

CHINESE TRADITIONAL CULTURE IN INDONESIAN FILM – *THE PHOTOGRAPH* (2007)

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ABSTRACT

Under Suharto's New Order regime (1966-1998), there is virtually no sign of ethnic Chinese culture or Chinese character featured in Indonesian film. However, after the outbreak of racial riot in 1998, between 2002 and 2007, there are a handful of Chinese-themed films produced and directed by Indonesian indigenous filmmakers. Most of their films are subsidized by foreign funding and appeared in national and international film circuit. Among the films, *The Photograph* (2007), directed by a female filmmaker, Nan Achnas presents an enormous amount of traditional Chinese culture. This paper evaluates the formation of diasporic Chinese identity through a close analysis of the cinematic and visual feature of the film. Incorporated with the filmmaker's experience, the discussion of the paper focuses on the representation of diasporic Chinese identity in the film text and that emblemized by the recurrent appearance of three photographs in the film. The paper argues Chinese-themed film like *The Photograph* not only recuperated Chinese Indonesian stories but also re-emphasized the cinematic portrayal of multi-ethnic society on Indonesian screen.

Keywords: Chinese Traditional Culture, Chinese Indonesian, Chinese-themed film

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been a long time since we last see images of ethnic Chinese traditional culture on Indonesian screen. Perhaps, the period between 1930s and 1950s when Chinese in Indonesia were the main players in the film industry, Chinese traditional culture thrived. After independent in 1949, the country's film industry is gradually taken over by local indigenous due to the upsurge of nationalism. Although ethnic Chinese remain vigorously participating in the film industry, Chinese-themed films are vanishing in the progressive manner. By 1966 when President Suharto comes to power (1966-1998), the authoritarian implemented the assimilation policy that eventually erases Chinese Indonesian culture identity (Hoon, 2006). Following the mandatory assimilation policy, Chinese culture identity has been forcefully submerged in the public sphere and there is no visible trace of Chinese involvement in neither the national film industry nor Chinese culture on Indonesian screen (Sen, 2006). Until the outbreak of racial riot in May 1998 that shove to the resignation of President Suharto soon after the riot. With the transformation of the political landscape in Indonesia and the revoking of Chinese Indonesian discrimination policy and restoration of ethnic Chinese cultural practice in the public domain, the first Chinese-themed films after the *reformasi* re-emerged in 2002.

Between 2002 and 2007, there are a handful of Chinese Indonesian theme based films were produced and directed by Indonesian indigenous filmmakers. Most of their films are subsidized by foreign funding and appeared in national and international film circuit. The first Chinese Indonesian film was released on the day of Indonesian Chinese New year celebration in 2002. The film, *Ca-bau-kan* (The Courtesan, directed by Nia Dinata,) is also