers the ramifications of ethic discrimination, the experience of uprootedness and the difficulty of managing an ambiguous cultural

identity in the post-New Order period. While *Blind Pig* may, on one level, broadly represent the voices of Chinese Indonesians in the post-*reformasi* era, on another level, the film is also heavily shaped by the filmmaker's own personal experiences of growing up as a Chinese in Indonesia. These personal experiences are crucial to understanding both the style and content of Edwin's films. This is an area of Edwin's film practice that calls upon us to return to more specific characteristics of Naficy's theory of accented cinema. In laying out the general characteristics of accented films, and in delineating the differences between exilic, diasporic, postcolonial and ethnic films, Naficy discusses the role of self-inscription by the filmmaker in the formation of these overlapping categories. He makes an interesting distinction between fictional feature films and experimental films. Naficy argues that in his research he discovered a tendency among exilic filmmakers towards fictional feature films, which "are often made by older émigré filmmakers" (2001, p 21). In contrast, he writes that "the experimental films and videos are sometimes more diasporic than exilic, and are made by a younger generation of filmmakers, who have been born or bred in diaspora" (Naficy, 2001, p. 21). Importantly, for this study of Edwin's *Blind Pig*, the diasporic "experimental films also tend to inscribe autobiography more, or more openly, than the feature films" (Naficy, 2001, p. 21). Although *Blind Pig* is a feature film, as we will see, structurally, the film exhibits many of the "experimental" techniques established in Edwin's short films, as discussed in the last chapter. In addition, the film is underpinned by numerous autobiographical elements, most of which are embodied by the central character, Linda. Indeed Edwin has asserted that "I think I put a lot of myself subconsciously into Linda, the firecracker girl", although he adds that the film as a whole reflects his broader experience, and each character is inspired by an incident that he encountered at some point in his own life (Rayns, 2008).

This central character, Linda, stands in for Edwin's own generation of Chinese in Indonesian society. Edwin has said that she represents his own feelings of "lostness" (personal communication, 2013) and this becomes most evident in a scene in which she eats firecrackers. During the film, Linda is featured on a reality television show for her ability to eat firecrackers, much like one would eat an American hotdog. While the host of the show is enthusiastic about her ability, Linda remains emotionless throughout her performance, as if she is numb to the surrounding environment. As she puts the firecracker in her mouth and lights it up, her unresponsive expression contrasts starkly with that of the host's, whose loud roaring builds the intensity of the scene, until audiences finally hear the loud explosion of the firecracker. Presented as the key image of the film (and also used on the film poster), the scene emblematises Edwin's perspective on the condition of the Chinese in Indonesia. For Edwin, the exploding firecracker expresses his feelings of uneasiness, paranoia, insecurity and confusion. Edwin states "I've had this feeling in my head for a long time" and the image "sums up the feeling that being Chinese in Indonesia is to be someone who is waiting for something to blow up" (Edwin, 2006). The explosiveness of the firecracker is set in stark contrast to Linda's emotionless expression, which points to the feeling of numbness experienced by Chinese Indonesians, in reaction to the discrimination and bigotry experienced in their home country. The scene works to metaphorically represent this pain and the perceived state of tension.

This metaphorical imagery is intensified by the particular significance of the firecracker in Chinese culture. In the mythology surrounding the device, the colour red and the sound created by its explosion are thought to be able to scare off a monstrous beast. The *Nian* monster is fabled as preying upon human beings on the eve of Chinese New Year (Yuan, 2016). The firecracker is used as a signifier of Chineseness, not only

in Edwin's film, but also for the Chinese community around the globe. The act of eating firecrackers by Linda thus signifies both the suppression and re-emergence of Chinese identity. Yet, the explosion of the firecrackers in Linda's mouth, suggests a mounting and an excessive internal pressure that could lead to injuries or even fatality. This threatening dimension of the firecracker thus means that it also invokes fear and insecurity.

Structured around the filmmaker's life-long experience of being Chinese in Indonesia, *Blind Pig* also depicts Edwin's childhood via the story-line of the young Linda and her friendship with her Indonesian friend, Cahyono. This is depicted in a series of flashbacks that intermittently disrupt the flow of the present-day narrative. The disjointed cutting between the past and the present produces a sense of confusion, that adds to the fragmented narrative structure. In these flashbacks, young Linda and Cahyono go to the same school. They often walk with their heads down to avoid eye contact or being spotted by the local street bullies, but inevitably, they become the target of such aggression. Cahyono is mistaken for a Chinese because he is walking with Linda. The bullies intimidate them with taunts such as, "Are you human beings or pigs?" As Cahyono is cornered and beaten up by the bullies, Linda uses firecrackers to frighten them away, a strategy that, over time, she develops into her sideshow trick. Here, the local indigenous boys are framed as the monstrous beasts, or *Nian,* of the Chinese legend. However, the incident causes Cahyono and Linda to be separated, when Cahyono's parents transfer him to a public school, where there are fewer Chinese Indonesian students. The flashback sequence is an inscription of Edwin's personal experience of his teenage years, when he walked to school with his sister. The filmmaker recalls:

> … When I was a child, people were throwing stones at me because I'm Chinese […] I always go home with my sister, who [looks] so Chinese, so people always harass her […] we [would] just run, and we would try to find a way where we won't see any people, because we always felt unsafe when there were people around us […][I remember] that kind of feeling …
>
> (Edwin, 2006)

This "structure of feeling" not only influences the narrative development, but also other aspects of the film. This sense of alienation is profoundly expressed in the non-linear narrative structure, or what the filmmaker himself calls "mosaic-like" story telling (personal communication, 2013). The fragments of the story are put together, like the assemblage of the small pieces of a mosaic. Fragmentation and a feeling of distress permeate this film. This is reflected in the setting of a dark, haunted warehouse that, ironically, Linda and Cahyono use as a safe hideout. In the film, when adult Cahyono and Linda are reunited in the abandoned warehouse, Cahyono says "I think this place is still haunted." But Linda only replies, "that's okay", as she playfully puffs out a smoke ring from her cigarette. Both Linda and Cahyono appear to be calm and peaceful in the haunted warehouse, as opposed to their uneasiness in other public spaces.

Such scenes uncover Edwin's autobiographical self-inscription in *Blind Pig*. They re-enact his fear, confusion, ambivalence and his sense of multiple identities that were a part of his own experience of growing up Chinese in Indonesia. According to Naficy, self-inscription is practiced in various ways by accented filmmakers. Often the directors appear visually or orally in the film as themselves, other times they may be inscribed into the film as fictional characters (Naficy, 2001, p. 277). While Edwin takes the latter approach in *Blind Pig*, his identification is not limited to Linda. Edwin's

experience is also seen reflected in Cahyono, who may also be perceived as the on-screen representation of the filmmaker's sister.

Apart from inscribing Edwin's own experience into the film through the character of Linda (and by extension his sister's experience through the character of Cahyono), the film also depicts the filmmaker's father in the figure of Halim (Linda's father). This is a good example of what Naficy calls the "self-reflexive interweaving of the filmmaker's own biography" (Naficy, 2001, p. 271). In Naficy's theory of accented cinema, performative strategies are often adopted by minority filmmakers "as [a] creative means of fashioning new and empowered identities that counter their sociopolitical subalternity and cultural marginalization" (Naficy, 2001, p. 269-270). These performative strategies rely on duality or doubling, which is a projection of the self, whilst the "double" may manifest as the friend, the enemy or even as an imaginary person (Naficy, 2001, p. 270-271). This performative strategy of the double is clearly at work in the character of Halim. He functions as a projection of Edwin's father and can be seen as a potent figure for mediating the state of ambiguity and uncertainty, experienced by the filmmaker, his father and the Chinese in Indonesia more broadly.

In *Blind Pig*, Linda's father, Halim, plays the character of the blind dentist. His vision impairment has been caused by an accident that occurs while he is performing surgery on himself. Halim intended to cut a double eyelid with a scalpel, but inadvertently blinded himself. As a result, he wears sunglasses throughout the film. The character can be read as a double for Edwin's father, who is a Chinese medical doctor and also suffers from vision impairment from failed eye surgery (Edwin, 2008). The filmmaker further affirms that, "[t]o become a Chinese medical doctor was quite difficult in those days. I could see that he was often hiding his cultural identity." Edwin further asserts that "I feel so angry [that he had to hide his cultural identity]. But I

cannot blame my father because it's difficult for him to maintain the family with this situation [ethnic tension] surrounding us" (Ryan, 2008). Edwin's personal experience with his father is inscribed into the film via Halim's storyline, although he may also be read as a doppelganger representing other Chinese Indonesians that the filmmaker has encountered. During the period of increased ethnic tensions in Indonesian, most Chinese experienced a great deal of conflict and disorientation in relation to their cultural identity. This sense of conflict is emblamatised by Halim and other characters in the film. As a result, some Chinese Indonesians attempted to hide their identity by means of camouflage, such as changing aspects of their identity, or by converting to the Islamic religion, like the character Halim in *Blind Pig*. Chinese conversion to Islam is seen as a noble act of assimilation and nationalism (Heryanto, 1998a, p. 104). However, this does not reclassify their citizenhsip or ethnicity, as they remained subjected to ethnic erasure under the New Order period (Heryanto, 1998a).

Edwin thus uses doubling and duality to embody the culturally split identity. Such a strategy underscores the issue of multiple or hybrid identities and their importance to the accented filmmaker. As Naficy claims, "accented films embody the contructedness of identity by incribing characters, who are partial, double or split, or who perfom their identities" (2001, p. 272). By engaging in the politics of identity, accented filmmakers, like Edwin, are able to exploit the possibilities of ambiguity, fragmentation and uncertainty. Aswell as operating as the "double" of Edwin's father, Halim and his botched self-performed surgery evokes the inclination of some Chinese Indonesians to conceal or change their appearance in order to assimilate. Heyes writes, "people do inflect their race through changes of their bodies" (2006, p. 273). Such cosmetic modifications include hair-straightening treatments, rhinoplasty, double-eyelid surgery and the use of skin-lightening creams. Heyes' argument regarding Michael

Jackson's cosmetic modifications to make his face appear less "black-looking" and more "white", due to the desirability of whiteness, is similar to why Halim performs double-eyelid surgery on himself (Heyes, 2006). In this instance, the dentist does this in an attempt to fit into the cultural ideal of the Indonesian indigenous majority, and such an act seems to carry the significance of the history of cultural and ethnic assimilationist policies.

The idea of the split identity is depicted visually in *Blind Pig* through the use of "double" reflections; most significantly when Halim performs his double eyelid surgery before the mirror in his dental clinic. His reflection in the mirror occupies three-quarters of the frame, resulting in an imbalanced composition in which the reflection (or doubled self) is privileged over the actual self. It could be argued that Halim's mirror reflection conjures up an imaginary of 'self' that is used by Edwin to probe his sense of multiple or split identities. The prominance on his reflection suggests a discordance between the inner self and outer selves of his character. Yet, the image also evokes a deep sense of ambiguity, observed in his uncertainty and hesitation in performing the slit. In his interpretation of the Doppelgänger, doubling and duplicity, Naficy notes, "their insides may feel ambivalent and unstable as they shift and waver between multiple self-perceptions, identities and cultures, while on the outside their bodies may give the impressoin of self-containment, stability, and cohesiveness" (2001, p. 274).

The reflection of Halim in the mirror represents a form of doubling, an ideal self envisaged by the character; an imaginary figure. Depicted as a character with a split identity, the Chinese Indonesian dentist leads a double life as an 'ideal' American by eating hotdogs and obsessively singing Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You". While his wife's devotion to her Chinese cultural identity is signified by her making pork dumplings, Halim imagines himself as a westerner and enters the US

Greencard Lottery. He is also never seen without his white laboratory coat, and *Blind Pig* continually returns to the dentists's glorification of Western culture and his fantasies of becoming an Amercian citizen. It is interesting that Halim's diasporic identity is expressed, not by a longing to return 'home', but rather dreams of an idealised elsewhere. At the same time, however, Halim is also imagining himself as a genuine Indonesian, with the film depicting his intention to convert to Islam and by his act of marrying his Indonesian mistress, Salma, who has promised to have a child with him. By the end of *Blind Pig*, Halim is married to Salma and they have a boy together. On the "inside", to use Naficy's term, he is heavily disorientated, battling with his multiple identities as a Chinese Indonesian, as a 'genuine' Indonesian and as a fantasy American citizen. Thus the double, both the reflection in the mirror that caused Halim to have the eye condition and the imaginary figure envisaged by the dentist, symbolizes the externalization of the internal facturing and doubt (Naficy, 2001, p. 274).

Every character in *Blind Pig* manages their fractured identity with a unique strategy. Halim attempts to alter his appearance, embrace American culture and adopt the Islamic faith, while his wife, Verawati, grapples with her own fractured identity by internalizing her anxiety and distress. Verawati is a retired national badminton player and she once represented Indonesia in a tournament against China. During the match, her nationality is questioned by a young Indonesian spectator, who complains of being unable to distinguish between the Chinese Indonesians and Chinese nationals. His taunts cause her to miss a shot and lose the game. The match, which is also the opening scene of *Blind Pig*, inscribes into the film the long battle waged for the legitimisation of Chinese Indonesian cultural identity. Shot in slow motion and lasting for two and a half minutes, the scene evokes a sense of physical and emotional pain and strongly alludes to the struggle endured by Chinese Indonesians in their search for identity. Khoo (2012)

critically ties the badminton match in *Blind Pig* to a real incident that happened to a Chinese Indoneisan badminton player, named Henderman, in the post-*refromasi* era. The world badminton champion was almost denied the opportunity to represent Indonesia in the Thomas World Cup in Guangzhou in 2002, because he was unable to produce the SBKRI (*Surat Bukti Kenegaraan Republik Indonesia*) proof of citizenship letter, provided to Indonesians of Chinese descent in the New Order Period, but which by then was already obsolete. This incident, and Edwin's allusion to it in *Blind Pig*, highlights the fact that the Chinese remained illegitimate citizens, even though they have inhabited the archipelago for many generations. As discussed in Chapter One, many of them have made significant contributions in the areas of trade and industries and have added much to the economic and cultural development of the country (Khoo, 2012).

As for Verawati, after this experience of discrimination and her failure at the badminton match, she immerses herself into a life of domesticity; repetitively making pork dumpling and watching Christian evangelist preachers on television. However, she continues to wear the Indonesian badminton Jersey. Her commitment to the deadening routine of making dumplings, combined with her languidness and apathy, encapsulates her sense of uncertainty and ambivalence. Affected by history, her past experience clearly shapes her emotion in the present. Edwin uses tight composition, static framing and a clustered *mise en scéne* to create a mood of constraint and claustrophobia. Not only does this help to express Verawati's emotion, this visual technique corresponds closely with Naficy's idea of the "closed chronotope", another characteristic of accented cinema that we can locate in *Blind Pig*.

The scenes in *Blind Pig* are consistent with the spatial and temporal aspects of Naficy's "closed chronotope" schema. As he explains, "the spatial aspect of the closed

form in the mise-en-scene consist of interior locations and closed settings." It is "created with dark lighting schemes that creates a mood of constriction and claustrophobia", whereas "the closed temporal form is driven by panic and fear narratives" (Naficy, 2001, p. 153). In the film, the claustrophobic domestic space, to which Verawati is confined, is the opposite of the public life we saw her lead as the nation's badminton player. She is often seen sitting in the foreground, at right edge of the frame making dumplings, with her back facing the camera, while her husband, Halim, is seated at the left edge of the frame. Their marginal positions may possibly have caused them to, both literally and metaphorically, fall out of the frame. The interior of the living room, where they sit, is untidy and cluttered with many household items. When she's alone, the film shows Verawati wander in the confined living room through the dark lighting. These scenes create a sense of claustrophobia through the use of a closed *mise-en-scène* and tight framing, as well as very few lighting sources in the house.

The relationship between Verawati and Halim further reinforces the perception of visual constriction in the film. Halim announces to Verawati that he is intending to convert to Islam, and in the same scene he also informs his wife that he wants to remarry an indigenous Indonesian woman. The failed relationship and the silence between the couple invokes an atmosphere of constratint and bitterness. On the other hand, Verawati is seemingly trapped in the past, as she continues to wear the badminton jersey, the symbol of both her freedom and failure. These strategies and the anxiety experienced by Verawati points to the closed temporal form of claustrophobia, a feature of accented cinema and one that points to a narrative underpinned by anxiety. The inscription of Edwin's autobiography into *Blind Pig* is not only confined to his personal experiences and the exploration of his father's marginalisation as a Chinese Indonesian.

Edwin also references the experiences of the Chinese community more broadly, who have lived in Indonesia for several generations. In the film, this is embodied via Linda's grandfather, Engkong ("grandfather"). Through this character, Edwin recalls the name change policies that affected the older generation of Chinese, a trauma the younger generation appear unable to fully comprehend. This can be seen in Linda's indifferent and unconcerned expression when her grandfather explains he has three different names. Over various scenes, we see him in a billiard center surrounded by his Chinese Indonesian peers, where Linda joins him occasionally. Through this setting, Edwin seems to be implying that Chinese Indonesians can only be engaged in western forms of social recreation, because much of their original cultural identity has been erased by assimilation policies. The grandfather, whose Chinese name is Wie Kian Tik, was given the name, Bernardus, while he attended a Dutch school. This multilingual Chinese Indonesian, who speaks Chinese to his friends and Indonesian to Linda, then changed his name to Suwisno Wijanarto, indicating a profound cultural assimilation, as he explains that the name is derived from Javanese culture. As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, in 1966, after Suharto came to power, his New Order (1966-1998) regime implemented various anti-Chinese laws, including the mandatory Name-Change Policy. Under the Presidential Decree, ethnic Chinese, who lived in Indonesia, were forced to adopt an Indonesian-sounding name to replace their Chinese name. Although after the *reformasi* in 1998, Chinese Indonesians were again permitted to use their Chinese names, many of them retained their Indonesian names. In *Blind Pig* Edwin explores this reconfigured Chinese Indonesian identity, and reveals that the younger generation, like Linda, may be unable to appreciate the significance of such identity erasure and the deep cultural assimilation, that took place over a long period of oppressive rule and various waves of colonization.

Exploring the Issue of Disjointed Family

While the story of *Blind Pig* is structured around the different experiences of Chinese Indonesians, within a family of three generations, the fragmentation of the family unit is an implicit theme embedded in the film. The family is represented as only fleetingly united though a single family gathering, that takes place over the course of the film. The image of the family is inserted in the film immediately after the archival footage of the ethnic riots in May 1998. The image shows Linda and her parents 'guarded' by Romi and Yahya, dressed in official government attire and military uniform respectively, sitting in the front garden of a colonial style mansion. The bright and enchanted garden setting is contrasted with a shot of the cluttered and suffocating interior of the family home, and the dilapidated warehouse in which Linda and Cahyono often seek refuge. In the following family scene, Linda packs her luggage, while Halim and Verawati watch images of the riot on the television. The film implies that Linda is on the verge of fleeing the country, just as many Chinese Indonesians did in response to the riots. Ignatius Wibowo explains that during the political turbulence of this time, many Chinese, fearful of the impending economic crisis, moved their capital out of Indonesia from 1997 (2001, p. 125). The horrific violence of the May riots also spurred Chinese to physically flee the country with their families (Wibowo, 2001, p. 126)

Significantly, the luggage that Linda is packing can be understood in terms of the symbolic nature of travel, and traveling identity, in relation to Naficy's characterisation of accented film. According to the theorist, "journeys, real or imaginary, form a major thematic thread in the accented films" (2001, p. 3). The image of Linda packing can thus be read in terms of that Naficy calls "outward journeys of escape" (Naficy, 2001, p. 3) While Linda never actually flees the country in *Blind Pig,*

nonetheless, this scene signifies the family's mobile identity and suggests the impermanent nature of their place in Indonesia. Many Chinese Indonesians migrated for the safety of their families during this time and made homes in Australia, Singapore and Malaysia (Nonini, 2006). Through an ethnographic approach, Donald Nonini recounts the experiences and mobilities of Chinese Indonesians, from the poor to the elite, who migrated to Australia in the aftermath of the May violence. Interestingly Nonini underscores the fact that transnational Chinese Indonesians maintained a "passionate attachment to Indonesia" (2006, p. 224). Conceivably, by showing Linda's preparations but not her actual departure Edwin is expressing his passionate attachment to the country.

The two pseudo-government officers, who appear in the family scene, symbolize the fact that the Chinese were often subjected to restrictions imposed upon them by government authorities. The image evokes the alienation experienced, not only by the filmmaker, but Chinese Indonesians at large. As previously discussed, in the New Order era, the Chinese had been labelled as *non-pribumi* (non-indigenous), and they were also identified as WNI (*warganegara Indonesian* or non-Indonesian citizen) - an abbreviation that was commonly used to refer to Indonesian citizens of foreign descent. Charles Coppel criticizes WNI as artificial and non-realistic (Coppel, 1983, p. 3). Both identifications caused Chinese Indonesians to be treated as second-class citizens and meant they were subjected to restrictions imposed against the practice of their Chinese culture, religion and language. Cooper's critiques of WNI is acknowledged by Chang-Yau Hoon, a cultural theorist, who also stresses that WNI highlighted the "alien-ness" of Chinese Indonesians from the perspective of indigenous Indonesians (Hoon, 2006).

The scenic courtyard shot thus suggests an imagined home or a utopia for the family, who remains estranged; both from each other and the nation to which they

supposedly belong. The details in this scene indicate another feature of accented filmmaking, regarding Naficy's theorization of "open chronotopes." The spatial nature of the open form "is represented in a mise-en-scene that favors external locations and open settings and landscapes, [as well as] bright natural lighting" (Naficy, 2001, p. 153). The temporal dimension of the open chronotope is that they are "imbued with structures of feeling that favor continuity, introspection, and retrospection" (2001, p. 153). The exterior location of the courtyard scene demonstrates Naficy's idea of the "open chronotope" and its relationship to the idea of utopia. This scene in *Blind Pig* depicts this characteristic, providing an imagined or ideal home for Linda's family.

The brutal riots, shown prior to the idylic picture of the family, indicate that Linda and her family remain entrapped by the ethnic unrest of their country. While the older generations, like Linda's grandfather, conserved his Chinese cultural identity by socialising with his Chinese peers, her father decided to assimilate by converting to Islam and re-marrying. Linda, on the other hand, is the third generation and she negotiates this split identity through yet another strategy. With a skill that she learns from her grandfather when she is young, Linda uses firecrackers as a form of weaponry. The different generational approaches to grappling with this issue of Chinese Indonesian identity, bring about further division in the family home.

The themes of family fragmentation and disintegration, combined with narrative fragmentation are obviously not new in Edwin's filmmaking practice. As established in the previous chapter, similar thematic concerns and narrative structures are present in his short films. While *Blind Pig* is predominantly concerned by the issue of identity disorientation, family disconnection is also depicted. As in his short films, Edwin challenges the idea of an ideal family unit in the New Order period, that consists of two children (boys or girls) and the parents to the children (Sasono, 2012). Eric Sasono

(2010), an Indonesian film critic, provides a good account of Edwin's approach to the family unit and how the director defies this romanticized notion of the perfect family. The filmmaker previously highlighted the issue of poor communication in a domestic setting in his short film, *A Very Slow Breakfast* (2003). In addition, in *Kara, the Child of a Tree* (2005), Edwin constructed the image of the ideal family only then to represent its literal and metaphoric fragmentation, when Kara's mother was struck by the statue of Ronald MacDonald. Similarly *in A Very Boring Conversation* (2006), the family consists merely of a mother and a daugther, who are emotionally and geographically distanced. If a family unit is presented in the ideal manner – a father, a mother and a son - such as in *Dajang Soembie* - the family members are problematised, such as the father being part-animal. The concept of the fragmentary family persists in *Blind Pig*. The disintegration of the family is fundamentally caused by the difficult experiences encountered by the family members, yet the state of silence that exists between the family members – the father, the mother and the daughter – only serve to deepen this fracture.

The concept of the fragmented family is closely interwoven with the key issue of the split cultural identity in *Blind Pig*. In this family, there is a strange distance between Halim and Verawati, with the husband speaking directly and insensitively to . his wife about his plan to convert to Islam, and later his intention to remarry. The two scenes are shot in the same setting deliberately to re-emphasize the filmmaker's deep concern with these issues. In both scenes, that consist of only two shots and minimal dialogue, Verawati's silence illustrates her submissive role. We have seen a similar portrayal of a mother figure in *A Very Slow Breakfast,* in which the career mother is depicted as a shadowy figure and emotionally distant from her family. In *Blind Pig*, Verawati searches for her sense of belonging, by engaging with the Christian

Evangelical television program and making dumplings. Despite her despair she shows no emotion when her husband expresses his intention to remarry and convert to Islam. The distance between the couple intensifies the overall fragmentation of the family and ultimately leads to it becoming completely dysfunctional. The absence of their daughter, Linda, and the fact that Verawati and Linda are rarely seen together on screen, further points to the issue of the fractured family. Like his short films, *Blind Pig* continues to scrutinize the construction of the family unit in Indonesian society.

In *Blind Pig*, there is no affection between the husband and wife, rather they appear more as strangers to each other. Halim is affectionate to his dental assistant and mistress, Salma, who he often sings with in the clinic. In order to please Salma, Halim even engages in a threesome sexual performance with the gay couple, Romi and Yahya. In return, the couple promise to assist Salma in her quest to win the *Planet Idol* reality TV singing competition, while Salma vows to marry Halim and give him a son. Khoo reads this strange triadic relationship as the condemnation of a corrupt political system involving: the Indonesian government, the overpowering Indonesian military and the Chinese Indonesians who have often been victimized by it (Khoo, 2010, p. 144). Setijadi-Dunn claims that the scene is a political allegory that implies that "the ethnic Chinese are always 'doubly screwed' by the state and the military" (2013, p. 72). The scene takes place in the dental clinic that is adjacent to Halim's house and Linda witnesses the scene of her father being sodomised. She is clearly perturbed by what she sees, as the film shows her wandering aimlessly in the house like a lost soul. In the context of family fragmentation, the incident not only disturbs Linda that her father is victimized by governmental authorities, but she is also confronted and confused by her father's sexual identity and moral misconduct. A form of nihilism is essentially present in Edwin's film, with the theme of incest running throughout his oeuvre from *A Very*

Slow Breakfast to *Dajang Soembi* and *Blind Pig* (Sasono, 2012). As relationships are ruptured, the family becomes fractured. *Blind Pig* depicts a significant lack of *family guanxi,* compared to what is presented in the indigenous-made, Chinese themed films discussed in Chapter Two.

Linda, for example, never experiences a sense of belonging in her home. The only time audiences witness the adult Linda in the family home is immediately after she witnesses the sodomization of her father, an experience that is shown to deepen her mental state of confusion and intensify her feelings of uneasiness. For Linda, 'home' is an illusion and the family unit provides no sense of connectivity. Edwin refuses to reproduce an ideal family *guanxi,* as reflected in the Chinese films made by the indigenous filmmakers. Family disjointedness in *Blind Pig* thus signifies the metaphorical expression of national disintegration and the failure of the project of racial assimilation, where political power, religious homogenisation and self-interest are the core values.

Family disintegration is also explored via the distant relationship between the mother and Linda, who prefers the company of her grandfather and father. Edwin tends to underplay the role of the mother in his films, they appear to be absent or emotionally paralysed. In *Blind Pig*, although the role of the mother is not significant, the lack of support and exchange between mother and daughter forms the basis of Edwin's representation of a dysfunctional family. The mother and daughter are never seen together in the film, apart from the symbolic family scene, in which the three members are depicted together outside the colonial house, guarded by the state officials. This profound lack of connection between mother and daughter, wife and husband, means the family can never function harmoniously or supportively.

In *Blind Pig*, Linda (during both her childhood and her adulthood) is often seen spending time with her grandfather at the billiard centre, where she learns about the history of Chinese marginalization and the experiences of his generation, including his many (and enforced) changes of name. It is from her grandfather that Linda learns the vital skill of protecting herself by using firecrackers. Occasionally, they are seen in the Indonesian market doing grocery shopping, like other Indonesians. The filmmaker stresses these inter-generational relationships in order to show the long settlement of Chinese Indonesians and their hybrid identity, as well as representing the way in which cultural identity is inherited from one generation to another. The emphasis on kinship, or family *guanxi,* between the grandfather and Linda, is significant as the lineage connection is a reference to Linda's ethnic origins and a verification of her cultural identity. The kinship tie in *Blind Pig* has, however, skipped a generation. Linda represents a young generation attempting to re-connect with a past of which she has virtually no knowledge, while her parents seem to suffer a kind of amnesia with regards to their Chinese cultural heritage. They have been assimilated, but at the expense of their cultural identities, as well as their family unity. When her grandfather passes away, Linda appears to become more alienated from her cultural identity, entrapped in a society to which she feels little connection. The film shows Linda wandering the city in a sequence of disjointed images. Linda asks her grandfather if he wants his remains to be cremated, buried or scattered in the ocean when he passes away and he replies "it is the same, don't waste your thoughts on it." Linda spreads the ashes into the ocean, standing by the seaport together with her friend, Cahyono, and she is clearly saddened by her grandfather's passing. Linda pays respect to her grandfather with a moment of silence at the seaport, instead of the traditional Chinese ancestor worship, as discussed in Chapter 2. The indigenous filmmakers may have restored Chinese traditional culture

to Indonesians screens, but Edwin's *Blind Pig* highlights a very different reality of Chinese experience in Indonesia.

The seaport, essentially a transnational site, again evokes the idea of 'journeying', a major thematic preoccupation that characterizes accented films. Naficy explains the importance of a transnational site as a "thirdspace chronotrope." He writes, "the thirdspace chronotrope involves transitional and transnational sites, such as borders, airports, and train stations, and transportation vehicles" (2001, p. 154). These sites are curcial in the formation of the "narrative of homecoming". The image of the seaport in *Blind Pig* is an expression of border-crossing and freedom, and thus operates as a "thirdspace chronotrope", which allows for the imagined homecoming or border crossing of Linda and her family.

The spreading of the grandfather's ashes in the ocean, as Linda and Cahyono look out to sea, symbolizes the longing for freedom not so much the desire for physical travel but a freedom from the liminal space of split identity. Liminality is a state of in-betweenness and ambiguity, as it applies to the reconstruction of identity, particularly one that can be observed in the hybrid identity of Chinese Indonesians. The concept is explained by Homi Bhabha (1994) as the negotiation of cultural identity that can occur across differences of race, class, gender and cultural tradition. Bhaba writes, "it is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjectivity and collective experiences of nationness, community interest or cultural value are negotiated." (1994, p. 2). Liminal space is a hybrid site that witnesses the production and reflection of cultural meaning. In *Blind Pig,* Linda, Halim and Verawati, as well as the grandfather, are represented as occupying a liminal space, or living in the third space, between two cultures or at the peripheries and margins of both cultures. They often find themselves not fully accepted by Indonesian society, yet at the

same time alienated from their ethnic origins. Situated in this liminal, in-between space, the Chinese Indonesian characters of *Blind Pig*, are subjected to ethnic marginalization and alienation. Although, in the post-Suharto era, expressions of Chineseness are no longer restricted (with a policy of multiculturalism), this does not, however, guarantee the acceptance of ethnic Chinese by the indigenous Indonesian community. Hoon explains, "the stereotype of the Chinese held by pribumi Indonesians has never changed", and "Chinese Indonesians continue to be regarded as *pendatang* (migrants) regardless of how many generations they have lived in the archipelago" (Hoon, 2007, p. 313).

On the other hand, the scattering of the ashes into the ocean could also be read as a symbolic gesture of returning to homeland, especially with regards to the older generation of diasporic Chinese migrants in Indonesia. But for Linda's grandfather, who is the only character with a living memory of the Chinese homeland, the desire for an imagined return to China is not the utmost priority, after living his entire life in Indonesia. As discussed in Chapter Two, a seaport also figures in the film, *The Photograph* (2017). Similarly to the scene in *Blind Pig*, the transitional site allows for an imagined return to homeland. The site also provides a locale for a reconnection with kin, however, Edwin's treatment of kinship connection is quite distinct from that depicted by the indigenous filmmaker, Nan Achnas. *The Photograph* represents a profound connectivity with Chinese cultural identity, illustrated in the close kinship tie with the descendants. The indigenous filmmaker seems to see Chinese of the older generation as, what Hoon describes, as "culture gatekeepers" (Hoon, 2007, p. 91). Edwin, on the other hand, as a part of the younger generation of Chinese Indonesians, adopts a different view of his Chinese cultural identity, as a result of his hybridity and

his multiplicity of identity. Nonetheless, like Nan Achnas, Edwin reveals an ongoing preoccupation with the state Chineseness in Indonesia.

Fragmented Narrative

Reflecting the themes of disjointed family and disoriented identity, the narrative of *Blind Pig* is constructed in a heavily fragmented manner. The diegesis of the film features the stories of eight characters but it is structured in an arbitrary and non-sequential manner. Edwin establishes a personalized narrative pattern that expresses his feelings of disorientation and conveys his sense of uneasiness of being a Chinese in Indonesia. The diegesis is made up of seven major segments (indicated by the presence of intertitles) that serve to establish the story of each character. With minimal dialogue, a feature that Edwin established in his short films, *Blind Pig* instead speaks to its viewers through its potent visuals. The application of intertitles is also a common filmic strategy adopted by the filmmaker – influenced in part by the aesthetic of his silent short film, *Dajang Soembie.* In *Blind Pig* the intertitles serve to introduce the characters and their relationships, and without such prompts, viewers may be unable to decipher the characters' connections and relationships. To some extent, the intertitles work to link the disjointed narrative fragments in *Blind Pig*, but the divergent lives of the characters are played out in a non-linear fashion, a strategy that serves to further deepen the sense of narrative incoherence. Chapter Three referenced an interview with Edwin, by Tony Rayns, in which the filmmaker expresses his rejection of conventional storytelling methods, because of the way in which he privileges experience and emotion (Rayns, 2008). The subjective aspects of his feelings thus inform the fragmented narrative structure of *Blind Pig*.

The first part of the film depicts the different cultural agendas of each character (Chinese or non-Chinese) and the strategies they have developed to cope with their identity issues. In this first quarter of the film (about twenty-five minutes), each character's life events (both past and the present) are shown concurrently. For instance, the stories of adult Linda (approximately 20 years of age) in the 'present' narrative and the experiences of young Linda (approximately eight years of age) are depicted concurrently as two different narratives. To a certain degree, the stories of young Linda and adult Linda can be misconstrued by the viewer, to be two unrelated. In the film, adult Linda is introduced, via the intertitles, as "the girl who eats firecrackers", as she is filmed by the reality TV crew in her house. Audiences then witness a flashback to the young Linda in the same room (approximately eight years old), singing the song "I Just Called to Say I Love You" with her father. In another instance, Halim, who is in the same white medical coat throughout the film, further disrupts our ability to distinguish past from present, since there are no visible signs of his having aged or time having left its mark on him.

The distinction between past and present is deliberately blurred throughout *Blind Pig*. Another example is the scene in which young Linda and Cahyono (both at about 8 years old) are seen eating Chinese fried cake at the bridge, captured in a long static shot, with a view of the Chinese dominated city, Surabaya. A similar shot, reveals an adult Cahyono searching for Linda at the same location later in the film. This scene depicts the unaltered discrimination experienced by Chinese Indonesians over the years and the incessant sense of insecurity experienced by Indonesians with Chinese features. By depicting past and present in virtually the same locations and with the same framing, Edwin challenges the concept of linear time. Focusing on the ordeals of Chinese

Indonesians across several decades, the only point of continuity in Edwin's film is the representation of the harsh treatment of the Chinese in Indonesia.

Indeed, Linda's non-Chinese friend, Cahyono is also often maltreated and beaten for his resemblance to an individual of Chinese origin. We even see Linda visiting Cahyono in his editing suite –working on footage of the riots. By representing a victim of the riots viewing footage of riots, Edwin self-reflexively gestures to the nature of representing history and cultural identity. This is not merely an example of using flashbacks to blur the line between the past and present, but rather a unique cinematic style that underpins his unconventional storytelling. The non-linear narrative technique thus reinforces the highly disjointed narrative structure. Most of the events are shown in a non-chronological order and viewers are expected to actively find meaning from the scattered information.

Edwin's approach to non-linear storytelling reveals an atemporal logic. In *Blind Pig* the stories of each character progress in parallel and indicate the filmmaker's attempt to challenge chronological narrative structures. In their influential essay, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit indicate that time does not exist in narrative structure, "or at least it only exits functionally, as an element of a semiotic system: time does not belong to discourse proper, but to the referent" (Barthes & Duisit, 1975, p. 252). Thus, time in narrative is understood as semiological time, and any sense of 'true' time is a referential illusion (Barthes & Duisit, 1975, p. 252). In *Blind Pig*, the atemporal structure of the narrative is evident through the simultaneous appearance of the past in the present, which is only made explicable by the fact that the flashbacks function as referents to the present. The atemporal structure of the film is only comprehensible when related to the experience of the filmmaker's childhood and his emotional and psychological reaction to the present.

The past experience of the filmmaker, accrued over the decades of his life, adds to his feeling of ambiguity in the present. Edwin's biography thus regulates the logic of fragmentation and non-chronological narrative structure in *Blind Pig*.

Edwin also uses the character's past experiences as a way of defining the key aspects of the characters in the present: the young girl who uses firecrackers to frighten off her enemies grew up to be Linda, the woman who possesses the special skill of eating firecrackers; the blind dentist's botched surgery to change his facial features becomes a key part of Halim's zealous attempts at assimilation; Verawati's failure in the international badminton competition becomes a major part of her emotional dysfunction and thus her sense of insecurity in the present.

These incidents in the film are not edited together in a consecutive manner, nor given the emphasis here of cause and effect. Instead the fragmented narrative structure allows Edwin to place even greater emphasis on the characters' fragmented identities, which reflects his own feelings of alienation and liminality. Yet again the fragments of the narrative are peppered with the material of his own experience, with each fragment, however trivial, sutured with biographical experience.

Edwin's *Blind Pig* represents the height of his experimentation with fragmented storytelling. The accented aspects of the film are characterized by the personal experience of the filmmaker himself. Many of the features of the film make sense when they are explained in the context of the filmmaker's experience. The tethered pig in the withered landscape points to the trials of the Chinese, grappling with the issue of identity in Indonesia. In the next chapter, the theme of confinement is examined in relation to *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012), in which Edwin adopts a more subtle cinematic strategy to tackle the problem of cultural identity.

Chapter Five

Interstitial Filmmaking, Spatial Displacement and Quasi-Family Ties in *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012)

In the last two chapters, I considered Edwin's accented film practice, in the context of Chinese Indonesian experience and identity. I argued that this prominent Chinese Indonesian filmmaker evokes elements of his cultural identity via the themes of displacement, fragmentation and family disintegration. Also discussed was the way in which Edwin leans heavily on his biography, another key characteristic of accented films. While some of his short films, and most principally his first feature film, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008), do possess references to Edwin's Chinese ethnicity, this is vastly different to the kinds of Chinese stories being told by indigenous Indonesian filmmakers, discussed in Chapter Two. For Edwin, Chinese identity tends to be connected to the problematic history of Indonesia and the decades of discrimination faced by Chinese Indonesians under Suharto's New Order government.

This chapter examines Edwin's second feature film, *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012). In contrast to his first feature, which included some recognisably Chinese characters and cultural practices, this film eschews almost all traces of visible Chinese identity. Instead, this film is interested in questions of spatial displacement and the potential of forging quasi- family ties that are not based on ethnic or racial identity. Here Edwin explores the bonds that form from a common experience of displacement, endured by a range of marginalised people. This chapter thus argues that Edwin's accented style indirectly explores the ongoing implications of the long-term marginalisation, erasure, displacement and trauma of Indonesia's Chinese community. In *Postcards*, Edwin also extends the notion of displacement to include those

experiencing dispossession as a result of urban development. As an internally exiled, diasporic filmmaker, Edwin is uniquely placed to reflect on these issues. Like his previous films, *Postcards* also evidences Edwin's continuing work within an interstitial mode of production and, more specifically, the adoption of, what Hamid Naficy has called, "chronotopes of imagined homeland" (Naficy, 2001, p. 153). In Chapter Four, the notion of "chronotopes" was explored in a schematic manner to illustrate how the *mise-en-scène* of the interior and exterior, emblematised ideas of alienation. Chapter Five, however, provides a more in-depth examination of the concept in an attempt to analyse the notion of spatial displacement and interstitiality in Edwin's filmmaking.

Edwin's Interstitial Mode of Production

In the previous two chapters, it was established that Edwin works predominantly in an interstitial mode of production. As discussed, the two major aspects of Edwin's interstitiality can be evidenced through the multiple funding sources of his films and in the various roles he plays in the productions. This enables greater control over both the authorship and the budgets of his projects, and ensures that his personal perspective is brought to the screen. Like his previous film, Edwin's second feature, *Postcards from the Zoo* (*Kebun Binatang*, 2012) exhibits numerous qualities of the interstitial mode of production. Again, the financial support of the film was gathered from multiple local and international sources. In the various aspects of production, Edwin performed multiple roles to shape the narration, artistic vision and aesthetics of the internationally acclaimed feature. He also worked with the same group of production crews. These personnel included his long-term collaborator, Indonesian producer, Meiske Taurisa (and the co-founder of Babibuta Film) as well as several additional international co-

producers, such as the Hong Kong and Malaysian based, Lorna Tee, as well as the German based, Thanassis Karathanos and Karl Baumgartner (Pallas Film, Germany). Consistent with his previous films, Edwin again worked with Ladya Cheryl (the actress leading most of his films), and Nicholas Saputra, who appeared previously in his short films. Edwin also employed his favourite key creative personnel to work with him again in *Postcards from the Zoo* – Sidi Salleh (cinematographer), Herman Panca (editor) and Daud Sumolang (co-writer of *Postcards,* who previously wrote the screenplay of *Dajang Soembi*). The influence of the filmmaker, as well the multi-source financing, are the two distinct features of the accented cinematic mode, and both are present in the production of *Postcards*.

One significant characteristic of the interstitial production mode is the financial provision under which it operates. With a reputation established on the European and Asian film festival circuit, as a result of the success of his first feature, Edwin gained financial support from various international funding bodies for the production of *Postcards*. In particular, monetary and non-monetary sponsorships were obtained from the Torino Film Fund, Hubert Bals Fund, Goteborg International Film Festival Fund, Sundance Institute, L'Atelier Cinefondation, Cinemart and Asian Project Market. Engagement with local and international financial support is an effective strategy to not only obtain sufficient funding, but to also ensure that the project remains relatively independent from state funding, thus allowing for greater freedom of expression. In addition, the multi-source funding from European and Asian countries also allowed for wider distribution. The film was screened at numerous international film festivals and gained distribution commercially in Germany, Austria, Korea and Taiwan. The promotional campaign was coordinated by the German based company, The Match Factory, a world sales company dedicated to bringing art-house cinema to the

international market. As part of the world sales company's initiative, Distribution 2.0, *Postcards* became the first international independent film that received a synchronised 'Video on Demand' (VoD) release in seven European countries in 2013. The VoD release took place in France (UniversCiné), Ireland (Volta), Switzerland (UniversCiné) and Spain (Filmin), as well as in the UK (Peccadillo Pictures) Belgium (UniversCiné) and the Netherlands (Eye Film Institute). *Postcards'* highest achievement was competing in the 62nd Berlin International Film Festival Golden Bear award. Although the film was not selected as the winner, Edwin's talent, as a newly emergent Asian filmmaker was recognized when he was bestowed the Edward Yang New Talent Award at the 6th Asian Film Awards in March 2012, in Hong Kong.

Reception

Postcards from the Zoo (2012) was largely well received by foreign audiences and critics. This can perhaps be attributed to the more linear narrative structure, higher production values and carefully crafted poetics of the film, in comparison to his previous feature *Blind Pig*. In order to better understand the reviewers' appraisals of the film, the following section contains a brief synopsis of *Postcards*.

The film centres on the life of Lana (played by Ladya Cheryl). At the age of only five little Lana, (performed by Klarysa Aurelia Raditya) was abandoned at the Jakarta zoo. The film follows her as she adapts to her surroundings and grows up among the animals. She befriends the zoo's inhabitants: the tigers, giraffes, elephants and hippos. Members of the zoo's motley staff take care of the young orphan and she also befriends some of Jakarta's homeless vagrants, who take shelter in the zoo. One day, a handsome magician appears at the zoo and, the now adult, Lana becomes mesmerised

by him, in particular by his gentle touch that she experiences during his magic performance. He entices Lana to leave the zoo for the first time and to explore life beyond the walls of the enclosure. He takes her to a massage parlour where she is employed to tend to the patrons, much like she has helped to take care of the animals. Unable to adapt to a life outside the zoo, however, Lana eventually returns to what has become her 'natural' habitat, the zoo, and resumes her life among the human and animal menageries. In this way, Edwin treats the space of the zoo as one of escape and respite from the city, which is depicted as threatening and alienating. This leads the viewer to question the very meaning of 'home' and 'belonging', and in this sense Lana's zoo habitat acts as a metaphor for the diasporic experience. Lana is presented as a figure of displacement that must adapt to a new environment, much like a migrant settling into a new host country, or an animal being placed into captivity.

Reviewers noted some of these themes, for example, Triwik Kurniasari of *The Jakarta Post* claimed that the experience of living in the zoo suggested a sense of displacement, as both humans and animals were restricted from living in their natural habitats (Kurniasari, 2012). In addition, Kurniasari states that while animals, such as the giraffe, the elephant and the tiger were kept in isolation, Lana, who lived in the menagerie, learnt to adapt to diverse surroundings and ultimately 'befriended' various species of animal. This observation corresponds with Edwin's intention to blur the distinction between humans and animals, and represent both species as experiencing estrangement, abandonment, feelings of loss and a longing for touch (personal communication, 2013). *Postcards* can thus be read as the metaphoric expression of Edwin's experience of living as a Chinese Indonesian and this state of cultural adaptation.

In another review, Justin Chong, from *Variety,* discusses the film with regards to Lana's restricted life in the zoo (Justin, 2012). Chong notes that, while Lana inhabits the "Keep Safe" environment of the endangered species enclosure, the sign "Dilarang Menyentuh Binatang" or "Don't Touch the Animals" checks any physical human contact. Indeed, Lana's desire for touch is one of the ideas that inspired the filmmaker to produce the film, when he observed the lack of physical connection between humans and animals at the zoo (personal communication, 2013). This longing for touch and physical closeness is represented via a model of poetical and magical realism, as will be further discussed.

Reviewers of *Postcards* certainly identified this theme of a 'longing to be touched', overlooking the more central theme that runs throughout the film regarding a greater 'longing for home'. According to Edwin "the desire to feel at home or to know what is home" is the key concept underpinning the film (personal communication, 2013). He stresses that the idea of 'home' in *Postcards* is a state of mind (Mischie, 2013). Like *Blind Pig,* which was occupied by the issues of family separation and fragmentation, *Postcards* is, at its core, the story of a young girl abandoned by her father at the zoo. The separation of father and daughter is the main reason why Lana is deprived of human touch and why she is governed by her overwhelming longing to 'return' home. The persistent interest in the lack of family cohesion reveals that *Postcards* also needs to be examined via the concepts of family fragmentation. However, *Postcards* is less concerned with the specificity of being Chinese in Indonesia, and is interested in a more general exploration of the concepts of displacement and marginalization.

This chapter aims to discuss the notion of cultural alienation in relation to *Postcards* and how the zoo, a public space, is imagined as a 'home' and a private space

for the dislocated Lana. While Lana occupies this public place, a place visited by three million visitors a year, the zoo is ultimately her home, and has been since she was five years old. The location of the zoo is thus presented as both the public domain (an open space for visitors) and a private place ('home' to Lana), signifying Lana's rootlessness and homelessness. Meanwhile, the zoo also symbolizes the reconstitution of 'home' as a public space in Indonesia, as experienced by many Indonesians who are unable to own a home due to the rapid urban development of the metropolis city, as depicted in the film. It is primarily the treatment of contrasting public/private spaces in *Postcards* and how this underpins Edwin's accented style that will be the focus of this chapter

Accented Spatiality: A Dialectics of Displacement and Emplacement

One of the central concepts developed by Hamid Naficy in his theory of accented cinema is the treatment of space in film. In a chapter entitled "Chronotopes of Imagined Homeland", in *An Accented Cinema*, Naficy considers what he calls "a dialectics of displacement and emplacement" (p 153, 2001) and in doing so he identifies two contrasting spatial tropes that have emerged among accented films. He refers to "open" and "closed" forms of spatiality. As discussed in the previous chapter, Naficy writes that the open form is typified by such characteristics as external locations, open settings and bright, natural lighting (p. 153). In contrast, Naficy writes that:

> The spatial aspects of the closed form in the mise-en-scène consist of interior locations and closed settings, such as prisons and tight living quarters, a dark lighting scheme that creates a mood of constriction and claustrophobia, and characters who are restricted in their movements and perspective by spatial,

> bodily, or other barriers. Tight shot composition, static framing, and barriers within the mise-en-scène and the shots' foreground suggest closedness. (p. 153)

We have already discussed such closed spaces in many of Edwin's shorts and in his first feature, *Blind Pig*. In *Postcards*, we can observe examples of both open and closed forms. The zoo is primarily treated as an open form chronotope, particularly at times when the space is not accessible to the public. At these junctures, Edwin's floating, poetic camera frequently observes Lana as she wanders the pathways between the various enclosures, helping to feed and bathe the animals. The notion of the zoo as an open chronotype is introduced in the opening sequence of the film, which shows little Lana wandering the zoo in search of her father. The temporal framework of the evening setting invests the zoo with a surreal atmosphere, so that the scene closely resembles a dream sequence, making it difficult for viewers to discern whether the images are part of a dream or reality. It is the first sign that this space will take on increasingly symbolic importance as the film progresses. Lee Marshall, writer for *Screen Daily,* describes *Postcards* as "cinematic poetry", "less interested in narrative, than atmosphere and the poetry of sound and vision" (Marshall, 2012). *Postcards* is embedded with multiple layers of poetic symbolism, that are communicated via the zoo setting and its use of spatial possibilities.

In the following scenes, little Lana explores the zoo, much like other visitors during the day, while at night she inhabits the menagerie, almost becoming one of the many vagrants that also utilize the space for shelter. In such sequences, the lush greenery of the zoo's many gardens is foregrounded, while the camera meditates upon the gentle, dappled light that breaks through the trees canopies, all of which generates a sense of safety and security. In this sense, this treatment of the space comes close to

what Naficy describes as “a nostalgically reconstructed past or a lost Eden” (2001, p. 153). This Eden-like quality is emphasized by the appearance of many exotic varieties of flora and fauna, which are present in the zoo. Lana is quite literally lost, displaced from her home and family; however, the zoo becomes a utopian refuge for the young orphan. Arguably, the space of the zoo is represented as it appears to Lana. Lana’s abandonment in the zoo is thus not framed as traumatic, rather her child-like imagination allows her to experience the facility as a safe and comforting space, a feeling that continues into her adult life.

The zoo is, however, also a contradictory and transitional space. Audiences are constantly reminded that this is literally a closed space, surrounded by walls and dominated by fences and cages. It is also a space that is invaded by thousands of visitors each day. While the displaced Lana has managed to feel at home in the zoo, it is only through constant adaptation that she manages to achieve this sense of rootedness. Throughout the film, Edwin reminds us of this by metaphorically drawing parallels between Lana and the animals that have also been removed from their natural habitats, and have had to adapt to living in a limiting and restrictive environment, among other species that they would not normally encounter in the wild.

One way Edwin achieves this is through the intermittent inclusion of inter-titles bearing the names and definitions of various zoological terms. One such term is “ex-situ conservation”, which literally means “off-site conservation.” It is an ecological practice aimed at protecting endangered species, by holding them in a zoo or wildlife enclosure. In this sense, Lana is treated as an endangered species. Although the Chinese background of the actress that plays adult Lana (played Ladya Cheryl) is not emphasized, the suggestion is that if we don’t preserve certain aspects of culture and identity, like endangered animals, such traditions and practices may become extinct.

While the protective space of the zoo thus enables Lana to grow and mature, her upbringing is also marked by various absences and limitations. Extending this metaphorical dimension: the preservation of a species always comes at a cost. One of the key themes developed through the film is Lana's longing for human contact and human touch.

Throughout the film, we are reminded of this theme via the many signs around the zoo that include "Don't Touch the Animals." Despite this, Lana frequently helps the zookeepers to bathe and feed the animals. She is privileged to be able to cross the threshold denied to visitors of the zoo. In one scene, when she is still a small child, we see her longing for touch when she is enticed by the soft underbelly of the giraffe, however, being so small, this remains beyond her reach. As she grows into a woman, Lana maintains this desire for touching and being touched. The appearance of a mysterious cowboy magician (played by Nicholas Saputra) in the zoo captivates her, as he touches her lightly while performing a magic trick that produces fire flame. In this scene, the handsome magician gently caresses Lana's fingertips, then her arm and ear before he makes a quick stroke along her fingertips to create fire on his palm. The physical contact and magic tricks beguile Lana, provoking an even greater longing to be touched by another human being, a longing that cannot be truly fulfilled by the animals. This introduction to human touch by the uncanny magician entices Lana to journey beyond the safe enclosure of the zoo, where she follows him to become his assistant. In *Postcards* only human touch is capable of reconnecting Lana with the human world. Before we go on to discuss how Edwin treats the world of the city beyond the zoo, there are other spatial dimensions of the zoo that must also be considered.

In contrast to the evening scenes, when Lana is able to wander the zoo in relative freedom and privacy, the zoo is also depicted as a place that is invaded by

hoards of visitors on a daily basis and it is thus also a very public space. In this sense it functions, in terms of what Bishnupriya Ghosh and Bhaskar Sarkar refer to, as a "double space", a site that operates as a "zone of displacement" (Ghosh & Sarkar, 1995 p. 107). Drawing on Hamid Naficy's earlier work in *The Making of Exile Cultures* (Naficy, 1993), they argue that "most films about displacement establish the protagonist's identity and its destablizations through attempts at, and failures of, self-location. Places – home, streets, bridges, nations – become signifiers of the subject's transpersonal realities" (Ghosh & Sarkar, 1995 p. 103). In *Postcards*, Edwin constructs a spatial dynamic that is underscored by this notion of living in a condition of exile. According to Naficy, exiles are 'liminars" who inhabit a "slippery zone" between two "structural force-fields of the 'home' and 'host' systems" (Ghosh & Sarkar, 1995 p. 104). Lana is metaphorically exiled when she is abandoned in the unfamiliar setting of the zoo and she takes up her place in "a zone of transition", "occupied by certain communities overlapping with both travelers/tourists and exiles" (Ghosh & Sarkar, 1995 p. 104). The fact that visually the zoo is treated as both a private and public space supports this reading.

In terms of Naficy's theory of accented cinema, we might also think of the zoo as a "thirdspace chronotope", which as discussed, he identifies as "transitional and transnational sites, such as borders, airports, and train stations, and transportation vehicles such as buses, ships, and trains" (Naficy, 2001 p. 154). The zoo is such a transitional space, which Edwin depicts much like an amusement park. This is exemplified in such scenes that include the zoo train ride, the cow shaped bus that Lana and the magician ride, as well as the dinosaur themed roll-coaster ride also taken by Lana. As an inhabitant, rather than a transient visitor of the zoo, Lana's displacement from the human world is even further emphasized by her journeys on such fantasy rides.

Indeed Edwin asserts that Indonesian zoos are much like the shopping malls, tending to attract aimless people, leading individuals to an overwhelming feeling of disorientation. The filmmaker argues that such a phenomenon has emerged as a by-product of the rapid urban development of the city of Jakarta (Edwin 2012). On the one hand, the zoo attracts masses of tourists coming to consume an experience, like shoppers at a mall, however, after dark, the zoo attracts a motley collection of vagrants who, like Lana, camp behind the relative security of the zoo's high walls. In this sense, *Postcards* reflects Edwin's concern for the fast-growing Indonesian metropolitan city that pushes many lower income earners to the periphery (Edwin 2012).

In *Postcards*, Edwin explores themes of displacement that go beyond his own, personal experience of internal exile. He extends the notion of cultural alienation to include the experiences that more generally arise from the rapid socio-economic transformation of the city. Tunggul Yunianto asserts that "[m]ega-malls, high-rise apartments, office parks, and new private cities are popping up across the broader metropolitan region called 'Jakarta'" (Bunnell and Miller 2011, cited in Yunianto 2014). This commodification of urban space has led to a situation that, Yunianto describes as, both "alarming and frightening" for poorer inhabitants, as occupy the margins of the city (Yunianto 2014, p. 102). One example of the rapid re-development that has resulted in considerable displacement of the city's inhabitants was the re-development of the *Kompleks Komoyaran,* located in the northern part of central Jakarta, commencing in the 1980s. According to Tunggul Yunianto, this led to the forced clearance of the lower socio-economic groups of the city, principally the *kampong* (village or shanty) dwellers with little or no compensation (Yunianto, 2014). Under the Suharto administration, a decree was issued to rebuild the *Kompleks Kemoyaran* into an international trade centre, which was re-named the New City of

Bandar Kemayoran (*Bandar Baru Kota Kemayoran*). Surrounded by mixed socio-economic residential areas, and slums inhabited mostly by lower-income residents, who were unemployed or street vendors, the commercialization process of their residential area caused much anxiety and frustration (Yunianto, 2014, pp. 109-111). Through personal interviews with residents in the area, Yunianto recollects their experiences of marginalisation and their emotional reactions to the prospect of eviction. The residents feared that, although they may be offered employment opportunities, they would not be able to live in the future city amidst the high-rise commercial and residential buildings. As Yunianto argues, "like it or not, people will be displaced, uprooted from Komplek Kemayoran" (2014, p. 112).

In *Postcards*, this theme of urban displacement is depicted through the character of Oom Dave (played by Dave Lumenta), a homeless man that seeks refuge in the zoo. In this sense, the zoo is also figured as a kind of human menagerie, not only inhabited by the diverse collection of animals, but also by a group of various marginalised people. Oom Dave epitomizes such internal exiles, displacement by the mega-development of Jakarta. His character embodies the experience of being 'lost in transition', while the city undergoes a process of radical transformation. This rapid urban development of the city saw the emergence of a new middle class group, who largely migrated to the city to improve their livelihood (Simone & Fauzan, 2013). Meanwhile the city was also occupied by the long-term residents who were unable to be accommodated by the big development. However, as Simone & Fauzan state in their article "On the Way to Being Middle Class: The Practices of Emergence in Jakarta", both the middle classes and working classes possessed a "sense of inevitability" about the process. This theme is reflected in the film through the character of Oom Dave, who arrives at the zoo with nothing but a backpack and an umbrella. He is portrayed as a vagabond or a person

drifting from place to place. He is a member of the skilled working class, trained as an audio engineer, but he has become 'lost' amidst the rapid socio-economic changes that have impacted the city and its residents. He joins Lana in wandering around the zoo, recording the sounds of the animals, an act that helps the two to develop a strong bond. Here Edwin seems to be suggesting that displacement may be the basis for a different form of connectivity and thus it can bring individuals together. Indeed, as will be discussed, the space of the zoo provides opportunities for the development of quasi-family ties. In *Postcards*, Edwin projects his concern regarding the social and cultural development of the city of Jakarta, especially underscoring those changes that have transformed the lifestyle of young Indonesians. To a great extent the zoo can be considered a symbolic representation of the leisure malls that emerged out of the project of Indonesia's re-development and modernisation, as both sites attract leisure visitors while also perpetuating feelings of aimlessness and disorientation. Thus, the zoo acts as a site of displacement and a metaphor for the socio-cultural hazards of rapid urban development. In *Postcards* the zoo is treated simultaneously as open and closed, public and private, a space of exile and home, an enclosure and a sanctuary. It is a site of both displacement and emplacement. Lana is initially *displaced,* when she is abandoned by her father in the zoo as a small child, but she quickly adapts to her new environment and makes it her home. This complex and often contradictory treatment of the space is, according to Naficy, typical of films that deal with imagined homelands. He emphasizes that "the connotations of open, closed, and transitional forms do not reside inherently or permanently in these forms; their significance and meaning must be derived from the contexts in which they are deployed" (Naficy, 2001 p. 155).

Edwin further contextualizes, and thus complicates, the meaning of space by presenting the city in stark contrast to the already contradictory site of the zoo. It is

through this juxtaposition that both the zoo and the city are invested with additional and paradoxical meaning. As mentioned above, it is via her encounter with a mysterious cowboy magician that Lana is finally enticed to experience life outside the relative safety of the zoo. Using the inter-titles that appear intermittently throughout the film, Edwin presents this phase as her "reintroduction" to what should be her "natural" habitat: the human world outside the zoo. The city is, however, represented, at least in part, as seedy and corrupt, with the magician presenting Lana to a mobster when they first arrive. The mobster is the owner of the spa and massage parlour, where they perform their magic shows and where Lana is eventually offered a job as a masseuse, when the magician disappears unexpectedly during a magic trick.

In line with Naficy's schema of accented cinema, the city is depicted through the closed form chronotope. In the massage parlour, in particular, Edwin uses restricted framing, interior locations and harshly contrasting lighting to invoke this sense of "closedness." For example, the *mise-en-scène* of the nightclub, a part of the massage parlour and where Lana and the magician first approach the owner for an opportunity to perform at the premise, is depicted in a dark lighting scheme with a contrasting blue neon light. The naked woman that sits next to the manager and the shadowy bouncers in the background add to the sordidness of the scene. According to Tadié and Permanadeli, nightclubs, bars, spas and massage parlours are the by-product of the modernization of Jakarta, in which the growth of the metropolis city and the night life have become the major contributors to the night economy (Tadié & Permanadeli, 2015, p. 471). The biggest club in Jakarta has five floors in which various spaces co-exist, such as cafeterias, massage/prostitution parlours, dance floors and karaoke bars (Tadié & Permanadeli, 2015, p. 478). When Lana returns to the massage parlour for a job, after the magician goes missing, she sits in the interior of her shared bedroom, against the

background of the glary day-light from the window. The harsh lighting and the tight framing of this scene again add to the effect of 'closedness'.

Urban spaces, such as the massage parlour, are granted a highly dystopian and claustrophobic quality in *Postcards,* that contrasts with the semi-utopian elements of the zoo. Ironically, once 'freed' from the confines of the menagerie, Lana finds herself even more alienated and restricted, as she is assimilated into a culture of commodification and sexualisation. Despite the sordid environment, Lana appears to retain much of her innocence and she approaches and tends to the clients much like she did the animals in the zoo. Edwin draws direct parallels between Lana's massaging of her human clients and the bathing and petting of the animals. Edwin reinforces this with shot setups in the massage parlour that recall those of the zoo. Lana massages her male clients by sitting on their backs, and in such a position she seems to be able to 'control' her patron. She then bathes her client in a bathtub, showering and rubbing him in a way that evokes the process of the tiger being bathed at the zoo. The difference is that Lana seems to take more pleasure bathing the animals, than the male patrons, 'a species' that is alien to her. At one point Lana is even asked by a male patron to put on a "tiger outfit". She corrects him, however, for it is actually a leopard outfit, which transforms her into a human-cum-animal in a human world. This scene also recalls the theme that first emerged in Edwin's short film, *Dajang Soembie,* which reflected on the dark side of human (and human/animal) relationships. In this scene in *Postcards*, however, in a bid to maintain her modesty, Lana asks that the client avert his gaze while she changes. Once she has put on the leopard costume, she does not massage him but sits beside him to tell him about the origins of the giraffe. While her narration unfolds, the film cuts away to images of Lana in the zoo, surrounded by children feeding the giraffe, and visitors watching the elephants. This flashback sequence functions much like a reminiscence of

homeland, a quality of the diasporic imagination. Ironically, her re-introduction into her 'natural' habitat proves to be an alienating experience, causing her to reach for memories of her imagined homeland in the zoo. Importantly, the *imaginary* quality of her memories is emphasised by the fact that she is depicted in these flashbacks as motionless, amidst the lively activity of the zoo visitors and the upbeat music that accompanies the sequence. Here, Edwin sets up, not only a juxtaposition between the closed formal treatment of the massage parlour and the open form of the zoo, but the manner in which Lana has also become disconnected from the zoo environment and thus her imagined 'homeland'.

Just as he emphasises the spatial disparities between the parlour and the zoo through visual framing and lighting schemes, Edwin also juxtaposes different kinds of soundscapes in his construction of open and closed forms. By and large, the element of sound in the spa scenes has been reduced to focus only on the voices of the manager and senior masseur, giving instructions to the employees. Ambient sound is minimal, and thus the soundtrack is limited to diegetic sounds, such the noise of the masseurs' footfalls or the sound of water running, intercut with long periods of silence, which heightens the sense of Lana's claustrophobia and alienation. The mood in the spa also evokes Lana's loneliness and her dislocation, and ultimately her 'voicelessness' in this environment. A scene in the spa, in which Lana is waiting to be assigned a patron, exemplifies this and provides evidence of how Edwin uses sound to consolidate the closed form. The scene sees Lana in one third of the frame, against a black background that takes up the rest of the frame. In a frontal mid-shot Lana is shown in a seated position, with her head tilted uncomfortably as she attempts to watch the television that hangs above her. The sound of the television is at minimal volume: only a soft hissing can be heard. Soon, a male voice is heard calling "Number 33" over the loudspeaker.

Lana, reduced to a mere number, immediately springs up and walks to her right before she turns back, realising she has taken the wrong direction; a clear sign of her state of disorientation. The sound from her heeled shoes, that create sharp footfalls, intensifies the sense of estrangement and disorientation.

This is in contrast to the various sounds produced by nature and the zoo environment; the animals, the zookeepers and the visitors that produce a richly multi-layered and complex soundscape, made up of both diegetic and non-diegetic sounds. Music, such as the jingle that accompanies the images of the moving dinosaur wagon, the children's roller coaster ride and the children playing in the playground, imbues the zoo with a jovial and lively atmosphere. The roar of the tigers, hippos and elephants, become fundamental to Lana's character and experiences of feeling at home –in contrast to the eerie noiselessness of the spa. Thus, the sonic contrast between the two sites presents the various psychological states of the character as she moves from the open spatiality of the zoo to the closed forms of the city.

Discontinuity and Edwin's Fragmented Style

The alienating, dystopian aspects of the city are emphasised through this spatial and sonic juxtaposition. This also has the effect of investing the film with a fragmented style, particularly during the second half of the film once Lana leaves the sanctuary of the zoo. Edwin frequently cuts back and forth between scenes in the urban environment and Lana's memories of her time in the zoo. As discussed in previous chapters, Edwin's directorial style is dominated by fragmented narration, which serves to disrupt continuity. Compared with his shorts and first feature film, *Postcards* is relatively coherent in terms of narrative continuity, but it still contains traces of his fragmented

style. For instance, about twelve minutes into the film, there is an abrupt temporal shift in which we move inexplicably forward in time from the young Lana to the adult Lana. This is executed via a cut from a wide shot of Lana as a young girl in the zoo, to a mid-long shot of adult Lana dressed as a zookeeper as she walks toward the tiger enclosure. The transition is effected with little information to indicate that young Lana has grown into an adult and now works in the zoo as an animal caretaker. The filmmaker seemingly creates an impression of dislocation through the abrupt temporal ellipsis.

Although fragmentation and discontinuity are not significant elements throughout the entire film, there are key moments where Edwin introduces narrative rupture. Perhaps the most significant of these is the sudden appearance and disappearance of the cowboy magician. He first appears at the place where the night settlers gather to spend their evenings at the zoo. Lana discovers him from a distance away as he plays a magic trick by himself. Later he disappears even more abruptly than he had initially appeared, during a magic trick in which he walks into a wooden case and requests Lana to fasten it with nails before setting the case on fire. He vanishes as the fire burns down the wooden case. With his disappearance, Lana has effectively been abandoned for the second time in her life and this only amplifies her sense of displacement in the urban environment. Eventually, Lana realises that she can no longer bear living in an urban setting and so she returns to the zoo, her imagined homeland.

In the press kit for *Postcards,* Edwin states that "[fragmented narration] allows the viewer to exit the narrative, invoking or triggering memories of personal experience" (Edwin, 2012). The intercutting between Lana in the spa, serving a patron and the motionless protagonist in the zoo amidst the busy crowds, may encourage viewers to recall their own experiences of displacement. Certainly in *Postcards*, Edwin

creates moments of disjointed narrative that allow for a broad interpretation of the experience of displacement.

Quasi-Family Ties and the Idea of Home

If the zoo is depicted largely through the open spatiality of the accented form, and is suggestive of an imagined or adopted homeland for Lana, one may consider that other characteristics of home, such as family connection, may also be present within this space. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, Edwin has frequently dealt with the theme of fragmented family in his oeuvre. Here, in *Postcards*, we see him attempting to imagine the possibility of forging quasi-family ties between diversely displaced people. Aside from the intimate emotional connections Lana forges with the animals at the zoo, the protagonist also develops strong bonds with several of the characters that live and work in the zoo. These characters include Pak Maman, the long-time zookeeper, and Oom Dave, the dispossessed sound engineer that seeks shelter in the zoo. These two characters take on the roles of father and brother to Lana respectively and the formation of these quasi-family bonds leads to a reimagining of family connectivity within the context of a hybrid community.

For Oom Dave, an embodiment of the city's homeless, the zoo is initially a place to rest, cook and gather with others experiencing destitution Eventually, Oom Dave enjoys increasingly longer periods within the menagerie, making it his home via his affiliation with both Lana and Pak Maman, who lives there permanently as the zoo keeper. Oom Dave treats the open site of the zoo as his own personal space, where he can even take a nap under a tree during the day. The image of him lying surrounded by a bed of dried leaves, under an overhanging canopy, and near a man-made stream,

evokes the atmosphere of an ideal home, an image that is nonetheless complicated by the fact that the boundaries between the public and private domains are blurred. We are thus persistently reminded of the presence of the public and commodified aspects of the zoo environment, and that fact that the site operates as an *imagined* homeland, a transitional thirdspace chronotope.

For Lana, the zoo is also the site in which she was abandoned by her father and the place her blood-link family connection was severed. Yet, the location is presented as an ideal 'home' for Lana, to which she eventually returns after her journey into the outside world. .For this rootless young girl, 'home' is more than a permanent place to live, as her sense of belonging in the zoo is nurtured through the bonds she establishes with the zookeeper, the homeless inhabitants and the animals. In the finale of the film we see Lana escape the confines of the massage parlour and take the 'moo-cow' bus to return to the zoo. The film concludes with the protagonist inhaling the smells of the zoo and touching the underbelly of the giraffe, a sign of her reconnection with family and a homecoming of sorts.

As discussed earlier, Lana seeks out the experience of touch, as a way of forging family connections. Edwin explains "physical touch is Lana's link to her father and, consciously or unconsciously, she always longs to be touched" (Edwin, 2012). In the film, the magician asks Lana if he can hold her hand and she extends her hand to his without hesitation. At one point, we may believe that Lana is intrigued by the charming appearance of the young man but, the experience of isolation, loneliness and family separation means that Lana is constantly seeking out touch, and thus a deeper sense of connectivity, with others. Lana's experience of disconnection may be understood as representing the filmmaker's own feelings of being entrapped in a state of in-betweenness. The longing for a kinship connection in the film, however, is not fulfilled

via traditional familial bonds. The presence of Pak Maman and Oom Dave, offers a more subtle form of quasi-family connection for Lana, in that they become stand-in fathers and brothers. The sense of a familial tie is especially present in the scene when Oom Dave cuts Lana's hair, while he discusses the significance of the giraffe in world history. This quasi-kinship tie between the two develops as Oom Dave educates her about the animals and plays the role of both brother and play-mate to the young girl

The haircutting scene is set under the canopy of a large tree, which is covered in parasitic vines. As he cuts her hair, Oom Dave recounts the arrival of the giraffe in Europe in the 15th century in the context of imperial history. He also discusses how this mighty animal was brought to China by admiral Cheng Ho as a gift to the emperor, but that it was seen as a threat to the Chinese officials. The officials in the palace feared the rising influence of the admiral and thus halted his world expedition. Oom Dave's belief regarding the influence of the giraffe may be understood as an allusion to Indonesia's own past under the authoritarian President Suharto and his oppressive governmental policies that accompanied the New Order. Edwin once confessed that his films couldn't be entirely separated from the social and political context in which he makes them. He asserts, "as long as my films are personal, they're always going to express (at least subliminally) my convictions and my questions about what's going on" (2012).[29] Edwin is thus clear about his intent in injecting social and political critique into his films through symbolism and visual representation. With this in mind, it is possible to read this scene allegorically: the huge trunk of the tree with its dominating root system and numerous parasitic plants may be read as the dominance of the Suharto regime and his followers who conspired for mutual gain.

[29] From the catalogue of *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012).

While this scene suggests a critique of the public political context, Oom Dave's cutting of Lana's hair reminds us of Lana's more personal or private longing to regain a sense of familial belonging. This theme of the re-constituted family is further reinforced through the figure of Pak Maman, who appears as a fatherly figure for Lana, despite having minimal dialogue and limited screen time. The zookeeper is played by Maman A. S. Effendi, a non-professional actor and an actual zookeeper from Laguna Zoo at the south of Jakarta, where *Postcards* was filmed. The only verbal exchange between the zookeeper and Lana is in a scene in which both sit in the corner of the rest house of the zoo. Oom Dave is seen undertaking a sound-mixing project in another corner. Lana sits near the window drying her hair with a towel, presumably soaked by the rain, when recording the sound of the elephant with Oom Dave, while Pak Maman sits smoking. The space evokes a cosy home-like ambience that is reinforced by the simple décor of the room: several pictures hanging on the wall, a translucent curtain over the window and flask, teapot and mug on the table. The conversation between the two is about Jera, the giraffe, who has been leaping out of the enclosure at night.

The filmmaker evokes this quasi-family connection through a sequence of shot formations and via the *mise-en-scène*. The immediate cut from the two-shot of Lana and Pak Maman in conversation, to the single shot of Oom Dave at his work desk, when Lana calls him in, is followed by another single shot of Lana. Through this sequence Edwin forms an invisible thread that binds the characters together in a quasi-kinship tie. A biological family remains beyond Lana's reach, reinforcing her sense of displacement and aimlessness that pervades her character and the film more generally. However, the familial fragmentation presented in *Postcards* is less intense compared to the dysfunction represented in *Blind Pig*. While the re-constitution of a quasi-family in *Postcards* is not completely emotionally fulfilling for Lana, the film indicates the

various ways individuals may bond with each other, despite their differences in terms of age, gender, class, social status and ethnicity. The quasi-family tie imbedded in film indicates a hidden voice, or double voice, that represents Edwin's constant negotiation of the boundary between displacement and belonging. This double voice comes from his in-between identity and the interstitiality experienced by the filmmaker.

In *Postcards* we observe a discernible shift in Edwin's filmic approach, one that is more nuanced and complex. While Edwin's hybrid identity remains central to his cinematic project, there is a broadening to the treatment and conceptualisation of what constitutes displacement. In this film Edwin's more mature treatment of the issues of displacement and emplacement, fragmentation and quasi-family is evident. While Edwin's filmic style evolves, it remains imaginative and experimental. In *Postcards* his representation of alienation, that has derived from his personal understanding of the experiences of displaced people in Indonesian, moves beyond his own individual identity as a Chinese Indonesian filmmaker to the stories of marginalised Indonesians more broadly.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to provide an account of the re-emergence of Chinese-themed films and the re-entry of Chinese Indonesian filmmakers into the Indonesian independent filmmaking industry in the post-Suharto era. This period proved to be a crucial juncture in the development of an independent national film industry, unconstrained by the governmental control that characterised the Suharto era. In this context, we saw the re-emergence of several feature films that focussed on Chinese characters. Through a close textual-analysis of three films made by indigenous Indonesian filmmakers, this thesis has argued that such productions played an important role in re-introducing Chinese stories and characters to Indonesian screens. It was thus argued that the impulse behind these films was one of recuperation; an attempt to recover Chinese presence in Indonesia's cinematic imaginary. Importantly, *Ca-bau-kan* (2002), *Gie* (2005) and *The Photograph* (2007) all do this by depicting not only Chinese characters and stories, but also by representing Chinese customs and cultural practices, such as ancestor worship and familial and non-familial *guanxi*. These efforts to restore Chinese culture to Indonesian cinema have remained, however, primarily at the level of representation and to some extent they avoided the issues of past traumas and the complexities hybrid identity, by focussing on stories of integration or re-integration of Chinese individuals back into the broader Indonesian society. In contrast, the prominent Chinese Indonesian filmmaker, Edwin, more directly addressed the disjointed – or fragmented - experience of being Chinese in Indonesia. This thesis demonstrated the way in which Edwin employed an accented mode of film production that placed greater emphasis on his own personal experience. His films make an important intervention into the independent Indonesian cinema industry through their stylistic consideration of

experiences of displacement and fragmentation that closely mirror his own experiences as a Chinese Indonesian. It is for this reason that Edwin was chosen as a case study, whose work stands in stark in contrast to the recuperative efforts of the indigenous filmmakers. This thesis therefore provided an insight into complexities of the Chinese identity as represented in contemporary Indonesian cinema and the contrasting diversity of the films, which have been produced by both indigenous and Chinese Indonesian filmmakers.

In Chapter One, this thesis framed these contemporary films within the historical, cultural and socio-political context of Chinese migration and settlement in the Indonesian archipelago. It also provided an overview of the long and significant history of Chinese participation in the establishment of the Indonesian film industry in the first decades of the twentieth century. This historical survey firstly established that the Chinese in Indonesia constitute a multi-dimensional diaspora and also revealed how the introduction of discriminatory policies by the New Order government effectively erased Indonesia's Chinese participation from the film industry. This part of the thesis thus provided the important groundwork for the examination of the contemporary Chinese-themed films discussed in Chapter Two, reinforcing their significance as the first films to feature Chinese characters since the fall of Suharto.

In the examination of the newly re-emerged Chinese-themed films, this thesis sought to question and unpack the multifaceted meaning of 'Chinese films' and 'Chineseness' as represented in Indonesian cinema. This examination contained two parts: the first part of the study evaluated the constitution of Chinese-themed films in Indonesia, the various kinds of cinematic approaches utilized by indigenous filmmakers to represent Chinese identity, as well as how Chinese cultural practices were understood in the multicultural Indonesia. This discussion contained a close textual analysis of the

three Chinese-themed films; *Ca-bau-kan* (2002), *Gie* (2005) and *The Photograph* (2007) made by indigenous filmmakers. One significant observation made in this chapter was that these films tend to revolve around the themes of familial and non-familial *guanxi*. Both types of *guanxi* have been presented as the fundamental foundation of the cultural representation of Chinese characters in the films. However, the Chinese Indonesian identity of the characters in films such as *Ca-bau-kan* and *Gie* is, to a large extent, de-emphasised, despite their contribution to the economic and political development of the country. The familial *guanxi* is portrayed in the reconnection with lost family in *Ca-bau-kan* and the re-emergence of an obscured family *guanxi* in *Gie*. In *The Photograph,* the depiction of Chineseness is illustrated via the inclusion of various traditions and practices in a multicultural society. The photographs in the film are presented as memories of homeland. The bond between the two main characters, Johan and Sita, not only exemplifies a quasi-familial *guanxi*, but to some degree, also demonstrates how the paradigm of family *guanxi* needs to be extended to include intercultural bonds.

The three Chinese-themed films discussed in this thesis illustrate that the Chinese in Indonesian are a diverse and hybrid community, and that intercultural connection is a foundational aspect of life in Indonesia. The multiplicity of 'Chinese' identity is depicted through the characters; Tan Peng Liang in *Ca-bau-kan*, Soe Hock Gie in *Gie* and Johan in *The Photograph,* but the definition of Chineseness remains manifold and cannot be generalized.

This thesis has therefore taken a comparative approach, contrasting three Chinese-themed films made by indigenous filmmakers with the feature films made by an ethnic Chinese filmmaker, Edwin. In spite of the fact that the representation of Chinse identity in their films is significant, such productions did tend to epitomize

Chinese identity via an 'outsider's' perspective. While, an ethnic Chinese filmmaker, such as Edwin, expresses his idea of Chineseness through his empirical experience. His films are thus structured by his personal encounters, which form the basis of his accented mode of filmmaking. This comparative approach attempted to provide different perspectives on 'Chinese Indonesian filmmaking' and the representation of Chinese identity via the medium of film in a heterogeneous Indonesian society. Chinese identity is hence presented in this thesis as multifaceted and Chinese-themed films are underscored as multidimensional and multi-layered.

The second part of the thesis examined the films directed by ethnic Chinese filmmaker, Edwin. Chapter Three foregrounded Edwin's short and feature films and explained how his distinctive and personal filmic style was developed through this early work. By taking into consideration the filmmaker's ethnic Chinese background and the complexity of his hybrid identity and sense of in-betweenness, Edwin's short films were examined within the framework of Hamid Naficy's accented mode of production (2001). It was argued that the filmmaker's unique cinematic style is evident in his short films and is then further developed in his two feature films, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly* (2008) and *Postcards from the Zoo* (2012). Detailed analysis of these feature films was undertaken in Chapters Four and Five respectively. In these chapters, it was further argued that Edwin's films are deeply marked by the characteristics of the "accented style". In addition to the stylistic characteristics and use of the interstitial mode of production, it was also maintained that Edwin's central thematic concerns include displacement, fragmentation, marginalisation and hybridity. It was thus argued that Edwin's use of the accented style stems largely from his personal, experiential approach to filmmaking, which contrasts considerably from the approach taken by the indigenous filmmakers' and their representations of Chinese Indonesian identity.

In the evaluation of Edwin's first feature film, *Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly,* this thesis argued that the production is an accented film deeply informed by the filmmaker's own situatedness and experience of being internally displaced. As a Chinese individual in a country that still prioritizes indigeneity and assimilation over cultural and ethnic diversity, Edwin's experience is represented as one of alienation and fragmentation. The discussion of the many characters in *Blind Pig* was framed by three main thematic and structural characteristics namely; disoriented identity, disjointed family and fragmented narrative. This thesis thus primarily engaged with Naficy's theorization of "accented cinema", which underscored the film's fragmented and non-linear style. This chapter also discussed how the disjointed style of *Blind Pig* mediated the encounter of internal displacement, as experienced by the ethnic Chinese filmmaker. Unlike the films discussed in Chapter Two, in *Blind Pig,* Edwin does not attempt to recuperate Chinese stories, or reinvent a form of family *guanxi*. This is important, for it suggests that from the perspective of the Chinese in Indonesia, who have suffered marginalization and discrimination, such recuperation is not necessarily possible, at least until the traumas of the past have been recognized and healed.

This thesis also traced the evolution of Edwin's filmmaking in a more recent feature. In contrast to his first production, which included some Chinese characters and cultural practices, *Postcards from the Zoo* eschews almost all traces of visible 'Chinese identity'. In his second feature film, Edwin extends the notion of displacement to include those experiencing dispossession as a result of urban development. Continuing to work within an interstitial mode of production, Edwin explores the bonds that form from a common experience of displacement, endured by a range of marginalised people. This too is far from the imagined re-integration of the Chinese into Indonesian society, posited by the films discussed in Chapter Two. Framed within Naficy's "chronotopes of

imagined homeland" (Naficy, 2001, p. 153) the analysis of *Postcards* provided a more in-depth examination of the concept of accented cinema in Edwin's filmmaking, in an attempt to analyse the notion of spatial displacement and interstitiality. The analysis of *Postcards* proposed that displacement and emplacement find renewed meaning through the main character, Lana. In this film, Edwin explores themes of displacement that go beyond his own, personal experience of internal exile. He extends the notion of cultural alienation to include the experiences that more generally arise from the rapid socio-economic transformation of Jakarta.

More recently, Edwin has ventured into mainstream filmmaking. This is evidenced by the release of his first commercial film, *Posesif* (2017). The teen romantic thriller, that was produced by his long-term producer, Meiska Taurisa, was released into the Indonesia market in September 2017. The film has been excluded from the discussion in this thesis, primarily because it falls out of the thematic concerns of this research. Also, the film was released at a time when my thesis was in its final stages of completion and was not available for viewing. Written reviews of the film suggest that Edwin has departed from his accented style and has perhaps entered a new phase in his career.

By focusing on the newly re-emerged Chinese-themed films made by indigenous and ethnic Chinese filmmakers in the post-Suharto era, this study sheds light on the importance of the productions of Chinese-themed films and ethnic Chinese productions. This thesis is based on original research that extends the current knowledge of Chinese Indonesian cinema, by broadening the parameters of the research to combine films made by both indigenous and ethnic Chinese filmmakers. The thesis has made an original contribution to the current research by providing an in-depth analysis of the selected films, and by contextualizing their study within the disciplines of both cultural

studies and film studies. This thesis therefore aims to contribute to the discourse on Chinese filmmaking, diasporic cinema, intercultural cinema and Southeast Asian filmmaking. It also aims to extend discussion of cinema in the region, where the ethnic Chinese are presented as a minor community and their productions are predominately produced in the mode of independent cinema.

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