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## Tionghoa Descendents Library Museum: A Strategy of Preserving Tionghoa History in Indonesia

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### Abstract:

*Tionghoa, or Chinese descendent people have been living in Indonesia since hundreds of years ago. Their existence has been becoming a part of Indonesian society. Undeniable, their presence gives impact to the development of Indonesian as a nation with multicultural ethnic as the acculturation occurred. Lots of Tionghoa people have been participated and contributed in the development of Indonesian in many aspects since long time ago, such as economy, politics, education, literatures etc. However, the literatures concerning their history are quite rare documented and collected. Tionghoa Descendent Library Museum located in Banten province; try to preserve the history of Tionghoa descendents in Indonesia through collecting documents, literatures and artifacts. This study is aimed to describe challenges and problems occurred in collecting documents or materials related to Tionghoa descendants in Indonesia and its strategies. This study is using qualitative approach. The data are collected through interviews with the owners as well as the collector and founder of the library and some information available on websites. It is found that it is hard to find documents, literatures or artifacts of Tionghoa descendants in Indonesia due to politics and government policies or regulations concerning Tionghoa in Indonesia, especially during the new order by Soeharto's regime. However, the strategies used by the founder to face this are by optimizing the network of antique book seller, obtaining the collections from the main holders or owners, maintaining good relationship with researchers, academicians, people or community that concern with Tionghoa history in Indonesia, providing map of significant collections, and promote library through online and social media.*

**Keywords:** *Tionghoa descendents, local history, knowledge preservation*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

History plays significant role in human life. It contains not only events and memories, but also valuable information of the past that might have important values for future generations. Moreover, through history people would have better understanding about their identity and expand as well as enrich their horizon on certain issues in the past. Thus, considering its value, history needs to be preserved. Nowadays, preservation of history could be conducted both traditionally and digitally.

However, not all history is well collected and documented, for instance the history of Tionghoa or Chinese descendants' people in Indonesia. Sidjaya (2014, p.33) in his study on Chinese-Indonesian under Soeharto's New Orde stated that Chinese-Indonesian seldom to discuss in history curriculum in Indonesia and they are perceived as foreign citizen though they have been living quite long in Indonesia. Tionghoa people have been part of Indonesia for decades. Their presence has been started very long ago even before the Dutch and Japanese colonialism occurred in Indonesia. Although, they are less considered in Indonesian history, as they live in Indonesia, they have been contributing in various aspects in Indonesia before and after Dutch colonials. Some of them are participating as entrepreneur or traders; some are writers or litterateurs, teachers or educators, journalists, Politicians etc.

Regarding their long presence in Indonesia, it is hard to separate Tionghoa people out of history of Indonesia as a nation. Thus, Tionghoa descendants' library museum was founded as a strategy to preserve Tionghoa descendants' history in Indonesia through collecting documents, literatures and artifacts. However, the process of obtaining the collections is not free from challenges or problems. This paper aims to describe the challenges or problems occurred in obtaining collections related to Tionghoa descendants' history in Indonesia and its strategies used to overcome it.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Knowledge Preservation**

Knowledge preservation (KP) is a component of knowledge management (KM). It is an important part in the cycle of knowledge management as it captures and stores valuable knowledge within an organization. It lies in the beginning of KM cycle. KP is viewed as a process of capturing, understanding; archiving, retrieving and protecting both explicit and tacit or implicit knowledge as it's still useful and valuable for the organization to meet its goal (IAEA, 2011).

### **Process & Strategy of knowledge Preservation**

In its process, knowledge preservation covers three stages; selection, storage and actualization ((Romhardt, 2007) as cited in Agrifoglio, 2015). The first stage, Selection, refers to the identification process of knowledge that is valuable and useful for the organization. It is impossible for an organization to record or save all information within. Therefore, identification and selection have an important role to select and protect any knowledge that is valuable for the organization. The second stage, storage means of saving the knowledge. After making a selection of knowledge, then it should be well stored. Storing the knowledge could be done either by individual, collective and electronic. The third stage, actualization refers to the updating of the knowledge. It is important to have knowledge that has been preserved

updated. As information is growing rapidly each day and brings changes to the organization, there is a need to keep updating knowledge in an organization.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method that aims to describe challenges or problems occurred and its strategies in collecting documents or materials related to history of Tionghoa descendants in Indonesia. The study is conducted in Tionghoa descendants library museum located in South Tangerang City, Banten Province. The data of this research were collected through interviews and some literatures. The interviews were conducted with the founder and owner of Tionghoa descendants' library museum elaborating his experiences on how to face challenges and its strategies in collecting documents and artifacts related to Tionghoa descendants' history in Indonesia.

## DISCUSSION

### Profile of Tionghoa Descendants Library Museum

Tionghoa descendants library museum was founded in 2011 by Azmi Abu Bakar, a Gayonese from Aceh Region. Azmi has been starting his efforts to collect the documents and artifact related to Tionghoa Indonesia when he was still at college. In 2011, the Tionghoa descendants library museum was opened to public. The collection are more than 30.000 not included the archives of Tionghoa. The collections are varies and not limited to documents and literatures only, but also artifacts. Some examples of the documents are manuscript in Javanese scripts written by Tjan Tjoen Hiang in Surakarta in 1891 that contains about a Chinese classic roman, Sie Djin Kwie, a newspaper, IK-PO in Chinese language in 1906, and also archive of birth certificate of Tionghoa descendants issued by Dutch government in 1946 (Wirawan, 2018). Besides documents, there are some artifacts, such as terracotta statue, cigarettes advertisement enamel in colonials' era, sign board of community of "Tiong Hoa Hwee Kwan" in 1900, etc. Below are some pictures of the collections as follow:



[1]. birth certificate of Tionghoa issued by Dutch Government in 1946; [2]. IK-PO newspaper in Chinese language in 1906, Sources: <http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah-43054495>]



[1] The sign board of Community of Tiong Hoa Hwee Kwan in 1900; [2]. Terracotta statue, Sources: <http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah-43054495>

These collections have been attracted not only Tionghoa people but also non-Tionghoa ones. Further, People from different kinds of background such as researchers, academicians, journalists, collectors both local and foreign are interested in visiting the library museum. Researchers from Netherlands, Australia, Denmark, USA and some other countries also came to see the collections as it relates to their researches. Their researches would be about genealogy of certain Tionghoa family in Bandung area, history of old Tionghoa School, etc. Some of them only visit the library to comply their curiosity of the news about the library collections they heard from other researchers.

As the founder of the library is not coming from Tionghoa ethnic, instead of a Gayonesse from Aceh province brings up a question to many people on reasons underlying his efforts of collecting documents, literatures and artifacts of Tionghoa descendants' people in Indonesia and later establishing the library. Responding to this, the founder explained that it is the nationhood spirit of diversity in Indonesia as one nation that is important to concern. Azmi, the founder has this motivation when he noticed that Tionghoa became victims of 1998 political riot in Indonesia when the regime of Soeharto fell. Since then, he was curious and interested in finding out more about Tionghoa in Indonesia. He believes that this tragedy might be caused by miss information and miss understanding that most people had and perceived about the presence of Tionghoa in Indonesia. The factors underlying this may vary and relate to other aspects such as politics and government regulations especially during new Orde. However, He believes that providing information of Tionghoa history in Indonesia might help change people perspective and paradigm about Tionghoa in Indonesia and strengthen the spirit of nationhood.

### **Preserving Tionghoa Descendants History through Library Museum**

There are several strategies of preserving knowledge that could be applied as well to preserve the history of Tionghoa descendants in Indonesia. The stages are as follow:

- (a) Selection; the library museum collects documents, literatures, and artifacts related to Tionghoa descendants in Indonesia. In making selection of collections, the founder makes a 'map' of significant collections that is related to Tionghoa nationhood roles and contributions in Indonesia.
- (b) Storage; the library keeps and maintains the collections of Tionghoa library museum.
- (c) Actualization; as the number of new collections is increasing, the data of the library collections are updated frequently.

## **Challenges, Problems and Strategies in Collecting Documents and Artifacts of Tionghoa Descendants**

### ***(1) Limited collections available***

Based on the interview with the founder of Tionghoa descendants of library museum, it is identified that it is not easy to collect documents or artifacts about Tionghoa descendants. Azmi said that it is rare to see that people have good interest in Tionghoa literatures. Even, among his networks of antique book seller, most of the sellers were not interested to sell Tionghoa literatures as the market demand was very limited.

Based on the interview with the founder of Tionghoa library museum, it is assumed that there might be several reasons underlying it which relates to government policies or regulations in Indonesia regarding to Tionghoa people, especially during Soehartos' New Order. The founder mentioned some regulations such as PP-10/1959 about the restriction of trading in rural area and other regulations concerning language, culture and religion. During the New Orde (1966-1998), there were some other regulations related to assimilations of Tionghoa in Indonesia, such as Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967 (Inpres No. 14/1967) on Chinese Religion, Beliefs, and Traditions, Cabinet Presidium Instruction No. 49/U/8/1967 on the utilization of the Chinese language in media, Decree of the Cabinet Presidium no. 127/U/Krp/12/1968 concerning Changes in Names, Provisional People's Consultative Assembly No. 32, 1966, etc. The regulations concerning Chinese-Indonesian related much with three pillars of Chinese society; Chinese schools, Chinese language, and Chinese organizations. (Sidjaya, 2014).

This regulation gave some serious impacts. For instance, PP-10/ 1959 prohibit Tionghoa to trade in the district or countryside. However, in practice, the restrictions also lead to the eviction of Tionghoa by local military government, as at that time, Tionghoa people were still considered foreign citizen. (Setiono, 2008). Besides that, the other regulations concerning on culture, language and religion also give impacts. "Provisional People's Consultative Assembly No.32/1966 was about the use of Chinese language and script in the mass media that mentions there will be only one Chinese-language newspaper (later called *Harian Indonesia*), sponsored and controlled by the government". (Tan, 2008, p.53). Moreover, on religious activities, Tionghoa could do that only within family environment and in a closed place. (Nurchahyo, 2016). Tionghoa people were encouraged to change their Tionghoa name to Indonesian name. Walujono (2014, p.1) describes a situation; "Though my father's family is ethnically Chinese, they have been living in Indonesia since the early 1900's. When my father was growing up, the Indonesian government forcibly tried to eradicate his Chinese heritage. He was not allowed to speak or learn the Chinese language and was forced to change his last name to an Indonesian one. My brother and I were passed down stories about my grandmother burning Chinese newspapers at her own fireplace for her family's safety".

Those conditions lead to the difficulties of finding collections related to Tionghoa in Indonesia as to keep documents, literatures or artifacts related to Tionghoa might lead to threaten their safety. To face the difficulties of finding collections, the founder tries to optimize the network of antique book sellers to help find the available collections. Moreover, in order to get to more authentic ones, Azmi also always finds and checks the collections to the main sources. These efforts take him to some rural areas in his traveling to see the main holder or owner of the documents or artifacts. So the

authenticity and quality of literatures, documents or artifact that he found is mostly much better than the ones owned by other antique book seller in his networks.

(2) More competitors to collect documents and artifacts related to Tionghoa descendants in Indonesia

Starting when the Tionghoa Descendants library museum was opened for public in 2011, it has been catching people attention about Tionghoa history in Indonesia as before it was quite rare to discuss. Moreover, the collections kept in the library museum are interesting. The founder mentions that most of the collections are not available in other institution such as national library.

Responding to it, Tionghoa people and some people who concern on Tionghoa history started to search for Tionghoa literatures and artifacts. Antique book sellers also start hunting for Tionghoa literatures as the market and demand start rising. It means the competitors of Tionghoa literature and artifacts collectors are increasing in number. Responding to this, Azmi, the founder of the library has some strategies used to obtain and collect the literatures and artifacts. Besides that, since Tionghoa descendants' library museum was opened for public, researchers, academicians, TV stations, and other people from local and abroad visit the library. From the interactions, he also learned more about the collections. This helps him understand the Tionghoa history more and could identify and map significant collections related to Tionghoa history. As he likes having discussion with the researchers and academicians of Tionghoa history, he finds out that some of his collections are quite rare and very significant and important to Tionghoa descendants' history in Indonesia. His focus on collections is the ones related to nationhood roles and contributions of Tionghoa for Indonesia. He expects that through the collections in the library, society would be well informed about Tionghoa and their nationhood roles and contributions in Indonesia. Later, it is hoped that negative perspective of Tionghoa in Indonesia would slowly decreased or diminished. Further, the library is promoted through online and social media, lots of people get informed about the library. It is

## **CONCLUSION**

Preserving history of Tionghoa descendants in Indonesia is considered important as their long presence of hundreds of years ago, their roles and contributions to various aspects in Indonesia can't be separated from Indonesian history. However, their history is rarely mentioned and documented. Thus, Tionghoa descendants' library museum tries to preserve their history by collecting literatures, documents and artifacts related to Tionghoa in Indonesia. In fact, the process of finding the collections also gives challenges such as the limited resources available in society and increasing demands of Tionghoa collections. To overcome this, the founder has some strategies to use; optimizing the network of antique book sellers, obtaining the collections from the main holders or owners, maintaining good relationship with others who concern with Tionghoa history in Indonesia, such as researchers, academician, journalist, etc., providing 'map' of prioritized collections of Tionghoa people that focusing on their nationhood roles to Indonesia as a nation and promote the library through online and social media.

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