

Political Rise or Standstill: Chinese-Indonesian Oligarchs in the 2014 National Legislative Election¹

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Abstract

Stereotype and suspicion toward certain ethnic minorities of the country has never left Indonesia's story of social diversity. Growing participation and greater representation of Chinese-Indonesians in national and local election have demonstrated an inspiring progress of the country's ongoing democratization which encourages the recognition of minority's ethnic identity in wider society. Based on this context, this paper aims to introduce the general performance of Chinese-Indonesian candidates in the legislative election at the state level since 1999, with a focus on analyzing media tycoon Hary Tanoesoedibjo's (or Hary Tano) experience in the 2014 election, in which he has been credited by political scientists and Chinese-Indonesian scholars for a certain degree of break-through in the Indonesian political landscape. Such story of success, however, does not necessarily indicate any trend that Chinese-Indonesian politicians in general have obtained the same degree of equality in politics as their indigenous counterparts. The tactic that Hary Tano has adopted is to expand his political clout through buying-off minor parties. Yet, in practice the underlying social norms of the status quo means that there is a long road ahead until Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs are taken seriously as political actors rather than used for short-term political gain.

Keywords: Chinese-Indonesians, oligarch, Hary Tanoesoedibjo, Partai Hanura, political equality, national legislative election

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Introduction

The political status of Chinese-Indonesians has been improving since the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998.² After the enactment of the Law no. 12/2006 in 2006, the right of an individual with any ethnicity of the country to contest for the country's top leadership has been acknowledged by the state. Progress does not halt there. In the 2014 national legislative election, Chinese-Indonesians have witnessed certain break-through in politics. Media tycoon Hary Tanoe was nominated by Partai Hanura to be the first ever ethnic Chinese vice-presidential candidate of the country. Rusdi Kirana, President Director of Lion Air and a Christian, was appointed to be the new deputy chairman of the traditionalist Islamic Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB). He skillfully utilized his economic leverage for the election and as a result PKB won an impressive result of 9.04 percent of the total votes and ranked the fifth among the twelve parties in the contest (CSIS, 2014). According to a survey by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in the March just before the election, PKB was likely to win only 6.7 percent.³ Does this news sufficiently point to a rise of Chinese-Indonesian politicians with oligarchic background, or the overall situation for Chinese-Indonesian politicians remains largely unchanged? To address this question, this paper sets out to argue that Chinese-Indonesian politicians have not obtained the same degree of political equality as their indigenous counterparts. The underlying social norms of the status quo means that there is a long road ahead until Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs are taken seriously as political actors rather than used for short-term political gain. As a

² "Chinese-Indonesians" in this paper are referred to Indonesian citizens who have Chinese ancestry.

case study, Hary Tanoe's short journey in the 2014 national legislative election will be elaborated in detail.

Chinese-Indonesians in Demography

Chinese-Indonesians are proportionately small in Indonesian population. In 2000 for instance, they were accounted for only 1.50 percent of the total population (Suryadinata, Arifin, & Ananta, 2003). Self-identification was the major survey method used in the 2000 census. Since the painful memory of the 1998 anti-Chinese riots and violence had not elapsed, many Chinese-Indonesians actually had omitted their Chinese ancestry, as they were uncomfortable to be viewed "ethnically" by the indigenous society (Suryadinata, Arifin, & Ananta, 2003). In other words, total population of the Chinese had been underestimated.

The latest and most comprehensive census that has systematically covered ethnic data and information is the one for 2010. In 2006, enactment of the Law no. 12/2006 had removed the official line of distinguishing "indigenous" and "non-indigenous" people of Indonesia. Ethnic minority, including Chinese-Indonesians, have obtained greater room and confidence to publicly express their ethnic identity. However, ironically, in 2010 the population proportion of the Chinese had experienced a further drop down to 1.20 percent (Ananta, 2013). This should be a consequence of the thirty years New Order policy of assimilation of the Chinese and Chinese identity into a "unified" Indonesian nation. Many Indonesians with Chinese ancestry now had considered themselves to belong to other ethnic groups rather than being Chinese (Suryadinata, Arifin, & Ananta, 2003).

The position of being a minority has also reflected by Chinese-Indonesians'

religious belief. In 2000, 88.22 percent of all Indonesians were Muslims (Ananta, Arifin, & Bakhtiar, Chinese Indonesian in Indonesia and the Province of Riau Archipelago: A Demographic Analysis, 2008). Among the Chinese community, that percentage was only 5.41 percent, while the other 53.82 percent were Buddhists and 35.09 percent were Christians, including Protestants and Catholics. In 2010, the situation was largely the same. Muslims were 87.54 percent of the country's total population, but were 4.65 percent of all the Chinese (Ananta, Arifin, & Bakhtiar, Chinese Indonesian in Indonesia and the Province of Riau Archipelago: A Demographic Analysis, 2008). Buddhists and Christians were 49.06 percent and 43.80 percent of the Chinese community. Those demographic figures can be interpreted from another perspective. 1.50 percent of Indonesia's total population had included three to four million people, who composed one of the largest Chinese communities in Southeast-Asia (Pan, 2016).

From the New Order to the "Reformasi"

Chinese-Indonesians have experienced difficult political and cultural attitude during the contemporary era. In 1965, the abortive coup to overthrow President Sukarno was immediately attributed to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). By claiming to be the largest communist party in a non-communist country, PKI was known to maintain a close relation with the communist People's Republic of China (PRC). This relation exposed PKI in a dangerous situation during the Cold War era when political ideology was dominating people's life in every aspect. Chinese-Indonesians were automatically considered as a partner of the PKI by the indigenous society, and inevitably became the victims of series of anti-communist riots and violence. About

half a million people, including both Chinese and non-Chinese, were killed (Cribb & Brown, 1955). PKI was then eliminated as a political force in the country. Chinese-Indonesians were openly identified as an origin of instability by the state and society. Their political rights, such as creating political party, were suppressed. Those Chinese who would like to participate in politics could only join the dominant New Order political parties or affiliated organizations. Without sufficient channels to make political appeals, not to mention to ensure security in their daily life, Chinese-Indonesians were vulnerable politically and socially (Lembong, 2008). In terms of Chinese culture, the New Order regime introduced a policy of assimilation, through which outlawed Chinese-language education and Chinese media, with an exception of the government-run *Harian Indonesia*. In the following three decades, Chinese culture was in stagnation.

By contrast, Chinese-Indonesians were left considerable spaces in the economy since the Dutch colonial era. They have had a long history of economic activism across the archipelago. In 1930 for instance, 36.60 percent of ethnic Chinese in the Dutch East Indies were involving in trading activity and 20 percent were participating in industry activity (Suryadinata, Pribumi Indonesians, the Chinese Minority and China: A Study of Perceptions and Policies, 1978). These numbers were significantly higher compared to the 13.38 percent and 5.48 percent of the Europeans, and 5.38 percent and 10.38 percent of the indigenous people. The colonial government aimed to stimulate economic activities across the archipelago through supporting Chinese business. Chinese-Indonesians' reputation of being skillful business people was widely recognized. Similarly, Suharto implemented a pro-business strategy of national

development to consolidate his political supremacy. By cooperating with a small group of Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs, his regime was able to achieve rapid economic growth which had legitimized the New Order regime as an efficient leadership. Suharto controlled the key resources for development, such as the oil industry, and he distributed them to his cronies, composing by a small group of Chinese-Indonesian tycoons such as Liem Sioe Liong and Eka Tjipta Wijaya (Muzakki, 2010). In 1994, among the top twelve conglomerates in Indonesia, only one was owned by non-Chinese (Suryadinata, Chinese Indonesians in an Era of Globalization, 2008). However, even the wealthiest Chinese had to rely on the solely strongman in politics, the influence of the material power of Chinese-Indonesians in politics was still strictly constrained. After 1998, Chinese-Indonesians in general are economically well-off than their indigenous counterparts. In 2002, only three out of the twelve top conglomerates in the country were owned by non-Chinese. In 2004, 70 percent of the domestic private capitals were in the hands of Chinese-Indonesians (Beiyan, 2008).

During the *Reformasi*, the situation of Chinese-Indonesians in culture and politics has been improved. The ban on the “three pillars” of Chinese culture, that is, Chinese education, organizations and media has been removed. Lunar New Year has been for the first time since the past four decades set to be a national public holiday. In politics, the new Indonesian Citizenship Law defines “Indonesian citizens” are the “indigenous Indonesians and other persons of non-indigenous acknowledged by law as citizens (Winata, 2008).” In the Article 2 of

the Law no. 12/2006, for the first time the concept of “Indonesian citizen” has been clarified as a person who was born in Indonesia and who has never assumed the citizenship of other countries. Chinese-Indonesians and ethnic minorities who have been living in Indonesia for generations are now included into “indigenous Indonesians” from the legal point of view. The law also granted them the right to run for government position at the state level as high as to the country’s president (Ananta, Arifin, & Bakhtiar, Chinese Indonesian in Indonesia and the Province of Riau Archipelago: A Demographic Analysis, 2008).

The 2014 National Legislative

Promulgation of the Law no. 12/2006 has undoubtedly increased Chinese-Indonesians’ opportunity in politics, yet this does not mean they had not involved before 2006. In fact, the overall number of Chinese-Indonesians who had contested for the seats in the national and regional legislatures has grown steadily during the *Reformasi* era. Many of them were elected and then entered the People’s Representative Council (DPR) or the Regional Representative Council (DPD) (see Table 1). In 2014, the twelve parties in the contest have proposed 6,600 candidates for the 560 seats in the DPR (Harian Indonesia, 2014). 55 of the candidates are Chinese-Indonesians and 15 were eventually elected. The total number of Chinese-Indonesians who entered the DPD in 2014 has not been calculated when this research was conducted, but by looking through the general trend since 1999, it is reasonable to predict that the total number of Chinese parliamentary members at the national level in 2014 will reach a new high.

Table 1. Total number of Chinese-Indonesian parliamentary members (MP) in the DPR and the DPD since 1999

Year of the election	MP in the DPR	MP in the DPD	Total MP number at the state level
1999	5	3*	8
2004	12	3	15
2009	14	2	16
2014	15**	–	–

Source: "1.86 Yi", <http://indonesia.sinchew.com.my/node/47233?tid=5>.

Note: *Cited from Long Yi, "Yin Du Ni Xi Ya Hua Ren Zheng Ce Yu Hua Ren Zheng Zhi Can Yu De Li Shi Fen Xi - Yi Zheng Zhi Jing Ying Gou Cheng Wei Jie Shi Yao Su" [Historical Analysis of Chinese-Indonesians' Political Participation and the Policy toward Chinese-Indonesians – Uses the Formation of Political Elites as an Explanatory Element], [In Chinese], Jinan Journal (Philisophy and Social Science), no. 5 (2013): 132-37.

**Cited from Wen Beiyan, "Yin Ni Zong Tong You Duo Yue Nuo Zhi Zheng Shi Nian: Ye Ji Xian Zhu, Ti Sheng Yin Ni Ge Ling Yu Dao Xin Tai Jie" [Ten-Year Presidency of Yudhoyono, With Outstanding Merits, And Has Developed All Aspects of Indonesia to A New Stage], Harian Nusantara, June 20 2014, accessed July 11, 2014, <http://qiandaoribao.com/news/50328>.

Hary Tanoe's political career started with the Nasdem Party in 2011. He left Nasdem and joined Hanura in February 2013 for the 2014 legislative and presidential elections. He was nominated by the party to be the first Chinese-Indonesian vice-presidential candidate in the history and scheduled to run for the presidential election in July with Hanura's founder, former military general Wiranto. However, since Hanura is a minor party whose performance in the legislative election in April has turned out to be weak, it is unlikely that it would be qualifies to nominate its own candidates to independently contest for the upcoming presidential election in July for the party. Hanura won only 5.26 percent in the legislative election and ranked the tenth out of the twelve parties in the contest (KPU). Even within its coalition with other parties, this poor electoral outcome also has suggested that Hanura is far from being capable to persuade its running mates to

nominate the presidential candidate pair that it proposed to represent the collation, especially considering its partners are the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) which won 18.95 percent, PKB (9.04 percent) and Nasdem (6.72 percent). However, is he as incompetent as what Chrisnandi criticized, or he has been squeezed for Hanura's short-term political gain? When officially announced the Wiranto– Hary Tanoe pair, the former general proudly introduced that as a Javanese Muslim himself, his pair with Chinese Christian Hary Tanoe represented Hanura's firm endorsement of pluralism (The Jakarta Post, 2013). On one hand, this may indicate that Chinese identity has received more recognition in politics. One the other hand, as Marcus Mietzner has observed, since 2009 political parties have become more pragmatic to aware the significance to obtain a centrist position where most potential voters would stay in (Mietzner, 2010). Even though the issue of

ethnicity has remained largely unmentioned, both religion and political ideology no longer serve as a dominant theme when voters are making their decision for election. Hanura's inclusion of the Christian and Chinese profile is a follow of the trend to seek for an image of multiculturalism and "unity in diversity".

In addition, to promote Hanura Hary Tanoe has fully utilized his business empire. In 2014, among all parties Hanura received the second largest campaign donation with a total amount of Rp 135.5 billion, which was much higher compared to the donation it gained in 2009 which was only Rp 19 billion and ranked the fifth in all parties (Halim, 2013). The campaign advertisements produced by his extensive media outlet are another known important contribution to the party. Hary Tanoe's MNC Group was once sanctioned by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPU) for the political stand of two of its television shows were heavily pro-Hanura (Jakarta Globe, 2014). Indonesian public television stations are regulated to remain

neutral and independent in election, even though major media have been known to have close connection with politicians. For instance, according to Winters, almost all major politicians are backed by media tycoons, or politicians have been seeking opportunity to expand their media resources (Winters, 2013). Hary Tanoe's efforts for advertisement are effective. In March 25 before the election, Hanura's members were ambitious to expect their party to win 13 percent of the total votes in April (Aritonang & Widhiarto, 2014) In the contrary, according to an opinion polling released by CSIS six days later, from July 2012 to March 2014, the support rate for Hanura had never surpassed 6.7 percent (see Table 2) (CSIS, 2014). Even so, in the period between November 2013 and March 2014, the time which overlapped with the official campaign period commencing from March 20, the party's support had experienced a noticeable growth from 2.4 percent to 6.7 percent. Without Hary Tanoe's campaign advertisements, the actual turnout for Hanura in the legislative election in April should be much lower.

Table 2. Hanura's support rate (percentage) from July 2012 to March 2014

Time for the survey	July 2012	April 2013	November 2013	March 2014
Support Rate	1.5	2.2	2.4	6.7

Source: "CSIS National Survey," <http://www.csis.or.id/post/press-release-csis-national-survey-march-2014>.

Thus, the key question for looking into Hary Tanoe's short journey in 2014 should not be on his contribution to the party, but on whether he had realized before joining the party that he would be "squeezed". If he had, what was his purpose to join the party? Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs are not unfamiliar with the tactic to patronize political man. Under the New Order regime, to acquire security in politics, economy and social life,

an inevitable issue that most Chinese-Indonesians facing was which indigenous politicians they would support and how much economic benefits they would have to spend on them (Winters, 2013). In 2011, two mainland Chinese scholars, Jiang Zhenpeng and Ding Lixing, conducted a survey to 141 indigenous Indonesians at the higher education institution in Yogyakarta regarding the general public's attitude toward the political participation by

Chinese-Indonesians. 5.07 percent of the respondent answer “may be” or “not sure” to the question whether Chinese-Indonesians should increase their participation in politics, such as to contest for the seats in the DPR and the DPD, or to run for local administrator (Zhengpeng & Lixing, 2013). 36.67 percent believed that Chinese-Indonesians should not do so. One reason given by them was that Chinese-Indonesians were not the locals, and thus they should not have full political participation. Other reasons included their concern of the association of Chinese-Indonesians with communism. Based on this context, this paper believes that Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs should already have a sufficient understanding regarding the possibility that they would be “squeezed” for economic benefits by their clients in politics. Meanwhile, the multi-polarized political structure of power in the *Reformasi* era has made patron-client relationship between Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs and parties, indigenous politicians as well as other types of political front man work much less to guarantee reciprocity. This relationship used to be more stable under the Suharto government. However, the democratization and decentralization after 1998 have gradually disintegrated the concentric circle structure of political power by stimulating new power centers rising at both the state and local levels. The new structure is too dynamic for Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs to maintain any stable patron-client relationship.

The Hanura–Hary Tanoe partnership is a typical exchange of political and economic interests. Even though Wiranto is an oligarch himself, he does not possess any sizable network of media (Winters, 2013). His major backer Hary Tanoe thus brought him his media empire, including the MNC Group, Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia, Global TV, MNC TV,

Sindo Radio, Seputar Indonesia and Okezone.com, which has 20 television stations, 22 radio stations, 7 print media and 1 online media. As a return, by monopolizing Hanura’s electoral campaign, Hary Tanoe intends to not just patronize that party, but to go further to buy-off it, although it seems that his effort has failed eventually. He has been focusing on minor presidentialist party whose material resources for political activity are limited. He joined the small Nasdem party soon after it was established in 2011. The legislative election in 2014 was the party first try, and it won 6.72 percent of the total votes and ranked just two places higher than Hanura (KPU).

Conclusion

As an ethnic minority with deep stereotypes, Chinese-Indonesians once had difficult experience in expressing Chinese identity in culture and politics. Since the collapse of the New Order in 1998, the situation has been improving. In the democratic era, the Chinese have never halted searching for greater opportunity for legislative election. Inspiringly, an increasing number of them have entered the DPR and the DPD. In the economy, Chinese-Indonesians have appeared to be more successful in comparison with their indigenous counterparts. The economic success is an important currency for the Chinese oligarchs to acquire more political interests.

In the 2014 national legislative election, Chinese-Indonesians have witnessed a break-through in politics. For the first time in history, a Chinese-Indonesian, namely Hary Tanoesoedibjo, was nominated by his party Hanura to be the candidate for the vice-president of the country. However, soon after the electoral result turned out to be an unsatisfactory

one, Hanura urged him to resign. This paper argues that Hary Tano was used for short-term political gain by the party rather than taken seriously as a political actor. He has foreseen the possibility of this difficult situation before joining Hanura. Since the New Order era, it has been a default rule in politics for Chinese-Indonesian oligarchs to patronize indigenous political men for political appeals, also for the indigenous political men to squeeze them for material resources. In the case of Hary Tano, he intended to not just patronize, but go further to buy-off the party. However, this tactic has proved to be a failure for him this time.

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Yuhao Wen holds an M.A. on Asia-Pacific Studies with honors from the Australian National University of Canberra. Yuhao has it with a special interest in Southeast Asia and ethnic Chinese communities in the region, particularly in Indonesia. Yuhao is also a recipient of the Ruth Daroesman Graduate Study Grant and an inaugural fellow at *China Cooperative* in Sydney, Australia.

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