

THE CONCEPT OF CHINESE-INDONESIAN-NESS AS SEEN FROM ERNEST PRAKASA'S ROLES IN *NGENEST*, *CEK TOKO SEBELAH*, *SUSAH SINYAL* AND *STIP & PENSIL*

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses four films entitled *Ngenest* (2015), *Cek Toko Sebelah* (2016), *Susah Sinyal* (2017), and *Stip & Pensil* (2017) in which Ernest Prakasa played a role, in the context of how the four films construct Chinese-Indonesian-ness. In the context of cinema, the appearance of Chinese-Indonesians on the screen during the New Order regime was scarce, and if there is any, the depiction was highly stereotyped. Only after Reform era in the late 1990s that Chinese-Indonesians and their culture began to re-appear on screen. Ernest Prakasa is one of few Chinese-Indonesians who publicly celebrates his Chinese-ness through entertainment platform. Ethnic identity theory applied on the discussion of the film cinematography and *mise-en-scene* to show what the films say about the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness. The findings show that Prakasa not only celebrates being a Chinese-Indonesian, but he also performs a self-mockery as Chinese-Indonesians by explicitly emphasizing the Chinese-Indonesians stereotypes. He also tries to re-establish inter-ethnic relationship and introduce contemporary Chinese-Indonesian-ness concept through his films.

Keywords: Chinese-Indonesian-ness, ethnic identity, film, Ernest Prakasa

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas empat film berjudul *Ngenest* (2015), *Cek Toko Sebelah* (2016), *Susah Sinyal* (2017), dan *Stip & Pensil* (2017) dengan aktor Ernest Prakasa sebagai salah satu pemerannya, dalam konteks bagaimana keempat film tersebut membangun konteks *Chinese-Indonesian-ness/Ke-Tionghoa-Indonesia-an*. Dalam konteks perfilman, penampilan orang Tionghoa-Indonesia di layar selama rezim Orde Baru sangat langka, dan jika ada, penggambarannya sangat stereotipikal. Hanya setelah era Reformasi pada akhir tahun 1990-an, orang Tionghoa-Indonesia dan budaya mereka mulai muncul kembali di layar kaca dan bioskop. Ernest Prakasa adalah satu dari sedikit orang Tionghoa-Indonesia yang secara terbuka merayakan ke-Tionghoa-annya melalui platform hiburan. Teori identitas etnis diterapkan pada diskusi sinematografi dan *mise-en-scene* film untuk menunjukkan konsep ke-Tionghoa-an yang ditunjukkan dalam film. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Prakasa tidak hanya merayakan dirinya sebagai Tionghoa-Indonesia, tetapi ia juga mengejek dirinya sendiri sebagai Tionghoa-Indonesia dan secara eksplisit menekankan stereotip orang Tionghoa-Indonesia. Ia juga mencoba membangun kembali hubungan antar-etnis dan memperkenalkan konsep kontemporer Tionghoa-Indonesia melalui film-filmnya.

Kata kunci: Ke-Tionghoa-Indonesia-an, Identitas Etnik, Film, dan Ernest Prakasa

1. INTRODUCTION

As an ethnic minority in Indonesia, Chinese-Indonesians have gone through many obstacles living in a nation that still

carries past sentiment towards them.

History has recorded that among other minority ethnics in Indonesia, the ethnic Chinese is the one suffered most especially

during tumultuous political times in Indonesia. The sentiment is rooted back to the period of Dutch colonization when they used the divide and conquer policy that created hierarchy in Dutch Indies, placing the ethnic Chinese in a higher position than the indigenous/native people. At the same time, the Dutch regularly broadcasted anti-Chinese propaganda through the media they controlled as a way to prevent the union between the ethnic Chinese and the native. Mostly coming from China as merchants, the ethnic Chinese particularly excelled in trading and was known for their hard work ethics. This economic gap created jealousy and sentiment among the native which perpetuates to this day.

During Soekarno's time, the demonization of capitalism as the western evil impacted the business-oriented Chinese-Indonesians and drew them farther from being regarded as nationalists. The sentiment of the indigenous even grew stronger when in the mid-1960s the Indonesian Communist Party, which was closely associated with the Soviet Union and China, was accused to be the mastermind of the killing of high-ranked generals. The result is the killing of thousands of people who were accused to be communists.

The birth of the New Order regime also meant the "death" of Chinese-Indonesians' freedom to express their cultural heritage in public, especially when

the regime raised the issue of "Chinese Problem." The regime forbade anything related to China from manifesting itself in public. The paradox was that the regime had very close business relation with some Chinese-Indonesians tycoons who also needed protection and assurance that they could run their businesses. This situation further created a wider economic gap between the ethnic Chinese and the indigenous, the growth of anti-Chinese sentiment, and in a way resulted in the emergence of Chinese-Indonesians' stereotypes that are still believed to be true to this day, one of which was that the ethnic Chinese were rich. "The New Order redefined, perpetuated, and instrumentalised the 'Chinese Problem' by depicting the entire Chinese minority as an economically rich group" (Chua, 2004). Thus, the construction of Chinese-Indonesian-ness during New Order regime could be summarized as "being rich." Some stereotypes of Chinese-Indonesians that were often shown in film during this period for example are "...rich, stingy, persevere in working, talented in trading, exclusive, and smart" (Pradianty, 2016:4).

The ethnic Chinese again became the victims during the fall of the regime in 1998 when they were targeted by mass amok that resulted in looting and burning of ethnic Chinese business premises and worse of all, the death and raping of ethnic Chinese women which cases were never

fully solved to this day. It was recorded that many Chinese-Indonesians fled abroad for safety and many never returned to Indonesia for fear of similar incident in the future.

The Reform period opened up new hopes for ethnic Chinese when the new government allowed them to express their cultural traditions. However, it did not mean that the anti-Chinese sentiment or discrimination is completely gone, as can be seen in the case of the ex-Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, or Ahok, who was accused of blasphemy and had to spend two years in jail. To this day, ethnic Chinese still face different treatments and discrimination although perhaps in a more subtle way, and is still continually struggling to be fully accepted as “Indonesians” and are not always seen as “The Other.”

2. LITERARY REVIEW

There were some previous researches on the aspect of Chinese-Indonesian in which Ernest Prakasa played a role using various perspectives of study. Kurniawan (2019) analyzed the film *Ngenest* and *Cek Toko Sebelah* to reveal the concept of cultural hybridity as well as the crossing of ethnic boundaries within the films. In another research, Hadiyanto (2017) focused on the primordial aspect of Chinese-Indonesian analyzed from the visual elements of the film *Ngenest*. Meanwhile, Hanifah (2018) focused her

studies on the anti-Chinese-Indonesian sentiment that are present in the films *Ngenest*, *Susah Sinyal*, and *Cek Toko Sebelah* by using Foucault's theory on power relation. Another research by Zamzamy and Kusuma (2018) emphasized the identity transformation of the Chinese-Indonesian in the post-reformation Indonesian cinema from *Ngenest* and *Cek Toko Sebelah* through narrative studies. Pratama and Hirzi (2017) performed a qualitative study using Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the issue of racism in the film *Ngenest*. Halim (2018) used Saussure's semiotic theory to analyze *Ngenest* and decode the meaning of the film. In her thesis, Pasaribu (2017) also researched *Ngenest* by using semiotic analysis to reveal the discrimination elements of the film. Widyasmara, et. al. (2017) analyzed *Ngenest* by focusing solely on the representation of ethnic Chinese in the film. Despite the quite extensive researches on Prakasa's role as Chinese-Indonesian in films, there are no articles yet that specifically discusses the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness in the four films and how they are related, thus, this article will be the first to discuss the topic.

3. METHOD

The method used is an interdisciplinary one, combining film studies and ethnic identity theory. In film studies method, close reading of the four films are needed to gather visual and verbal

information regarding the portrayal of Chinese-Indonesians. The aspects to focus on are the cinematography and mise-en-scene. After collecting the data, they will be analyzed by the ethnic identity theory that will help explain the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness in the four films.

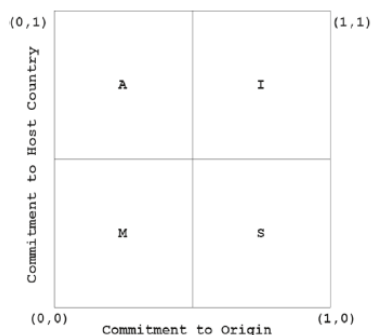
There are numerous academic papers talking about the idea of Chinese-ness, but not many discuss the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness, let alone in the filmic context. In the context of traditional Chinese virtue, Chinese-ness means that, "...people are expected to behave in a 'civilized' manner and this includes speaking, interacting and going about their daily lives in an unobtrusive, humble and quiet manner" (Lyle, 2015: par.1). This is believed to be the traditional moral-political model that can withstand any challenges of the modern world, and is the foundation of Chinese characteristics. While Chinese-ness is generally defined as the quality of being a Chinese, regardless the place where the person lives, Chinese-Indonesian-ness is defined as the quality of being an ethnic China living in Indonesia. This definition leads to complication as the widespread ethnic China across the archipelago may have their own unique concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness based on the area where they live. Thus, this article will limit the discussion to Chinese-Indonesians living in big cities in Java, as the four films show.

The quality of being Chinese-Indonesians is a social/cultural/political construction that is affected by various variables. This quality is related to the intensity of the individual's ethnic identity to the host culture. There are different methods in measuring the intensity of the individual's ethnic identity which is called *ethnosizer* (Epstein & Heizler, 2015:2), which categorizes immigrants into four main states: assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation. The range of this intensity is from zero to one.

"Assimilation is a strong identification with the host culture and society coupled with a firm conformity to its norms, values, and codes of conduct, and a weak identification with ancestry. Integration is achieved when an individual combines, incorporates, and exhibits both strong dedication to the country of origin and commitment and conformity to the host society. Marginalization is weak dedication to or strong detachment from either the dominant culture or the culture of origin. Separation is an exclusive commitment to the culture of origin, even years after emigration, paired with weak involvement in the host culture and country realities" (Epstein & Heizler, 2015: 2)

The following table can clearly show the range of the intensity:

Table 1. The ethnosizer



The ethnosizer tool will be used to measure the Chinese-Indonesian-ness in the four films, based on several variables, i.e. language, cultural habits, self-identification, identification by others and social interaction. The variables will be broken down into a more specific sub-variables. This ethnosizer is commonly applied to actual immigrant cases through survey and interview method, but since this is a film analysis, the method used will be a close reading of the four films that focuses on the dialogue, interaction, reaction and visualization of the Chinese-Indonesians and their dynamic relationship with their social environment.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. *Ngenest*

The premise of the film *Ngenest* is the determination of a Chinese-Indonesian man to be freed from bullying caused by his being an ethnic Chinese. Besides being bullied, he is constantly extorted under the assumption that Chinese-Indonesians are rich. Thus, he commits to himself to break the circle of bullying and extortion by marrying an indigenous woman with a hope

that his children will not carry the physical quality of an ethnic Chinese, i.e. slanted eyes and fair complexion.

In *Ngenest*, there are three different worlds: the world of the Chinese-Indonesians (Ernest, his family and friend [Patrick]), the world of the indigenous (Meira and family), and the mixed world of ethnic Chinese and indigenous (Meira and Ernest, Ernest and his co-workers). Through Ernest's interaction with the three worlds, the audience is informed on how Ernest sees himself as a Chinese-Indonesian and at the same time also reveals the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness of the film.

Throughout the film, the main character, Ernest, is unhappy with the fact that he was born as ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia. His fear of the continuous bullying because of his physical look as an ethnic Chinese almost takes a toll on his relationship with his wife when he keeps delaying on having a child for fear that the child will look Chinese like him. Thus, his dialogue, action and relationship throughout the film mostly show that he is trying his best to be assimilated through the host culture, for example when Ernest tries to befriend those who bully him and marry to a native woman. Even though he is still bound to his ethnic of origin due to his parents' wishes, he attempts as much as he can to reduce the intensity of his interaction with his ethnic tradition.

The visualization of the Chinese-

Indonesians is not completely realistic as the film depicts stereotypical physical Chinese-ness such as fair complexion and most of all, slanted eyes. In reality, not all ethnic Chinese in Indonesia has those specific features. Other stereotypes that can be found are: (1) the exclusivity of Chinese-Indonesians which means they only mingle and get married with other Chinese-Indonesians as seen in other Chinese-Indonesian characters, (2) the specific terminologies they use when they talk to each other (especially between Ernest and Patrick), (3) they are mostly depicted as merchants or business owners, as evident in the film that Ernest' parents owns a shop and Patrick's parents have a company, (4) they are mid-upper class people (not being depicted as people with financial difficulty).



One interesting new feature about the Chinese-Indonesians that is exposed in *Ngenest* is the use of specific daily conversational terms that most Chinese-Indonesians understand. These terms are derived from Chinese language that has been adapted by Chinese-Indonesians so they sound a bit different from the original language. For example, there are words like *bo ceng li*, *ceng li*, *amsiong*, *tiko*, *ang pao*, *hopeng*, *cibay*, *bo kam guan*, *kiong hi*, *ceban*, *hao ce*, *kang tao*, *kung kung*, *ngko*, *ci* that have almost never been exposed that much in other films depicting Chinese-Indonesians before this film. These terms

also suggest exclusivity among Chinese-Indonesians as they are the only ones understand the meaning of terms and they can freely speak to each other using those daily words in their own "world" without having fear that the indigenous/native people will understand them.

Overall, the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness in *Ngenest* suggests a strong self-awareness of being an ethnic Chinese who is *physically* different. The emphasis is on the physical look more than other aspects of being a Chinese-Indonesian. To be accepted and free from bullying and extortion, one has to assimilate with the majority, including doing an interethnic marriage. Chinese-Indonesians are also expected to have strong mentality to survive as minority, as Ernest's father explicitly tells Ernest.

Referring to the ethnosizer instrument, it can be concluded that *Ngenest*, through the portrayal of Ernest, depicts a Chinese-Indonesian character who is very aware of his physical Chinese-ness that causes all problems in his life, thus he tries to assimilate to the host country as much as he can, to an extreme measure of determination in marrying a native woman to break the vicious bullying circle. The character Patrick depicts a different type of Chinese-Indonesian. He attaches to his culture of origin stronger than to the host country as seen from his action throughout the film.

Table 2. Ethnosizer table of *Ngenest*

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|---|---|-------|
| Commitment to host Country | (0,1) | A  | I | (1,1) |
| | (0,0) | M | S  | (1,0) |
| | | Commitment to Origin | | |

The Chinese-Indonesian-ness in *Ngenest*, especially Ernest, is in the state of assimilation. He is not fully detached from his origin as he still performs some cultural traditions as what his parents expect him to do and he tries his best to assimilate to the host country. Thus, it is safe to conclude that his level of commitment to the host country is a 1, and his commitment to his culture of origin is a 0,5. These numbers go along with the concept of Chinese-Indonesians that the film offers, in which to free himself from bullying, he has to be committed to the norms of the host country and lessen his attachment to his origin. While for Patrick, it is safe to say that he is in the state of separation as he still has an exclusive commitment to his culture of origin and does not really identify himself with the host country. Thus, his commitment to the host country is probably at 0.5 and his commitment to his culture of origin is 1.

4.2. Cek Toko Sebelah

The premise of the film *Cek Toko Sebelah* is the struggle of a Chinese-Indonesian family in making peace with their past and realizing their future dream. In a narrower scope, the film talks about a personal ambition of Chinese-Indonesian men (Erwin and Yohan) versus their responsibility as sons to his father (Koh Afuk) and their partners (Ayu, Yohan's wife and Natalie, Erwin's girlfriend). When the father figure, Koh Afuk, decides to retire after many years running his grocery shop, he wants his second son, Erwin, to continue the business. On the other hand, Erwin, a successful young executive, wants to pursue his career on a different path. He is on his way of getting an international career working in Singapore. Erwin's brother, Yohan, is a freelance photographer who has to struggle hard to make ends meet for his family. Erwin actually wants to run the grocery store but his father does not trust him due to some misunderstanding between them. The death of the mother makes the young Yohan becomes rebellious, involves in drug abuse until finally he is married to a native woman although his father disapproved the marriage. The father is still traumatized by the 1998 incident when Chinese-Indonesians' houses and premises became the target of the mass amok and that makes him unable to trust native people. Thus, conflicts happen within the family

because each of the three main characters has their own reason for why they behave in such ways.

Cek Toko Sebelah focuses on the world of a Chinese-Indonesian family while the interaction with the outer world or the world of the majority is limited to the relationship between the family and their employees at the grocery store. There are still stereotypes of Chinese-Indonesians shown in the film, such as (1) physical Chinese-ness: slanted eyes, fair complexion, (2) Chinese-Indonesians own a shop/store, (3) exclusive, only trust fellow Chinese-Indonesians in business or getting married with other ethnic Chinese: Koh Afuk's right hand in the store is Koh Amiau, and he is irreplaceable unlike the native employees; Erwin's girlfriend, Natalie, is an elegant and rich Chinese-Indonesian woman executive, (4) Chinese-Indonesians belong to mid-upper class, (5) Chinese-Indonesians are stingy, as seen in the scenes when Ko Afuk treats the workers to cheap bread instead of pizza and when Ko Afuk takes back two bottles of juice from the people to whom he gives that drink. The non-stereotypical depiction of Chinese-Indonesians is Yohan who is not rich and his marriage to a native woman. It seems that Prakasa used the same formula in *Ngeneset* of depicting interethnic marriage. Besides the visual depiction, the Chinese-Indonesians' characters also sometimes use some specific Chinese-

origin words such as *hoki*, *kamsiah*, *auban*, *goceng* that refer to their Chinese-ness.

Compared to *Ngeneset*, Prakasa's *Cek Toko Sebelah* is almost free from the issue of ethnic discrimination. The most used word referring to Chinese-Indonesian characters is the word "Koh" or "Ko" followed by the word "Ci", or "cici," both words are common and neutral in meaning. There is only one offensive word used by one of Yohan's native friends who jokingly refers to Yohan as "Cina miskin" or poor Chinese. Since it is spoken by his close friend who is happened to be a Christian, the word used does not sound discriminating. It is important to mention the friend as being a Christian because such an ethnic slur spoken by a Christian becomes "half offensive." The majority of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia is Christian/Catholic, thus they are double minority and experiencing double discrimination: being a Chinese-Indonesian and a Christian/Catholic. So when Yohan's Christian friend says that Yohan is a "Cina miskin," the word becomes less offensive. Another scene showing an offensive word is when one character makes fun of the name "Afuk," saying that it is a weird name. The common name for an ethnic Chinese seems to sound weird to the native, which suggests the lack of interaction between the two ethnics. Besides the two events, the film does not show any other ethnic discrimination.

In the context of cultural habits, the film shows none. There is only one cultural object that refers to Chinese-ness, i.e. the golden fortune cat which is seen on the table of Koh Afuk's grocery store. There are also other references but not of their Chinese-ness, but of their being a Christian Chinese-Indonesian family. It is shown when Koh Afuk asks one of his employees to buy a small Christmas tree and through the cross necklace worn by Ayu, Yohan's wife. It is worth mentioning that both in *Ngenest* and *Cek Toko Sebelah*, the native women whom the Chinese-Indonesian men are married to (Meira and Ayu) are Christian. We think Prakasa is aware that he already deals with a sensitive issue of ethnic discrimination and he does not want to add religious issue to his film, which is probably even more sensitive. Thus he plays it safe by making the two native women as Christians.

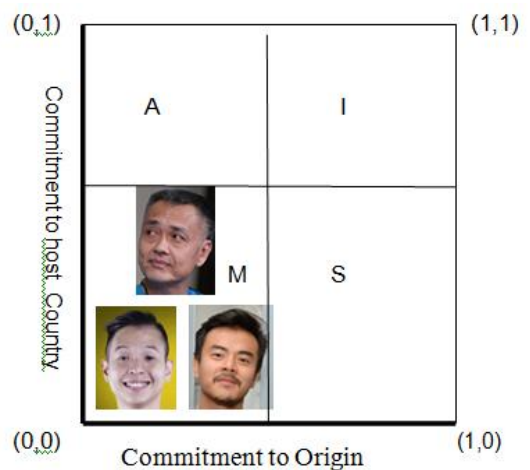
Another interesting aspect about *Cek Toko Sebelah* is how the film portrays the situation that may be experienced by real Chinese-Indonesian families in which older generations work as shop owners but whose descendants decided to pursue different path of career. The parents' business probably plays an important role in the success of the younger generations' career and most parents hope that their children will continue the success, but with the change of condition, many Chinese-Indonesians younger generation take

different path in life.

In conclusion, we think that the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness in *Cek Toko Sebelah* suggests a strong familial bond and respect towards the parents within Chinese-Indonesian families. The strong bond and high respect towards the elderly signify the quality of being a good Chinese-Indonesian. Chinese-Indonesians are also portrayed as being resilient and persevere as evident in the character of Erwin, Yohan, and their father, who try to do their best to make their loved ones happy.

Referring to the ethnosizer instrument, the main Chinese-Indonesian characters in *Cek Toko Sebelah* do not show strong attachment both to the dominant culture or culture of origin.

Table 3. Ethnosizer table in *Cek Toko Sebelah*



Thus, they can be categorized to be in the state of marginalization. Their level of commitment to host country and culture of origin is probably at 0.5. This number goes along with the concept of Chinese-

Indonesian-ness that the film offers, which focuses more on a universal value of familial bond and respect towards the elderly.

4.3. *Susah Sinyal*

The premise of *Susah Sinyal* revolved around a woman named Ellen, a successful lawyer who was so busy to a point that she rarely spent time with her only daughter, Kiara. Kiara's grandmother was the one who mostly took care of Kiara. Kiara's world drastically changed when Agatha passed away due to a heart attack. In order to deal with the grief, Ellen and Kiara decided to visit Sumba Island for a vacation. From there, the story focused mostly on the effort of a mother and a daughter to reconnect to each other and mend their relationship. In *Susah Sinyal*, the Chinese-Indonesian aspects came mostly from two characters: (1) Iwan, Ellen's colleague, played by Ernest himself, and (2) Iwan's mother. There is only a small portion of the story that touched upon the issue of Chinese-Indonesian and the issue is treated as an afterthought since the focus of the film is the dynamic relationship between Ellen and his daughter. Nevertheless, *Susah Sinyal* still offers some interesting concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ess.

The Chinese-Indonesian character, Iwan, is portrayed as a well-educated, successful lawyer and he has a fiancée who is studying for her master degree in

Australia. Throughout the entire film he is shown to be on the process of preparing his wedding by the help of his mother who is portrayed as the owner of a big hardware store. Although most of the Chinese-Indonesian aspects come from the interaction between those two characters, they are not the only Chinese-Indonesian characters in the film. There are Pak Handi Salim, a successful businessman who is one of Ellen's clients, Cassandra Salim, an actress as well as Pak Handi's daughter, and Koh Chandra, a shrimp factory owner whom Ellen meets during her holiday in Sumba. Among all those Chinese-Indonesian characters, one similarity is found, which is all of them are portrayed as either rich or successful in their respective fields. Such portrayals reinforce the typical stereotype regarding Chinese-Indonesian as a rich and prosperous ethnic group. In terms of physical feature, they are also typically portrayed as people with slanted eyes and fair complexion.

Throughout the film, Iwan is shown as a person who is very self-aware of his Chinese-ness as he often refers to himself using the word 'Cina' when interacting with the non-Chinese characters. He is also depicted as a person who unconsciously uses Chinese terminologies such as *siake*, *tepai*, *feng shui*, or *amsiong* when interacting with non-Chinese characters. When using those terminologies, the non-Chinese characters would ask him the

meaning of those words and he always replies with "You will know the meaning when you married a Chinese person." The way Iwan refers to himself as 'Cina' and the way he often uses the Chinese terminologies during conversation show that to some extent he still identifies himself with his culture of origin and has some degree of attachment to it. Meanwhile, his reluctance to explain the meaning of the Chinese words that he uses shows a degree of exclusivity of the Chinese Indonesian. At the same time, his action can also signify that he does not want to show his Chinese part of his life too much when interacting with the non-Chinese, especially in a professional setting. Such response may suggest that Iwan tries to blend in with the rest of the society by not showing too much of his Chinese-ness in public.

Throughout the film, Iwan's mother often calls Iwan on the phone to the point that he is annoyed because his mother constantly asks for his opinion regarding detail things related to his wedding preparation. During all the interactions with Iwan, his mother is always seen to make the call from her hardware store, and the audience can see a fortune cat statue near her which enforces the common stereotype of Chinese-Indonesian as merchants. She is also portrayed as a money-oriented person as evident in one scene when she threatens to cut the salary of one of her

male employees because he does not do what she has asked. On another scene, she is shown to bargain quite rigorously with a store clerk over a garment for Iwan's wedding. Iwan's mother also represents the typical Chinese-Indonesian who is still conservative because she thinks that a ritual such as *tepai*, a traditional tea ceremony, is very important in a wedding process while her son thinks that such ritual is not that important. The way Iwan's mother is stereotypically portrayed in the film suggests a Chinese-Indonesian who still has a strong identification and attachment to the traditional Chinese value as well as her Chinese-ness, unlike her son who already shows sign of detachment from his Chinese-ness.

Iwan's detachment from his Chinese-ness can be seen in one particular scene when Ellen asks him to accompany Kiara so that she can buy cheaper fabric if Iwan is with her. Her action suggests that she thinks Iwan, as a Chinese-Indonesian, is good at bargaining. Upon hearing Ellen's request, Iwan feels offended because of Ellen's assumption of his bargaining skill as an ethnic Chinese. He emphasizes that just because both of his parents are store owners; it does not necessarily make him able to bargain because such skill is not hereditary. This particular scene displays how the concept of Chinese-ness is seen from both the Chinese-Indonesian and the non-Chinese perspectives. On the one

hand, Ellen's request may have no ill-intent to discriminate Iwan for being a Chinese-Indonesian. However, it shows that the stereotype of Chinese-Indonesian being specialized in business and mercantile has become so ingrained in people's mind. She nonchalantly asks Iwan with the assumption that he is able to bargain even though as a fellow lawyer bargaining is clearly not his specialty. On the other hand, Iwan's response to Ellen's request shows that he does not want to associate himself with his parents's occupation. Rather than taking over his parents' business, he chooses to be a lawyer which shows that even if he acknowledges himself as a Chinese-Indonesian, he wants to set himself apart from the stereotypical assumption that Chinese-Indonesians are identical with tradings. Iwan's response can be interpreted as a form of detachment from the Chinese-Indonesian stereotype that has been exhaustively used to create his own identity as an individual. This particular scene can be seen as a form of simulation on how stereotype creates prejudice which may seem harmless but can potentially create an ethnic-based conflict.

In *Susah Sinyal*, Iwan belongs to two worlds that are related with the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness. The first world is the public where he actively tries to set himself apart from his Chinese-ness which can be seen from the way he interacts with

his non-Chinese friends and colleagues. The second world is the private which is represented by his interaction with his mother in which he shows a sense of detachment from the Chinese culture as well as having different value from his parents. Thus, the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness in *Susah Sinyal* suggests a quality of a Chinese-Indonesian to be independent and establish his own identity that is neither controlled by the host country or his culture of origin. When referring to the ethnosizer, it is safe to say that Iwan's level of commitment to host country and culture of origin is a 0.5, as there is no evident of him committing fully to both cultures. The character Iwan leans more to the marginalization state as he is shown to have a weak attachment to both cultures. Meanwhile, Iwan's mother is definitely in the integration state as she is able to have a successful business in host country but still has a strong attachment to her culture of origin and her Chinese-ness rather than actively assimilates with the host culture. Thus, her level of commitment to host country is a 0.5, and his commitment to origin is a 1.

Susah Sinyal still represents stereotypical Chinese-Indonesians who are rich and wealthy. Such portrayal shows that the "being rich" stereotype is the one that persists and keeps being reinforced in the film even though it does not reflect the reality. However, the portrayal of both Iwan

and his mother shows a form of intergenerational differences in the concept of Chinese-ness between the younger and the older generation of Chinese-Indonesian, particularly in relation between parents and children which goes accordingly with the main premise of the story, i.e. mother and child relationship.

Table 4. Ethnosizer table of *Susah Sinyal*

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---|-------|
| (0,1) | A | I | (1,1) |
| Commitment to host Country | I | S | (1,0) |
| (0,0) | S | A | (1,0) |
| | Commitment to Origin | | |

4.4. *Stip dan Pensil*

The premise of *Stip dan Pensil* revolves around four high school students: Tony, played by Ernest Prakasa himself, Bubu, Saras, and Aghi. They are all portrayed as students that came from wealthy families who think that money could solve most of their problems in life. Thus, when a school project forced them to build a temporary school to educate kids from a slum area in Jakarta, they found that money could not solve all social problems around them. The main issue that the film emphasizes on is the wide social gap between the have and have not in the urban setting through the issue of

education importance. Thus, the issue on Chinese Indonesian-ness, while is still present, takes on a periphery position in the film.

Stip dan Pensil shows the juxtaposition between Chinese-Indonesian stereotype as a rich and wealthy ethnic group as well as showing that not all Chinese-Indonesians are actually well-off financially. The so-called rich Chinese-Indonesian in the film is represented by only one character, Tony. Tony is portrayed as a typical high school student that comes from a rich family, a fact that he himself acknowledges in the film as well as shown from the luxurious white Volkswagen car he drives. The portrayal of Tony shows how the stereotype of rich Chinese-Indonesian still persists. Meanwhile, the other kind of representation is shown in one scene when Tony wants to order a chicken noodle from a Chinese-Indonesian street peddler named Koh Salim.

Koh Salim is portrayed as a typical Chinese-Indonesian with slanted eyes and fair complexion and he still speaks with a thick Chinese accent. Unlike the common rich stereotype of Chinese-Indonesian, Koh Salim represents a mid-lower class Chinese-Indonesians as he is shown to live and run his business in Jakarta slum area, a portrayal that is rarely shown in mainstream media. In this particular scene, Tony explicitly shows a sense of disgust towards Koh Salim. He finds out that Koh

Salim's noodle is not hygienic as seen when Koh Salim spits on the ground before making the noodle. Consequently, Tony cancels his order out of disgust. This particular scene shows the diversity of Chinese-Indonesian in society especially in terms of economic condition. It simply shows that not all Chinese-Indonesians are rich; some are struggle to make ends meet.

The film also addresses the fact that Chinese-Indonesian is rarely holding a political position in the Indonesian government. It is shown in one scene when the four students try to get permission from Mr. Toro, the head figure in the slum community, to build a temporary school in the area. Upon meeting them, Mr. Toro initially thought that they are from the city officials who try to evict the slum. However, he corrects himself by stating that it is very unlikely for someone who looks Chinese (specifically referred to Tony by making his own eyes slanted) to become a city official. Although later on Toro also states that there is a Chinese-Indonesian governor in Indonesia, which definitely refers to the figure of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama aka Ahok, the ex-Jakarta's Governor. The fact that a Chinese-Indonesian like Ahok could sit in a strategic political position in the government is considered to be an anomaly.

Furthermore, unlike the other two films that represent Chinese-Indonesian as an exclusive ethnic group, Tony is shown to

interact normally with his indigenous friends. The problems that Tony has to face are not so much because of his Chinese-ness but more towards the fact that he comes from a wealthy family and he is arrogant. It is shown when he argues with indigenous students, they never refer to Tony's ethnicity to insult or offend him. The film may want to suggest that for young teenagers, ethnicity is not a determining factor in choosing friends, as well as trying to show that in today's context, Chinese-Indonesians to some degree have gain acceptance and are able to blend in with the rest of Indonesian society. Such portrayal as well as interaction can be seen as an effort by Ernest to re-establish the previous representation of Chinese-Indonesian within the Indonesian society. He tries to create a contemporary depiction of Chinese-Indonesians that are more inclusive and actually part of the society instead of repeating the same old dominant stereotypes that represent Chinese-Indonesian as "The Other."

However, the portrayal of Chinese-Indonesian as an exclusive community is still present in the film albeit through one of its minor characters. It shows in a scene that involves the previously mentioned Koh Salim and the slum community around him. In this scene, a woman from the slum community comments on how Koh Salim is always selling the noodle every day without showing any concern towards the people



around him. This particular comment suggests a sense of exclusivity and ignorance of the older generation of Chinese-Indonesian that is still prevalent in the previous discussed films. The comment also shows how the indigenous may actually think about the Chinese-Indonesian community in general.

In *Stip dan Pensil*, Chinese-Indonesians are represented by Tony and Koh Salim. Tony represents the stereotypical rich Chinese-Indonesian and younger generation of Chinese-Indonesians who is aware of their Chinese-ness but is able to easily mingle and interact with the indigenous without facing any discrimination. Koh Salim represents the older generation of Chinese-Indonesian that is still considered exclusive by people around him. But at the same time Koh Salim's portrayal is subverting the rich stereotype of Chinese-Indonesian as he is portrayed as a mid-lower class Chinese-Indonesian who lives in a slum area.

When referring to the ethnosizer instrument, Tony is categorized as a person who has neither strong attachment to the host country nor his culture, thus he can be said to be in a marginalization state. One can safely say that his level of commitment to his host country is 0.5 and to his culture of origin is a 0. These numbers may show the strong detachment of the younger Chinese-Indonesians to their culture of origin and weak attachment to host country which shows that while being a Chinese-Indonesian is a part of their identities; they do not see it as significant part of their life. It may also indicate that for the younger generation of Chinese-Indonesians, their ethnicity may no longer act as a handicap or obstruction for them to be able to interact with people from different ethnic group.

Meanwhile, Koh Salim can be categorized to be in the integration state as he is shown to still have a strong attachment to his culture of origin and not as much to the host country. Koh Salim who sells noodle and still speaks with thick Chinese dialect is still considered to be exclusive by the community around him. Thus, his level of commitment to host country is a 0.5, and his commitment to culture of origin is a 1. These numbers may represent the older group of Chinese-Indonesian that still holds the Chinese traditional value quite strongly and does not consider the culture of their host country as

Table 5. Ethnosizer table in *Stip & Pensil*

| | | | |
|-------|---|---|-------|
| (0,1) | A | I  | (1,1) |
| (0,0) |  M | S | (1,0) |
| | Commitment to Origin | | |

Commitment to host Country

a significant part of their identity.

In terms of stereotypes, *Stip dan Pensil* both conforms and subverts the rich Chinese-Indonesian stereotypes. The portrayal of Ernest Prakasa as Tony and Koh Salim can be seen as an effort to show the diversity in Chinese-Indonesia ethnic group particularly in term of economy condition. On the one hand, it acknowledges the notion that some Chinese-Indonesians are rich which has long become a stereotype but not entirely false. On the other hand, the film also shows that some Chinese-Indonesians do not fit with the rich and wealthy stereotype by portraying those that are from the lower class who live in poor condition. As the film mainly emphasize on the social gap between the have and the have-not, the different portrayal of Tony and Koh Salim shows that within the Chinese-Indonesian community itself there are those whose life is filled with privilege and there are those who has to struggle in day-to-day basis. Furthermore, the film also displays the concepts of Chinese-Indonesian-ness regarding the younger generation, represented by Tony, who shows detachment to both cultures but is able to interact with any ethnic group without considering their Chinese-ness as a barrier. Meanwhile, Koh Salim represents the older generation that still shows a rather strong attachment to their Chinese-ness and a limited interaction with the society around

them despite the fact that he is not the typical rich Chinese-Indonesian.

Below is the table showing the variables of ethnic identity in the four films which are divided into language, cultural habits, self-identification, identification by others, and social interaction. This table will provide a better understanding on the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness in the four films.

Table 6. *Ngenest*

| No. | Variables | <i>Ngenest</i> | |
|----------|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Language: | | |
| | A. Offensive words: | | |
| | -Cina | 20 x | |
| | -Sipit | 12 x | |
| | -Cong | 1 x | |
| | B. Specific terminologies (by Chinese-Indonesians/CI) | Tiko | |
| | | Bo ceng li | |
| | | Ceng li | |
| | | Ncek | |
| | | Hopeng | |
| | | Amsiong | |
| | | Ci | |
| | | Cibay | |
| | | Bo Kam Guan | |
| | | Kiong hi | |
| | | Ceban | |
| Hao ce | | | |
| Kang tao | | | |
| Angpao | | | |
| Koh | | | |
| 2 | Cultural habits | -Chinese New Year -Chinese wedding | |
| 3 | Self-Identification | | |
| | A. Referring to oneself as "Cina" | 35 x | |
| | B. Referring to oneself as "Sipit" | 1 x | |
| 4 | Identification by others: | | |
| | A. Cina | 20 x | |
| | B. Sipit | 12 x | |
| | C. Cong | 1 x | |
| 5 | Social Interaction | Ernest blends with both CI and native | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | indigenous. Patrick is more exclusive |
|--|--|--|

Table 7. *Cek Toko Sebelah*

| No. | Variables | <i>Cek Toko Sebelah</i> | |
|--------------|--|---|--|
| 1 | Language: | | |
| | A.Offensive words: | | |
| | -Cina | 1 x | |
| | -Sipit | - | |
| | -Cong | - | |
| | B. Specific terminologies (by Chinese-Indonesians) | Goceng | |
| | | Hoki | |
| | | Koh (44) | |
| Cici/Ci (15) | | | |
| Kamsiah | | | |
| Auban | | | |
| 2 | Cultural habits | - | |
| 3 | Self-Identification | | |
| | A.Referring to oneself as: | - Erwin: as a successful executive -Yohan: as a responsible husband, dedicating son Koh Afuk: caring father | |
| 4 | Identification by others: | | |
| | A.Employees see them as: | Boss, employer | |
| 5 | Social Interaction | Getting along with the employees of the shop and the shop owner next door | |

Table 8. *Susah Sinyal*

| No. | Variables | <i>Susah Sinyal</i> | |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| 1 | Language: | | |
| | A.Offensive words: | | |
| | -Cina | - | |
| | -Sipit | - | |
| | -Cong | - | |
| | B. Specific terminologies (by Chinese-Indonesians) | Koh | |
| | | Ci | |
| | | Bohwat | |
| | | Amsiong | |
| | | Siake | |
| Tepai | | | |
| Fengshui | | | |
| Hua Ce Lei (F4) | | | |
| 2 | Cultural habits | -Tepai -Chinese Wedding | |
| 3 | Self-Identification | | |
| | A.Referring to oneself as "Cina" | 4 x | |
| | B.Referring to oneself as "Sipit" | 1 x | |
| 4 | Identification by others: | | |
| | A.Cina | - | |
| | B.Sipit | - | |
| | C.Cong | - | |
| 5 | Social Interaction | Iwan is able to blend with the CI and native/indigenous Iwan's mother is shown to be more conservative and still hold the Chinese tradition | |

Table 9. *Stip & Pensil*

| No. | Variables | <i>Stip & Pensil</i> |
|-----|--|--|
| 1 | Language: | |
| | A. Offensive words: | |
| | -Cina | - |
| | -Sipit | - |
| | -Cong | - |
| | B. Specific terminologies (by Chinese-Indonesians) | Koh |
| 2 | Cultural habits | - |
| 3 | Self-Identification | |
| | A. Referring to oneself as "Cina" | 3 x |
| | B. Referring to oneself as "Sipit" | 1 x |
| 4 | Identification by others: | |
| | A. Cina | - |
| | B. Sipit | 1 x |
| | C. Cong | - |
| 5 | Social Interaction | Tony is able to blend with the native/indigenous. Koh Salim is shown to be more traditional and exclusive. |

From the table above, *Ngenest* shows strong self-awareness of being an ethnic Chinese as suggested with the frequency of the word "Cina" used more by the ethnic Chinese to refer to themselves. In addition, the specific terminologies used by the Chinese-Indonesians also point to the same awareness of them being an ethnic Chinese. The second and third most frequent words spoken by indigenous people to Chinese-Indonesian characters—"Cina" and "sipit"—refer to the bullying based on the physical Chinese-ness. It can be concluded that *Ngenest* carries a self-mockery tone of being a Chinese-Indonesian through exaggerated stereotypes, oversimplification of the

resolution to the bullying problem, and identity self-denial. This is supported by Prakasa himself who stated that sometimes when one faces a problem one may just laugh at it and laugh at oneself to lessen the problem, especially when one cannot do anything about it, just like Ernest who cannot change the way he look as a Chinese-Indonesian.

Cek Toko Sebelah focuses on the internal world of a Chinese-Indonesian family and the dynamic relationship between them. The concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness of the film which is about familial bond and respect towards the elderly within the family is clearly evident in the dominant use of the words "koko" and "cici" that signify familial relationship as well as a designation word towards elderly Chinese-Indonesians to show respect. In addition, each Chinese-Indonesian characters identifies themselves as part of their family. Although Ernest is seen as an ambitious executive, he still makes time to meet his father, so does Yohan who regularly visits his father with his wife, Ayu. The father, Ko Afuk, shows genuine father love towards the two sons, although at the beginning he shows more attention to Erwin and ignore Yohan, but at heart he still loves them both as evident in how he says to Yohan to keep the money Yohan borrows from him and that everything he works for is for his children.

In *Susah Sinyal*, the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness is shown through how the Chinese-Indonesian still identifies themselves with their Chinese-ness albeit only in private space. In public space, they actively try to detach themselves from their Chinese identity especially during the interactions with the indigenous people. The table above shows that the frequency of the Chinese terminologies usage is very limited compared to the previous two movies. When words such as “Cina” or “sipit” are used, all of them are spoken by the Chinese-Indonesian to identify themselves to others. Other characters that are mostly indigenous never used those words to refer to the Chinese-Indonesian character which may be related to the fact that the film revolves around the professional sphere in which the use of such words is unacceptable. Moreover, the Chinese terminologies are either used unconsciously or used when the Chinese-Indonesian characters interact with one another in public spaces and they do not bother to explain what those words means to the indigenous even when asked. Thus *Susah Sinyal* emphasizes on how some of Chinese-Indonesians actively make a clear distinction in regards of their Chinese-ness that occupies their public and private lives which is in line with Iwan who tries to be independent and set himself apart from his parents’ Chinese-ness and establishes his own identity.

In *Stip and Pensil* there are even fewer references that are directly related to Chinese-Indonesian compared to the previous three movies. The table shows how the word ‘Cina’ and ‘sipit’ are never uttered to offend but only used to identify oneself or others casually. Moreover, there is almost no Chinese terminology used by the two Chinese-Indonesian characters. The absence of Chinese-ness aspects despite the presence of Chinese-Indonesian representation may be due to the fact that the film tries to address different issue, i.e. the wide social gap in Indonesian society. Nevertheless, the presence of few Chinese-ness references is likely only to emphasize the detachment of Tony from his culture of origin. He is able to effortlessly interact and mingle with his indigenous friends without having to face any kind of discrimination in regards of his Chinese-ness. This suggests that the film wants to introduce Chinese-Indonesian-ness concept of the younger generation that does not see one’s Chinese-ness as an issue when socializing with the rest of society.

5. CONCLUSION

The discussion of the four films shows that they offer various representation of Chinese-Indonesians and the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness in particular. This variety makes the representation closer to the reality of Chinese-Indonesians’ lives although still

limited to those living in big cities. By using the ethnic identity theory, we also found different and unique concepts of Indonesian-Chinese-ness in his four films. In *Ngenest*, Prakasa “bombarded” the audience with blunt and direct issue of ethnic discrimination experienced by Chinese-Indonesians which is never exposed as much as this in any films depicting Chinese-Indonesians before. This is evident through numerous repetition of offensive words and exaggerated discrimination. In terms of issue of discrimination, *Ngenest* plays at superficial level because the discrimination is focused on the physical aspect of being a Chinese-Indonesian, which is followed by a simplistic choice of assimilation as a shortcut to break the bullying circle. The film also emphasizes that cutting off one’s ancestral values is never easy if not impossible, as seen in Ernest’s parents who still attach strongly to their culture of origin.

While *Ngenest* exposes the discrimination in a wider social spectrum, *Cek Toko Sebelah* confines the issue to a domestic level in which conflicts occur within a Chinese-Indonesian family. The concept of Chinese-Indonesia-ness is narrowed to the virtue of father-children, husband-wife, and lover relationship and respect towards the elderly. Most of the indigenous characters do not play significant part in this film which further

emphasizes the film’s exclusivity in dealing with domestic family sphere. In terms of racial discrimination, the film does not show much. There is only one mention of the offensive word “cina miskin” which is half-offensive as it is spoken as a joke, and the mockery towards the name “Afuk” by one indigenous character which is brushed aside by Erwin as a nonsensical slur.

In *Susah Sinyal*, the concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness is drawn to a more personal sphere in which the Chinese-Indonesian character, Iwan, is portrayed as a Chinese-Indonesian who seems to detach from his culture of origin as well as his host country. He tries to be independent and establish his own identity without having to conform to either cultures. The role portion of Chinese-Indonesian character is not as much as the two previous films, yet his presence as the representation of Chinese-Indonesian characters, along with his mother, provides a significant information on the discussion of Chinese-Indonesian-ness. The contrast concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness between Iwan and his mother can be seen as a progression in the portrayal of Chinese-Indonesian in a film in general.

Stip and Pensil is talking about the world of teenagers and their school dynamics. The film also has Chinese-Indonesian representation that comes from two different generation, old and young, represented by Koh Salim and Tony

respectively. Thus, we found two different concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness revealed from the two characters. Similar to *Susah Sinyal*, the character Tony seems to detach himself from the host country and his culture of origin. His Chinese-Indonesian-ness signifies a quality of being able to mingle and socialize with any ethnic group without looking at his Chinese-ness as a difference when having social interaction. On the contrary, Koh Salim's Chinese-Indonesian-ness is traditional: being a hard-working, exclusive Chinese-Indonesian who detaches himself from his country but strongly attaches to his culture of origin. Being a non-typical Chinese-Indonesian who is not rich, does not mean that Koh Salim automatically mingles with the indigenous, in fact he keeps a distance as evident in how his neighbors complain of him having no concern about his surrounding. The way he speaks with thick Chinese dialect suggests that he does not speak Indonesian much at home, which means he attaches to his culture of origin more than to the host country.

In terms of ethnic discrimination, *Stip dan Pensil* shows none, which is a progression compared to Prakasa's *Ngenest*. In that light, we want to conclude that the representation of Chinese-Indonesian in which Prakasa played a role, consciously or unconsciously, show a kind of progression in representation. From representing typical Chinese-Indonesian

stereotypes in *Ngenest*, Prakasa moves on to a more varied representation of Chinese-Indonesian in *Cek Toko Sebelah* and *Susah Sinyal*. His role in *Stip dan Pensil* also offers a different representation of Chinese-Indonesian in terms of social interaction. The audience do not see exact similar depiction of Chinese-Indonesian characters, but they are exposed to different spectrum of Chinese-Indonesian characters along with their different concept of Chinese-Indonesian-ness, in different settings of life. We believe Prakasa consciously and continually inserts Chinese-Indonesian characters in his films not only because he is a Chinese-Indonesian and thus it becomes his comfort zone, but on a more significant level, he attempts to build a "visual habit" for the audience so that in the long run, the appearance of Chinese-Indonesian characters in any films will be considered neutral without any cultural/ethnic baggage that comes along with their appearance.

In addition, the ethnic identity graphic also shows that the Chinese-Indonesian major characters are moving from the state of assimilation in *Ngenest* to the state of marginalization in the other three films. The marginalization state can be considered the "neutral" state in which an ethnic Chinese keeps a distant from both cultures. In the context of Chinese-Indonesian portrayal in films, this neutral

state reduces the exaggerated and unrealistic stereotypes of the ethnic. Indeed, Prakasa cannot avoid some typical stereotypes of Chinese-Indonesians, in particular the physical Chinese-ness and Chinese-Indonesians as wealthy ethnic, as these stereotypes are present in all four films. To compensate these stereotypes, he comes up with different characteristics that are rarely or never attached to Chinese-Indonesians such as seen as poor, sociable, or generous characters. In other words, Prakasa shows Chinese-Indonesians who are full of nuance and not flat.

To conclude, Prakasa's presence in national cinema brings new insights to how Chinese-Indonesians are represented in films. Being a Chinese-Indonesian, Prakasa is undoubtedly fluent in elaborating the life dynamic of Chinese-Indonesians. In fact, his whole career is based on how he presents his Chinese-Indonesian-ness in a way that no one has ever presented before. He exposes ethnic discrimination he has experienced in a light, jokingly manner that it no longer becomes a traumatic experience but moments to laugh at and reflect upon. At the same time he indirectly provides a lesson for the audience to understand the impact of ethnic discrimination towards minority and to introduce the reality of Chinese-Indonesians' lives which are as dynamic and varied as any other ethnics

living in Indonesia.

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