

On the Relationship between Chinese Language Education in Malaysia and Indonesia with Their National Conditions

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Abstract

Chinese language education exists in both Malaysia and Indonesia. The commonalities and individualities of the national conditions of both countries have an impact on their Chinese language education. The official languages scripts, and major beliefs of the two countries are quite similar, and under their influence, local Chinese have special expectations for Chinese language education. Compared to Indonesia, Malaysian Chinese have a larger proportion of the population and a tendency towards marriage, which to some extent is more conducive to the Chinese language education of local Chinese. Both countries' national conditions and personalities have unfavorable factors for local Chinese language education.

Keywords

Malaysia, Indonesia, Chinese Language Education, National Conditions

1. Introduction

We searched on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) using “Comparison of Chinese Language Education in Malaysia and Indonesia” as the title or keyword, and the results showed that there were no relevant papers. Of course, we cannot conclude that there are no relevant papers yet, because it cannot be ruled out that some papers have not been included in CNKI. However, this indicates that there are not too many papers comparing Chinese language education between them at present. Previously, there have been many achievements in studying Southeast Asian Chinese, such as Chen Limao (2019) [1], Chen Limao (2023) [2], etc. Regarding the achievements of Chinese language education in Malaysia, there are mainly as Wang Xiaoping, Zhang Xin

(2021) [3], Shao Cen (2023) [4], Thock Ker Pong (2024) [5], etc. Wang Xiaoping and Zhang Xin (2021) analyzed Chinese language education in Malaysia from the perspective of cultural identity. Shao Cen (2023) presented the results calculated through quantitative methods. Thock Ker Pong (2024) analyzed them using Chinese primary schools and national Chinese secondary schools as entry points. However, the above three articles only discuss Chinese language education in Malaysia, without comparing it with Chinese language education in Indonesia. Regarding the achievements of Chinese language education in Indonesia, there are mainly Zhang Meng (2013) [6], Ye Han, Chen Juntian (2021) [7], and others. Zhang Meng (2013) analyzed the current situation of Chinese language teaching in Indonesia and proposed several strategies. Ye Han and Chen Juntian (2021) briefly reviewed the history and current situation of Chinese language teaching in Indonesia, and proposed some countermeasures. However, neither of them has been compared with Chinese language education in Malaysia.

We have conducted on-site investigations in Malaysia and Indonesia three times, gaining a certain understanding of local Chinese language education. Based on this, we have explored the relationship between Chinese education in Malaysia and Indonesia and their national conditions.

2. The Similarity of National Conditions of Malaysia and Indonesia and Their Impact on Chinese Language Education

The two countries have similar national conditions:

1) The languages used by the main ethnic groups in the two countries are very similar. Some people believe that Malay and Indonesian are dialects of each other. Malay and Indonesian are both composed of 26 letters, and some have pronunciation similar to English. Overall, Malay is quite similar to Indonesian. They can generally be spoken. According to the survey, Malay is quite similar to Indonesian. Many Indonesian workers working in Malaysia do not need to specifically learn Malay and can quickly hear and speak it, but there is clear evidence.

2) The two countries consider Islam as their main religion. In Malaysia, there are often broadcasts of Islamic prayer in the sky above cities, and Muslim women wearing headscarves can be seen in public places. And it's the same in Indonesia. And Indonesia is still the world's largest Muslim country.

3) Many customs between the two countries have similarities. The toilet habits of Malays and Indonesians are similar. They like to use spices in my diet, such as pepper, tomato sauce, chili, etc. Most Chinese people in both places enjoy eating Bak Kut Teh. And most of them were relocated to provinces such as Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan in China during the Ming and Qing dynasties period.

4) The relationship between Chinese and other ethnic groups in both countries is that of immigrants and locals. Both countries have a significant number of Chinese people in absolute terms. There are millions of Chinese and overseas

Chinese in Malaysia, and tens of millions of Chinese in Indonesia, both of whom are countries with a considerable number of Chinese.

Chinese migrated from China in modern times. Due to both countries being colonies at that time. During the colonial period, Chinese were forced to cross the sea due to living and other reasons. Upon arrival in the local area, Chinese were accepted as laborers due to the need for logging or manual labor. And other ethnic groups in Malaysia, except for descendants of Indian descent, are considered local races, although they may have migrated from other places in history. However, the locals have such a concept, and it is also related to the country's name.

The similarity in national conditions between the two countries has to some extent promoted the need for Chinese language education among Chinese and overseas Chinese in both countries. Chinese language education has an important mission in the minds of local Chinese to maintain the cultural characteristics of the Chinese people, rather than just using Mandarin as a livelihood skill.

3. Differences in National Conditions between Malaysia and Indonesia and Their Impact on Chinese Language Education

Compared to Malaysia, the development of Chinese language education in Indonesia faces greater disadvantages:

1) The first factor is that affecting the proportion of Chinese population. The Chinese population in Malaysia, although decreasing year by year, still accounts for over 20% of the total population. Chinese people are the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia. In politics, facing various unfavorable factors, especially during elections, one can openly raise demands and fight for equality for the Chinese and all ethnic groups. In Indonesia, although there are more Chinese people, the total population of Indonesia is over 200 million, and the proportion of Chinese people is less than 10%. The demands of Indonesian Chinese have not been given enough attention. According to the investigation, Chinese people tend to voluntarily admit defeat and tolerate when they have arguments with Indonesians. This is an obvious proof.

2) The second factor is that the forms of coexistence among different ethnic groups are different. In Indonesia, it is mainly the assimilation of the Chinese by the Indonesian ethnic group. There is no obvious retention of Chinese people like in Malaysia. There is relatively little cultural exchange between Malays and Chinese. As a result, if it is a Chinese owned Chinese restaurant, Malays rarely visit it. Similarly, restaurants opened by Malays are rarely visited by Chinese. In Indonesia, according to surveys, Chinese restaurants also have Indonesians dining there. Even Indonesians eat pork products, etc. In Malaysia, the relationship between local races and Chinese is manifested as surface level inequality, such as the fixed enrollment system. In terms of company management, Chinese listed companies are required to give 30% of their shares to Malays according to regu-

lations. For example, a real estate developer who develops a property must sell a significant proportion of the property to Malays and cannot sell it to Chinese people, even if they have money, they cannot buy it. Even without Malays coming to buy, it cannot be sold. On the surface, Chinese Indonesians do not have these unfair regulations. But at a deeper level, due to the hard work and perseverance of Chinese people, they often excel in business. Indonesians often find themselves at a disadvantage in competition. Over time, it will trigger panic and dissatisfaction among some illegal individuals in Indonesia.

3) The third factor is that the influence of political factors. Chinese Indonesians often become scapegoats for politicians' political conspiracies. In history, some politicians often considered Chinese people as objects of political consideration in order to shift conflicts and achieve specific goals. The occasional incidents of anti Chinese sentiment in Indonesian history may be influenced by political factors to some extent.

Indonesia once implemented a policy of stifling Chinese culture. Local Chinese cannot even retain Chinese surnames. They have to switch their names to Indonesian names. Even on certain Islamic holidays, Chinese shops cannot operate. The normal life of local Chinese was once restricted, let alone Chinese language education. In some specific periods in the past, when the political situation in Indonesia was unstable, some local Chinese people gathered together and asked security guards to do security to ensure the safety of life and property. In some local Chinese community organizations, Chinese people dare not step forward to serve as leaders because they are afraid that if the situation becomes unstable, they will be the first to be targeted by extremist attacks.

4) The fourth factor is that the impact of social and economic factors. Overall, there is a certain gap in the living standards of Indonesian people compared to Malaysia. According to the survey, a considerable number of Indonesian laborers are working in Malaysia. Economic and social factors have also led to political instability in Indonesia, which is not conducive to local Chinese education and the status of Chinese people.

5) The fifth factor is that the impact on marriage. Although early Malaysian Chinese intermarried with other ethnic groups and gave birth to "Nyonya" and "Baba" phenomena, intermarriage with local Malays is no longer common in contemporary times. Because in Malaysia, people intermarry with Malays, and the vast majority of Malays believe in Islam, according to Islamic rules, anyone who marries or marries an Islamic believer must convert to Islam. The cultural customs of Chinese people differ greatly from those of Islam. Therefore, it is rare for contemporary Chinese to intermarry with Malays. It is not uncommon for Chinese Indonesians to intermarry with Indonesians in this regard. During our investigation in Indonesia, we witnessed firsthand a Chinese restaurant owner who married an Indonesian and gave birth to children. His wife and children are helping in the store. When the son of a fellow villager also married an Indonesian, according to investigations, the Indonesian would also offer incense to their

Chinese ancestors. At this point, the teachings of Islam in Malaysia differ from those in Indonesia.

6) The sixth factor is that the impact of relevant policies. In Malaysia, especially in places where Chinese people are concentrated such as Malacca and Kuching. Many shops on the street have names in Chinese. However, in Indonesia, shop names rarely contain Chinese characters. On the one hand, Chinese is not easily understood by many people in the local area. On the other hand, Chinese was banned for decades. According to the investigation, in Jakarta, Chinese people were once prohibited from speaking Mandarin and Mandarin dialects. Once, a fellow villager from Leizhou was speaking his hometown dialect with a Chinese person in Jakarta, but was looked at with very strange eyes by those around him, so he had to switch to Indonesian for communication.

Although the overall environment may be slightly better than Indonesia, there are also certain factors in current national conditions of Malaysia that are unfavorable for the development of its Chinese language education.

1) Due to the decline in birth rates, the proportion of Malaysian Chinese in the total population is decreasing. At the beginning of the establishment of Malaysia, the proportion of Chinese population in Malaysia was even comparable to that of Malays. As the birth rate of Chinese people declines, although the birth rate of Malays is also decreasing, overall it is still higher than that of local Chinese and overseas Chinese.

2) Due to the continuous immigration of Malaysian Chinese to Singapore or Hong Kong of China, the proportion of Malaysian Chinese in the total population is decreasing. While the birth rate of local Chinese is declining, many Malaysian Chinese are also immigrating to neighboring Singapore, or to Hong Kong of China or other countries/regions. This further exacerbates the downward trend of the proportion of Malay Chinese in its total population.

3) The enthusiasm of Malaysian Chinese for Chinese language education is not as strong as in the mid-20th century. As time goes by, many Malaysian Chinese are not early first or second generation immigrants, and the enthusiasm of the new generation of Chinese for Chinese education has declined. Overall, their attention and support for Chinese education are not as strong as before.

4) They are lack of support for Chinese language education has not fundamentally changed In Malaysia. Independent secondary schools in Malaysian Chinese education are not included in the government system. The funding for its operation must be raised by the school itself, although in recent years the federal government and some state governments have provided some assistance to Chinese independent high schools, it is still a drop in the bucket. Chinese independent secondary schools can only raise funds from Chinese people and communities, making it difficult to operate. The academic qualifications of Chinese independent high school students are not recognized by Malaysia. Many graduates of Chinese independent high school need to attend universities abroad.

4. Conclusions

By comparing Malaysia and Indonesia, two geographically adjacent countries, we can gain some insights:

The development of overseas Chinese language education cannot be solely judged by the Chinese language education itself, but is closely related to the national conditions of the host country. If the policies of the host country support or at least allow its development, and at the same time, the Chinese and overseas Chinese in the host country have a strong sense of responsibility to maintain the cultural characteristics of the Chinese people and inherit the Chinese language, and have the strong support of Chinese people from all walks of life in the country, as well as the support of international Chinese education, then the Chinese education in that country can often develop well. Otherwise, Chinese education will be hindered and fall into a slump.

Chinese language education is different from Chinese language education in China. Not only in terms of teaching objects and teaching rules. Overseas Chinese education is also greatly influenced by the host country. Language itself does not have class characteristics, but the use of which language and script is often related to ethnicity, national policies, and other factors. China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and interacts with countries around the world on this basis. Due to the fact that the identity of Chinese people is already a nationality of the host country, our country does not recognize dual nationality and cannot interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. However, the fact that Chinese people can receive good Chinese language education in their host countries undoubtedly plays an important role in promoting economic, trade, and cultural exchanges with China.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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