

Chinese Indonesian Women in Local Politics: The Political Rise of Tjhai Chui Mie in Singkawang

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the rise of Tjhai Chui Mie (TCM) as the first Chinese Indonesian woman elected as a political leader in Indonesian history. TCM won a direct local election in February 2017 and become the Mayor of Singkawang (2017–2022). Employing a qualitative research utilizing a feminist research methodology, this paper reveals complex interactions between ethnicity, politics, and gender. It strengthens the findings of previous scholarly works that highlighted the continuing relevance of ethnic politics or ethnic identity in contests for local executive power, especially in West Kalimantan. It shows the interplay of ethnic identity and a shift in ethnic power sharing in Singkawang, which previously occurred mainly between Dayaks and Malays, but now takes place between Chinese and Malays, which also accompanied by playing patronage factor in it. It also sheds light on a positive gender narrative of Chinese Indonesian women in Singkawang. TCM, who has strong individual and social capital of networks, becomes a subject capable of influencing and shaping the dynamic of local politics, as compared to a dominant and negative narrative of Chinese Indonesian women in Singkawang that often associates them with the issue of mail-order brides. TCM's case indicates that it is no longer appropriate to position Chinese Indonesian women as peripheral as they now have the same chances and potential as other Indonesian women to use ethnicity or gender to compete in local political contests. From a broader point of view, this paper contributes significantly to filling in the picture of Indonesian women's varied experiences and roles in shaping local democracy in post-*reformasi* Indonesia, and promotes a non-andocentric perspective on politics.

Key words

local politics, Chinese Indonesian women, ethnic identity, power sharing, new gender narrative

Introduction

This paper seeks to explain the political rise of Tjhai Chui Mie (hereinafter referred to as TCM) as the first female Mayor of Singkawang, successfully elected in the February 2017 direct local election. TCM becomes the first Chinese Indonesian woman successfully elected as a local leader in the history of Indonesian local politics. This phenomenon is especially interesting considering the fact that Chinese Indonesian women usually experience double discrimination. The first form of discrimination comes from 'within' because Chinese people's ways of life and belief (Confucianism) are highly patriarchal, positioning men as the core and controller of the family while women are in a subordinate position (to obey their fathers, husbands, and sons) (Meij, 2009). The second form comes from 'outside' namely the state and society's attitude toward Chinese people as an ethnic minority in Indonesia. According to Suryadinata (2016), the Chinese Indonesian population, which constitutes a mere 1.5% to 1.8% of the whole, is commonly perceived as non-indigenous (*nonpribumi*). Considered as minority and non-indigenous, Chinese Indonesian women often become a target of hatred and violence as happened in the May 1998 violence (Saputra, 2001). The political rise of TCM is therefore especially interesting in the context of the evolving relations between Indonesian society and the ethnic Chinese in the post-*reformasi* era (after May 1998).

Historically, Chinese traders from mainland China initially arrived to trade in the 1400s, and then stayed along the North coast of Java (Tuban, Surabaya, Gresik), whereas Chinese peasants and laborers arrived in Sumatera and Kalimantan (Yudo Husodo, 1985). The Chinese community in Indonesia is quite heterogeneous, with internal divisions according to religion, socio-economic status, profession, education level, locality, generation in Indonesia, gender, and other factors (Freedman, 2003). The relationship between indigenous people (*pribumi*) and Chinese Indonesians turned increasingly bitter when the Dutch launched the *passenstelsel* policy to control the movements of the Chinese population as well as to stop acculturation with indigenous people (Setiawan, 2012).

Following the Indonesian revolution, Chinese Indonesians were resented by the indigenous people as economic competitors, resulting in the passing of Presidential Regulation No. 10 of 1959 which prohibited Chinese Indonesians from engaging in retail trade in rural areas (Lan, 2009). During the three decades of Suharto's authoritarian New Order government (1966–1998), sporadic anti-Chinese riots took place until the last and most brutally violent May 1998 riots

(Lan, 2009). Despite being marginalized in politics, Chinese Indonesians took an active role in the economy (Nugroho, 2009; Tan, 1987).

There have been positive developments since the *reformasi* following the fall of Suharto in May 1998. Some regulations to abolish discrimination against Chinese Indonesians have come into force. For example, President Habibie through Presidential Instruction No. 26 of 1998 has abolished the use of the terms *pri* and *nonpri* in official government policies and business. This was followed by Presidential Decree No. 6 of 2000 during Abdurachman Wahid's presidency, which revoked Presidential Decree No. 14 of 1967 concerning the restriction of the practice of Chinese customs and traditions to the private domain. Presidential Decree No. 191 of 2002 under Megawati's presidency made Chinese New Year a national holiday, while Law No. 12 of 2006 concerning citizenship issued by the office of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono provided that ethnic Chinese who are Indonesian citizens are categorized as belonging to one of the ethnic groups of the Republic of Indonesia (Anggraeni, 2017).

In the post-*reformasi* era, we gradually witnessed the participation of Chinese Indonesians in politics and public life. *Kompas* newspaper noted that of a total of 560 members of the National House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR) in 2009–2014, 15 were Chinese Indonesians (*Kompas*, 2011). For the period of 2014–2019, this number has fallen to seven (*Kompas*, 2011).

In local politics, the introduction of direct local elections since 2005 under Law No. 32 of 2004, and the current Law No. 10 of 2016, which introduced direct local elections to elect the head of local government (governor, district head, mayor), has facilitated greater participation of Chinese Indonesians as local leaders. For example, some Chinese Indonesian men who have been elected as local leaders through the direct local elections are Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (a.k.a. Ahok) as the District Head of East Belitung (2005–2006), Vice-Governor of DKI Jakarta (2012–2014), and Governor of DKI Jakarta (2014–2017), or Christiandy Sanjaya as the Vice-Governor of West Kalimantan (2008–2013).

Direct local elections have also had a positive effect in increasing number of female political leaders. During the first (2005–2010) and second (2010–2015) periods of direct elections, a total of 26 female local leaders were elected (Dewi, 2015a). In the 9 December 2015 direct local elections, a total of 24 female leaders were elected as heads of local government. In the February 2017 direct local elections, there were 337 pairs of candidates, of which 92.6% were men and 7.4% were women (General Election Commission, 2017).

TCM is one of the female leaders elected during those February 2017 elections.

Her political rise is interesting, not only because she is the first Chinese Indonesian woman leader in Indonesian local politics, but also because of her position within Indonesian society's evolving post-*reformasi* relations with the ethnic Chinese. As noted by Herlijanto (2016, p. 4) the *pribumi* (indigenous people of Indonesia) elite, see that the ethnic Chinese today have managed to free themselves from their "economically strong but politically weak status", and are seen as making an organized effort to become a prominent group both economically and politically.

This study is the first scholarly work to examine Chinese Indonesian women, especially female political leaders in Indonesian local politics. From 2008 to 2017, I have been examining the rising trend of female leaders in Indonesian local politics from various points of view: the contribution of Islam, gender, and networks (Dewi, 2012a, 2012b, 2015a); culture and language (Dewi, 2014); familial ties and political dynasty (Dewi, 2015b); socio-economic conditions (Dewi & Fuady, 2016); piety and sexuality (Dewi, 2017); and gender risk and femininity in personal political branding (Dewi, 2018).

While there have been studies on Chinese Indonesian women, such as those by Sidharta (1987, 2016), Saputra (2001), Nugroho (2009), Meij (2009), and Kwartanada (2017), this paper fills the gaps because none of them have mentioned TCM. There have also been copious studies on Singkawang, such as on the widespread mobility of the Hakka Chinese Indonesian population from Singkawang (Hertzman, 2017), the lantern festival *Cap Go Meh* in Singkawang (Chan, 2009; Tanggok, 2013), or the diasporic heritage network of Singkawang-bound Chinese Indonesian tourists and their Singkawang-based relatives (Ong, Ormond, & Sulianti, 2017), but again none mention TCM. It is in this paucity of literature that this paper finds its empirical and scientific urgency. From a feminist perspective, TCM's experience as the first Chinese Indonesian woman elected Mayor must be taken into account to help complete the picture of the varied experiences of and roles played by Indonesian women in shaping the dynamic of local democracy in post-*reformasi* Indonesia.

Research Method

This study represents a work based on a qualitative research using a feminist research methodology focusing on women's personal experiences in a specific context to gain knowledge based on their real-life experiences (Harding, 1987). The research questions are as follows: First, what is the pattern of TCM's political rise? Second, what is the role played by ethnic identity in the rise of TCM? And third,

what kind of gender narrative is being constructed by TCM's rise? Here, I will reflect on TCM's experience as a Chinese Indonesian woman in the context of my previous research that encompasses mainly Javanese women. I echoed Iris Marion Young's concept of "seriality" (Young, 1994, p. 714) referring to a way of thinking about women as a social collective without identifying common attributes that all women have or implying that all women have a common identity. Therefore, by observing and understanding the story of TCM's political rise as a Chinese Indonesian woman, and relating it to my previous findings regarding non-Chinese Indonesian women, this paper contributes to gaining a comprehensive picture of the political pattern of the rise of Indonesian female political leaders. The main materials presented in this paper are drawn from in-depth interviews with TCM and related sources during my fieldwork in Singkawang in mid-December 2017. In addition, I interviewed relevant sources in Jakarta as well as examining written materials related to TCM's opinions.

Area of the Study: Socio-Politics of Singkawang

Singkawang is one of the 14 regencies in West Kalimantan. West Kalimantan has a diverse ethnic population in which the two largest ethnic groups are Dayaks and Malays (*Melayu*), followed by the Javanese, Chinese, Madurese, and Buginese (Tanasaldy, 2007). Singkawang consists of 26 villages and 5 districts. Since the inception of the office, there have been five Mayors of Singkawang in the period 2001 to 2017: Awang Ishak as acting Mayor (2001–2002), Awang Ishak as elected Mayor of Singkawang (2002–2007), HK (2007–2012), Awang Ishak again (2012–2017), and most recently TCM (2017–2022). Politically, Singkawang is the base of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, PDI-P), a nationalist-based political party with which TCM is affiliated.

In 2016, the population of Singkawang was 211,508 with 107,975 men and 103,533 women (Central Bureau of Statistic of Singkawang District, 2017). A multi-ethnic city, the Chinese constitute the majority in Singkawang. Malays generally live in the coastal areas located in the western part of Singkawang, while the Dayaks reside in the rural and mountainous areas located in the eastern part (Tanggok, 2013).

Historically, the arrival of the ethnic Chinese, especially as miners in West Kalimantan, occurred through Brunei between 1740 and 1745 at the request of Malay sultans such as Sultan Sambas and Penambahan Mempawah because of their skill in gold mining (Aju, 2017a) and they were responsible for the com-

mencement of gold mining in the Kingdoms of Mempawah, Monterado, Seminis, Lara, and Pemangkat. According to Schaank (1893) as cited from Aju (2017b), most of the Chinese miners who migrated from their country to seek new life in the south to avoid chaos and hunger were Hakka, Hokkian, and Cantonese. According to You (2015), Hakka are the majority Chinese clan who migrated to West Kalimantan. This is consistent with Wang Gungwu's note as cited in Setiawan (2012) stating that, while the Hokkian mainly went to Japan, the Philippines, and Java, the Hakka went to West Kalimantan and Thailand. Those Hakka who migrated to West Kalimantan came from Guangdong and Fujian provinces (Chan, 2009; Tanggok, 2013).

While Hakka were previously stereotyped as rural and poor people, nowadays it is hard to find any of them working as gold miners as they work in various professions, such as fishermen, traders, farmers, or in the fields of politics and education (Tanggok, 2013). Based on the foregoing, we can see that the majority of the Chinese Indonesians living in West Kalimantan are Hakka who used to be traders and gold miners.

Results

Political Rise Pattern

This section analyzes the pattern of TCM's political rise. In so doing, I will compare the case of TCM with those of other female leaders that I previously observed in my earlier research. The first step is to understand her individual capital. I have used the concept of 'individual capital' in my earlier research on female political leaders (Dewi, 2015a), which refers to the personal traits of each individual in terms of family background, education, skills, personality, and political experiences, which are intrinsic and cannot be transferred.

TCM, who is Hakka, was born on 27 February 1972 in Singkawang; she is a part of the Tjai clan and the third of four girls in her family. She believes in Confucianism, although her identity card states she is a Buddhist. Since her youth, she has been active in PERMASIS or the Singkawang Community Association (*Perkumpulan Masyarakat Singkawang*). There is little information about her husband, Lim Hok Nen, though some say he is a businessman. TCM is a mother of four children and they also have three step-children. TCM has good individual capital. She gained a Bachelor's degree from Stie Mulia University in Singkawang in 2011 and has worked in a succession of private companies from 2002 to 2014,

the most recent being an insurance company.

TCM has developed strong social networks as a result of her involvement with various organizations, such as participating as a volunteer at the Tzu Chi Foundation as from 2010 to present, actively participating at Tri Dharma serving as the chief of Majelis Tao Indonesia (2014–2019), and also serving as the chief of the Hakka Community of Singkawang (2014–2019) (Author's interview with TCM, 19 December 2017; Profil Tjhai Chui Mie, 2017). TCM's identity as a part of the Tjai clan (in Indonesian usually written *Chai*) and the Hakka can be seen from the congratulations posters sent by both the Tjai clan and the Hakka group from Yogyakarta to TCM, which I found in front of the Singkawang Mayor's Office on 19 December 2017, two days after TCM's inauguration.

In my interview with TCM in Singkawang, she said that she had the support of her husband and other family members which confirmed her in her decision to compete in the election (Author's interview with TCM, 19 December 2017). She also explained the influential role of her father. Her father, who can neither write nor read Indonesian properly, is the neighborhood chief (*ketua Rukun Tetangga*) in the Ward of Sedau in the District of South Singkawang. From the time she was a Junior High School student, TCM has been familiar with her father's role as the neighborhood chief. According to Chan's research note (2009), the Hakkas of Singkawang have retained their language for generations in spite of the New Order repression; Hakka, not Bahasa Indonesia, was the main language of conversation among the local Chinese. Because TCM is very fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, she often helped her father and others in the surrounding neighborhood who could not speak Bahasa Indonesia well to deal with various matters relating to basic community services such as birth certificates and resident cards. As a result, she gradually came into increasing the touch with the community and gained their trust, and also developed an understanding of the flow of services related to government and administration.

TCM's initial participation in politics began in 2004 when she replaced Bong Wui Khong from the New Indonesian Association Party (*Partai Perbimpunan Indonesia Baru*, PPIB) as a member of the Regional House of Representatives of Singkawang. In the 2009 general election, she was successfully elected for PPIB as a female member of the Regional House of Representatives of Singkawang (2009–2014) with the highest vote of all the candidates in her West Singkawang electoral district. This achievement saw her appointed chief of the Regional House of Representatives of Singkawang (2009–2014). Following the elimination of PPIB in the 2014 election, she joined PDI-P, was successfully re-elected as a



Figure 1. Congratulations posters from the Tjai clan and Hakka community. Adapted from the author's picture, in front of Singkawang Mayor's Office, 19 December 2017.

member of the Regional House of Representatives of Singkawang (2014–2019), and then competed in a direct local election for Mayor of Singkawang in February 2017.

There were four pairs of candidates in the February 2017 direct election in Singkawang: (i) Tjhai Nyit Khim & H. Suriyadi, (ii) TCM & Irwan, (iii) H. Abdul Mutalib & Muhammadin, and (iv) Andi Syarif & H. Nurmansyah, this last pair being nominated by non-political party/independent candidates. According to the General Elections Commission, TCM and Irwan gained the highest number of votes with 42.6% and become the elected Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Singkawang (Yulika, 2017).

Interestingly, there were two Chinese Indonesian women competing in the 2017 direct local election in Singkawang, Tjhai Nyit Khim (who was called *Malika* in the

election) and TCM. Both of them come from the same Thjai clan and ran as candidates for the position of Mayor of Singkawang. Tjhai Nyit Khim, who converted to Islam, is the wife of Awang Ishak, former Mayor of Singkawang (2001–2007, 2012–2017). However, as Tjhai Nyit Khim has converted to Islam and become a Muslim, she is no longer considered Chinese. According to local Chinese perceptions and belief, any Chinese who convert to Islam become Malay (Author's interview with EL, head of South Singkawang sub-district, 20 December 2017). This is also the case among Dayaks. As explained by HK former Mayor of Singkawang (2007–2012), the Chinese or Dayaks (usually Christian) who convert to Islam will be seen as having become Malay or, in the local term, "*masuk melayu*" (author's interview with HK, former Mayor of Singkawang (2007–2012) in Jakarta on 7 December 2017). Therefore, in Tjhai Nyit Khim's case, Chinese communities no longer view Khim as a Chinese Indonesian but a Malay (*Melayu*). Thus, TCM was considered by the community as the only Chinese woman candidate in the election, a situation that gave her a significant advantage. When I asked her about her motivation to compete in the 2017 election, she said:

It seems [that I] just go with the flow. I didn't want to be involved in politics in 2014. I chatted with some people close to me. But, they were angry with me. [they said] "you were not total [in politics], you have been trusted by the people, you have to help the community" [...] They told me to become mayor and indeed I had the encouragement of our party chairman [PDI-P], and the governor [West Kalimantan] at that time because I was the chairman of the local parliament of Singkawang, where I gained the highest number of votes in two legislative elections in Singkawang (Author's interview with TCM, 19 December 2017).

According to TCM, her nomination in the February 2017 direct local election was primarily supported by the chief of the PDI-P of West Kalimantan Province, Cornelis, who also served as the Governor of West Kalimantan for two terms (2008–2013, 2013–2018). As the most powerful figure in West Kalimantan, gaining support from Cornelis made TCM feel confident as the governor said that the party's machine would ensure her victory. In addition, TCM was supported by HK, the first Chinese Indonesian man elected as Mayor of Singkawang (2007–2012). As TCM said, HK is one of her most prominent campaigners (*juru kampanye*) (Author's interview with TCM, 19 December 2017).

Without the endorsement of such a powerful patron, it is unlikely TCM would have been confident in her ability to succeed in Singkawang. Cornelis and TCM had strong ties through the political networks as Cornelis had been the chief of the West Kalimantan Province PDI-P and Governor of West Kalimantan for two terms (2008–2013, 2013–2018). In addition, there was the traditional ethnic identity relationship between Dayak (Cornelis) and Chinese (TCM) which had historically seen the existence of a Dayak–Chinese collaboration in West Kalimantan (an issue explained in more detail in a later section). To a lesser degree, we cannot ignore the important presence and endorsement of HK as an important patron as a factor in TCM's political rise in Singkawang, because HK was the first Chinese Mayor of Singkawang (2007–2012). While the issue still requires further study, these early findings echo Aspinall's observation (2011, p. 307) that patronage trumps ethnicity in Indonesian local politics: "Although ethnicity is politically relevant in most regions, most detailed local studies suggest that it does not provide the ideological and organizational framework that structures local political dynamics"; in fact, patronage and clientelism are the most consequential frameworks.

Looking at the above story, TCM's political rise was preceded by her political career as a member of the local parliament. She began her political career as a member of the Regional House of Representatives of Singkawang for three consecutive terms (2004–2009, 2009–2014, 2014–2019), thus confirming her political and social popularity and acceptability among the Singkawang community. Having spent at least 13 years engaging in political activities in the local parliament prior to becoming the Mayor of Singkawang gave her a competitive advantage that made her unbeatable by other politicians. TCM said: "It is impossible to rise suddenly. How will people know our potential? How will they judge whether you have a potential working capability or not if you never show it? That is the point" (Radio Republik Indonesia, 2017).

Looking at the bigger picture, the pattern of TCM's political rise is similar to those of non-Chinese Indonesian female political leaders in my earlier studies. Female political leaders, before being nominated as candidates for head of local government, had usually been elected as a member of the local parliament for at least one term, but most of them had been elected for two terms. This strategy is congruent with the need to increase popularity within popular direct democracy in local politics. Although some female politicians lose, they will still gain an advantage because their names will have been widely circulated among community members. If they manage to be elected as a member of the local parliament for at least two terms, it provides them with opportunities to prove their capability to

their constituents. This is the case, for example, for female political leaders in Java, such as Rustriningsih (district head of Kebumen 2005–2010) who was elected a member of the People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*, MPR) in the 1999 general election from the PDI-P's electoral district of Kebumen (Dewi, 2015a); Ratna Ani Lestari, the elected district head of Banyuwangi (2005–2010), who began her political career as an elected member of the Regional House of Representatives of Jember (2004–2009) (Dewi, 2015a); and Sri Sumarni, the elected district head of Grobogan (2015–2010), who was previously elected as the member of the Regional House of Representatives of Grobogan for three consecutive terms (2004–2009, 2009–2014, 2014–2019) where she became the chief of the Regional House of Representatives of Grobogan for the 2009–2014 period (Dewi & Kusumaningtyas, 2018). In Bali, we see Ni Putu Eka Wiryastuti, the elected district head of Tabanan, Bali (2010–2015, 2015–2020), who were former members of the Tabanan Regional House of Representatives (2009–2014) (Dewi, 2016). In South Sulawesi we can see Tenri Olle Yasin Limpo, elected a member of the Regional House of Representatives of Gowa from Golkar for two periods (i.e., 2004–2009 and 2009–2014), who later run as the candidate of district head of Gowa though did not gain enough votes to be elected as district head of Gowa in the 2015 direct local election (Dewi, 2018). In sum, their successes in local parliaments prove their real popularity and acceptability among local people, which is an important consideration for politicians wishing to run as candidates for head of local government.

Ethnic Identity and the New Power Sharing

TCM has strong social capital due to the networks she developed with various groups in Singkawang. In this regard, I agree with Burt (1995) who believes that social capital is the major determinant for success in a competition. In the case of TCM, she acknowledged her strong social capital:

My advantage lies in the fact that I make friends with various people and don't discriminate, even when I was a member of the local parliament [...]. (Author's interview with TCM, 19 December 2017).

A further interview with a prominent Tri Dharma figure in Singkawang (a Chinese Indonesian man who identified himself as Hokkian) saw similar comments:

This is our pride [Chinese Indonesians in Singkawang]. [Women] used to be shackled in the household. She [TCM] was agile, wherever she went. There were religious ceremonies and so on. I have known TCM for a long time. Especially in Singkawang there are many temples. She has been attending ceremonies all the time. The place where Chinese people gather is during the commemoration day in the temple. Indeed, if you want to introduce yourself to the traditional Chinese community, you have to go to temples (Author's interview with AC, a prominent Tri Dharma figure, 20 December 2017).

TCM's strong social capital of networks among Chinese Indonesians in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, and beyond can be seen from the large numbers of congratulations posters sent to TCM from various networks of Chinese clans, businesswomen, businessmen, and non-Chinese individuals to TCM that were displayed in front of the Singkawang's Mayor office as well as along the street, which I observed in Singkawang on 19 December 2017. At this stage, her ability to build networks was really crucial in her political rise and victory. Here again, I agree with Aspinall's observation (2011) that ethnicity alone is not a trump card and that what really counts is the ability to *membangun jaringan* (build networks), as in TCM's case.

Having strong Chinese social networks, what was TCM's strategy in the 2017 direct local election? Was the ethnic identity card being played in these elections? I agree with Freedman (2003) who said that ethnic identity is formed from internal dynamics within a group, is shaped and affected by the larger social, political, and cultural environment in which a group lives, and that ethnic identity in Indonesia has long been a political category. In Singkawang, the Chinese are in the majority followed by Malays, Dayaks, the Buginese, the Madurese, and the Batak. Historically in West Kalimantan, the Chinese often entered into a coalition with Dayaks (You, 2015), whereas the Chinese and Malays have long had conflicting relationships in relation to the struggle over the gold mining territory.

In the 2017 direct local election, TCM needed to find a pair as her vice-district head candidate to create an ethnic balance. It has to be understood that ethnic politics in the post-New Order period, as Tanasaldy said, has been colored by ethnic "power sharing" (Tanasaldy, 2007, p. 371). According to Tanasaldy, district head elections after 1999 (at that time the election of a local government head was still conducted by members of the Regional House of Representatives) had been largely peaceful, mostly because of conscious power sharing between Malays and

Dayaks, the two ethnic groups having reached an understanding of their respective ethnic domains (Tansaldy, 2007).

TCM's political context differs from Tanasaldy's observation, which was made under the previous Law No. 22 of 1999 on Regional Government in which local government heads were elected by the members of the Regional House of Representatives. Her rise has been under the new Law No. 32 of 2004 and the current Law No. 10 of 2016 in which the local government heads have been directly elected by the local people since 2005. In this new political context, TCM still had to find an ethnic balance. She chose a Singkawang man named Irwan, a local bureaucrat, chief of the FKPPi (*Forum Komunikasi Putra-Putri Purnawirawan dan Putra Putri TNI-Polri*, Communication Forum of the Sons and Daughters of the Retired Army and Police). Irwan is a Bugis-Malay Muslim, young and popular, and has strong networks among Malay youth and the ethnic Chinese. Irwan's wife is from Madura, and his father is a former Military Rayon Commander in the sub-district of Tujuh Belas, which is now called South Singkawang, in which the majority of the population are Chinese Indonesians. As his father had many Chinese friends, Irwan is also familiar with and has many Chinese Indonesian friends in Singkawang (Author's interview with JP, a prominent Malay cultural figure and a member of Irwan's winning team in Singkawang, 20 December 2017). JP added that, while TCM has for many years developed strong networks with Chinese Indonesians in Singkawang and gained their trust, Irwan has many years of relationship with not only Bugis-Malay but also Chinese youth. Thus, the combination of TCM and Irwan created a strong social capital of Chinese-Malay networks that became a competitive advantage none of their competitors could match. At this stage, the ability of TCM and her team to build networks that stretch beyond single-ethnicity boundaries has been crucial in her political rise and victory.

HK said that Irwan contributed to TCM's victory as he attracted Muslim voters, either Bugis or Malay and Chinese Muslim voters (Author's interview with HK, the former Mayor of Singkawang [2007–2012], 7 December 2017). AC, a Chinese Indonesian man, said that TCM's close personal relationship with Dayak and Malay figures meant that, in the event of any tension, it could be easily settled (Author's interview with AC, a prominent figure of Tri Dharma figure, 20 December 2017). Here we can see that the consideration of ethnic identity balancing was being seriously taken into account in TCM's political rise and victory. Here, Mietzner's previous observations (2009, p. 277), echoed by Aspinall (2011, p. 304), seem relevant: That Indonesian electorates do not support ethnic exclusivists, because in regions with diverse ethnic populations, most winning candi-

dates are those who appeal “to cross-cultural constituencies instead of relying on support by one ethnic, religious or social group.”

HK, as one of TCM’s campaigners and supporters, said that ethnicity becomes one of the vote-gathering factors while religion does not; this is because not all Chinese people are followers of Confucianism as many of them are Muslims, Catholics, and Buddhists (Author’s interview with HK, a former Mayor of Singkawang (2007–2012), 7 December 2017). He said that although they could not use various Chinese associations formally, as they are non-political organizations, individual prominent figures in various Chinese associations supported TCM (Author’s interview with HK, a former Mayor of Singkawang [2007–2012], 7 December 2017). HK also conducted door-to-door campaigns in the Dayak community in remote areas. HK’s role in consolidating votes from Dayaks for TCM is interesting given that he is Chinese. Historically, Dayaks have had a close relationship with the ethnic Chinese because Dayaks experienced discrimination under the Malay sultanates and Dutch colonialism that prevented them from participating in social activities beyond their own group (Tanasaldy, 2007). In the case of TCM’s political rise, the ethnic Chinese (in this case TCM) and Malays (in this case Irwan) cooperated in the 2015 direct local election, creating an interesting new ethnic collaboration.

This paper’s findings regarding the interplay of ethnicity in politics is not surprising. In a broader picture of post-*reformasi* Indonesian local politics, Aspinall (2011) concluded that ethnicity (a soft form of ethnic politics) still counts in arenas such as local elections. Tanasaldy noted that the politicization of ethnicity has a long history, especially in West Kalimantan, and has been practiced in particular by the underdog Dayaks rather than by the more powerful Malays (Tanasaldy, 2007). What is new in the rise of TCM in Singkawang is the formation of a new form of collaboration, which implies new ‘power sharing’ between the ethnic Chinese and Malays, as compared to the past where, as noted by Tanasaldy, ethnic political contests in West Kalimantan mainly occurred between Malays and Dayaks (Tanasaldy, 2007). Previously, the ethnic Chinese in West Kalimantan often created coalitions with Dayaks (You, 2015). Now, with the rise of TCM, a new form of coalition has arisen. While previously, during the Old Order and New Order eras, the Chinese in West Kalimantan remained passive in politics and mainly creating coalitions with Dayaks against Malays. Now, in the post-*reformasi* era, due to the direct local elections, and especially in the case of the political rise of TCM, it is clearly obvious that a shift in power sharing between ethnic groups in West Kalimantan has occurred. The ethnic Chinese have moved forward and are competing with other

groups in Singkawang by coalition with the Malays, who are also a strong element to be considered in an ethnic-balance strategy.

By showing the political rise of TCM, this paper adds a new understanding of the shift in ethnic power sharing: Previously occurring mainly between Dayaks and Malays, the post-*reformasi* era now sees new patterns of ethnic power sharing between the ethnic Chinese and Malays. This is part of the process to create a democratic equilibrium in Singkawang.

New Gender Narrative

I position TCM as a Chinese Indonesian woman in the bigger picture of Indonesian women, following Budianta's statement (2002, p. 41) "to contextualize Indonesian women's effort in redefining their gendered roles within a highly volatile transitional climate post-*reformasi*." I view TCM's experience in the context of an assumption that 'gender politics' is constantly changing: Where the 'gender arrangement' of the appropriate behavior of men and women in society and its cultural context is not static and constantly changes or is being negotiated due to various influences. The definition of the term 'gender politics' here refers to the one proposed by Connell (2008, p. 144): "Gender politics is about the steering of the gender order in history. It represents the struggle to have the endless re-creation of gender relations through practice turn out a particular way." Connell (2008, pp. 3–6) uses the terms *gender arrangement* or *gender order* as the dominant patterns of gender arrangements and norms of society. Connell focuses on gender as it is manifested through social relationships, where men and women interact through either thoughts or actions that constantly produce, reproduce, change, and modify the concept of gender. Some factors such as modernization, political, economic, and social changes play a significant role in influencing changes in women's narratives in each cultural context. For example, Sen (1998) explores shifts in the narrative discourse of Indonesian women: While in the 1970s the narrative of Indonesian women emphasized the notion of 'housewife,' in the 1990s the narrative of 'working women' develops as central to the paradigmatic female subject in Indonesian political, cultural, and economic discourses.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century there has been some movement toward a rejection of Confucianism in East Asia (Lee, 2011). However, in the case of TCM, we can see that the 'gender arrangement' of Chinese ways of life and beliefs, influenced by Confucianism, are highly patriarchal, positioning men as the core and controller of family while women occupy a subordinate position and have to

obey their fathers/husbands/sons (Meij, 2009). The dominance of patriarchy continues in Chinese families: The family line is through the father or the male line, manifesting the centrality of boys in the family compared to girls (Author's interview with AC, a prominent figure of Tri Dharma in Singkawang, 20 December 2017). Interestingly, AC added that while previously in Singkawang Chinese women were perceived to only have a private role inside their respective households and could not participate outside, this has now changed. Looking at the TCM's case, she said:

It's the same, that nature [*kodrat*, ability to do a particular thing, appropriateness and boundary as woman such as giving birth, breastfeed, nurture of children, be a good wives,] can't be changed [...]. Once we are at home we can't do this and that. If we are outside [of home] we might still be able to do it. If we are at home, our children will tell us what they want. Being inside and outside are different (Author's interview with TCM, 19 December 2017).

As we can see from the above quotation, TCM's position in the private and public spheres is clearly different. While she has a political and strategic role in the public sphere as Mayor of Singkawang, once she is back home she becomes an ordinary Chinese Indonesian woman who has to obey the gender arrangement of the Chinese ways of life and belief.

Nevertheless, on the issue of TCM's political rise in the public sphere, AC mentioned that TCM's rise as the candidate for the post of Mayor of Singkawang positively encouraged other Chinese Indonesian women to stand out and support TCM's campaign as well. AC felt optimistic about participation of Chinese Indonesian women in Singkawang in the future, saying "there has been a change in the people's mindset; hopefully in the next five years there will be more women" (Author's interview with AC, a prominent figure of Tri Dharma in Singkawang, 20 December 2017).

In Singkawang, by becoming the first Chinese Indonesian female Mayor, TCM has expanded the imagination and practices of Chinese women in Indonesian local politics. This is certainly a new positive narrative of Chinese Indonesian women in Singkawang compared to the previous dominant negative narrative. In their attempts to escape poverty, ordinary Chinese Indonesian women from West Kalimantan, mainly from Singkawang, have gone down the road of arranged marriages abroad. Yentriyani (2005), who studied the transnational marriages of

Chinese Indonesian women with Taiwanese men in West Kalimantan, revealed various cases of women being trafficked involving intermediaries. TCM's response to this phenomenon is to view such women (called *amoy*) as "family heroes" (*pahlawan keluarga*) because they often have to marry someone they do not know for the sake of the family's welfare (Author's interview with TCM, 19 December 2017). Generally, the picture of Chinese Indonesian women in Singkawang are those who often become mail-order brides for men from Taiwan, China, Malaysia, and Singapore (see <http://www.indonesiamatters.com/1663/singkawang/>) (Sandel, 2015).

By understanding this general picture, we can see how TCM's political rise as the first Chinese Indonesian woman in Singkawang has opened new horizons. Chinese Indonesian women in Singkawang are now gradually becoming perceived as being capable of influencing and shaping local politics. Through her life and experiences, TCM has enriched our understanding of the contemporary new portrait of a Chinese Indonesian women's narrative, especially in the multi-ethnic city of Singkawang in post-*reformasi* Indonesia.

Conclusion

This paper highlights some important points. First, looking at the bigger picture, the pattern of TCM's political rise is similar to those of other non-Chinese Indonesian female politicians as I discovered in previous studies. My previous research revealed that female political leaders, before being nominated as candidates for the head of local government, had usually contested a seat in Parliament and been elected as the member of the local parliament for at least one term, though most of them had held office for two terms. This strategy is congruent with the need to increase popularity within direct democracy. Although some female politicians lose, they will still gain an advantage because their names will have been widely circulated among community members. These findings show that a parliamentary position at a local level paves the way for female political leaders to compete for executive positions. By revealing the pattern of the political rise of Indonesian women in local politics, this paper contributes to filling the gap in scholarly works on women in politics. This is because the majority of scholarly works focus mainly on the experience of female members of parliament in Asia (e.g., Iwanaga, 2008) (Prihatini, 2019) as well as in other continents (Franceschet, Krook, & Tan, 2019) and only a few examine the political rise of women to executive positions in local politics.

Second, in relation to the interplay of ethnic identity, this paper shows a strong indication of the use of ethnicity or ethnic identity in the rise of TCM, also accompanied by playing patronage factor in it. While I agree with Tansaldy (2007) who states that ethnic identity will continue to play an important role in West Kalimantan politics in a peaceful manner, I add a new perspective of the shift in ethnic power sharing: While previously it occurred mainly between Dayaks and Malays, post-*reformasi* Indonesia is now witnessing a new ethnic power-sharing arrangement between ethnic Chinese and Malays, which I suggest is part of the process of creating a democratic equilibrium in Singkawang.

Third, this paper has uncovered the new gender narrative of Chinese Indonesian women in Singkawang. By becoming the first Chinese Indonesian female Mayor, TCM who has strong individual and social capital of networks, has expanded the imaginations and practices of Chinese women in Indonesian local politics, as subjects capable of influencing and shaping local politics. This is a new positive narrative, unlike the previously dominant and negative narrative that primarily associated Singkawang's Chinese Indonesian women with the mail-order bride business. TMC's case shows that Chinese Indonesian women can no longer be classed as merely peripheral. They now have the same opportunities and potential to use ethnicity or gender to compete in local political contests, in the same way as other Indonesian women.

By revealing the interplays of ethnicity, politics, and gender, this paper contributes significantly to the picture of Indonesian women's experiences and roles in shaping local democracy in post-*reformasi* Indonesia. This paper is a continuation of the author's consistent efforts since 2008 to bring, present, and analyze the wide variety of Indonesian women's experiences in local executive power, which vary by region, religion, and ethnicity. This represents a real and significant contribution to Indonesian political studies by shifting away from the tendency to focus on the andocentric features of a political system (Fleschenberg & Derichs, 2012) that marginalizes women's experiences in politics. Andocentrism shall no longer be the norm in local politics in post-*reformasi* Indonesia.

Acknowledgements. I greatly appreciate the time Tjhai Chui Mie took to speak with me and her permission to share her story, both for academic purposes and to inspire other Indonesian women.

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