In recent years, Chinese education in Southeast Asia, mainly Malaysia and Singapore, has become a focus of study for many Chinese-educated scholars. Nevertheless, there have also been some articles or book chapters on Chinese education in Indonesia, although monographs are rare, except for Professor Huang Kunzhang’s book under review. The monograph was first published in Malaysia in 2005, and this 2007 edition has been updated to 2006.

Unlike in Malaysia where Chinese education, especially the Chinese-medium school, is still going strong, Chinese education proper in Indonesia ended in early 1966 after Suharto came to power. It is important to note that Huang defines Chinese education (huawen jiaoyu) not as Chinese school (huaxiao) but as Chinese-medium school and Chinese-language teaching. This is a debatable issue. Huang also uses the term huaqiao (overseas Chinese) for Chinese citizens residing outside China, and huaren/huayi (ethnic Chinese/of Chinese descent) for ethnic Chinese who are not citizens of China, which is a common usage in mainland China. His monograph consists of two parts, the text proper (196 pages) and appendixes and bibliography (109 pages).

Based on the concepts of huaqiao and huaren/huayi, Huang has divided the history of Chinese education in Indonesia into seven periods. The core of the subject is discussed as follows: Chapter 3, the origins of overseas Chinese education (1729-1900), Chapter 4, the emergence of a new-style overseas Chinese education (1901-1941), Chapter 5, the dark age of overseas Chinese education (1942-1945), Chapter 6, the revival of overseas Chinese education (1946-1949), Chapter 7, the development of overseas Chinese education after World War II (1950-1957), Chapter 8, overseas Chinese education in gradual decline (1958-1966), and Chapter 9, ethnic Chinese and Chinese education (1958-2006).

The periodization of Chinese education in Indonesia up to 1957 is quite commonly adopted by writers on the subject. It is based on Indonesian political history and major events in the development of Indonesia’s Chinese education. In this sense it is “Indonesia-centric,” rather than “China-centric.” What constitutes the education of Chinese Indonesians after 1957 is still a debatable issue: Is it “Chinese education” or “Chinese-language teaching?”

Chapter 8 entitled “Toward gradual decline of overseas Chinese education (1958-1966),” deals with the drop in the numbers of Chinese school students resulting from the 1957 regulations which required Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent to attend Indonesian-medium schools, and the further dwindling of Chinese-medium schools due to the closure of the pro-KMT schools. It also touches on the contribution of “overseas Chinese education” in Indonesia. Huang is generally correct in his discussion of the adverse effects of the 1957 regulations but does not mention the actual implementation of the regulation: Those children of Indonesian citizens who were already in the final years in Chinese-medium schools and who would graduate in the first half of 1958 were permitted to finish their study until graduation. During the first half of 1958, therefore, there were still a significant number of Indonesian citizens in...
Chinese-medium schools. Huang is critical of the Chinese-medium schools curriculum which was “China-oriented” rather than “Indonesia-oriented.” As such, the students were being prepared for further studies in China rather than for living and working in Indonesia. Although he points out that Chinese-medium school graduates went on to make major contributions to China and Indonesia in various fields, he does not give any concrete examples. It would be more convincing to the readers if he had provided a list of graduates who went on to join various occupations after 1958.


In the first period of 1958-1966, some Chinese-medium schools still existed while Indonesian-medium schools “for ethnic Chinese” began to emerge from 1958. The 1957 regulation compelled Chinese-medium schools to be split into two divisions. The first division remained as Chinese-medium schools while the second division became Indonesian schools to take in those Chinese with Indonesian citizenship who were affected by the 1957 regulation. In these Indonesian schools, as noted by Huang, Indonesian was used as the medium of instruction and Chinese was only taught as a subject for a few hours a week. Besides, the school curriculum followed that of the Indonesian national schools, not the Chinese-medium schools. Huang called these jimin xueshao (籍民学校) or Indonesian citizen schools which were still offering Chinese education (huawen jiaoyu, see p. 171). In fact, “Chinese-language teaching (华文教学 huawen jiaoxue) in Indonesian schools” would be a more appropriate description. During this period, however, there was still tolerance toward Chinese language and Chinese culture.

However, during the second period (1966-98), Suharto eliminated the three pillars of Chinese culture in Indonesia by closing down all Chinese-medium schools, banning Chinese socio-political organizations and suppressing Chinese-language newspapers (except for the military-run bilingual newspaper Yindunixiya ribao). The purpose was to make all Chinese Indonesians assimilate into the “indigenous” Indonesian community. It would seem that Huang is fully aware of this, yet he still talks about “Chinese education” during the Suharto period. It may be because he takes into account the existence of the SNPC schools (Special Project National Schools), which were very limited in number and later banned), the existence of a Chinese Studies Department at the University of Indonesia and two other private universities, and the establishment of a Chinese-language center for tourism purposes in the mid-1990s. But this is insufficient evidence for the existence of “Chinese education” in Indonesia under Suharto. Therefore it would be more appropriate to discuss the New Order period in a separate chapter as the liberalization of Chinese-language teaching and Chinese culture took place only after the fall of Suharto.

For the post-1998 period, Huang discusses the revival of Chinese education during the reformasi (reform) era which succeeded the Suharto period. He deals with the rise