PhD Thesis Summary

Normalization of China-Indonesia’s diplomatic relations and the role of the mianzi concept

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Abstract
This thesis examines the normalization of China-Indonesia’s diplomatic relations in order to understand China’s main motivation. The “micro-macro linkage” approach is used to uphold the empirical evidence that is enhanced by the mianzi concept. In Chinese culture, mianzi consists of honourable values and meanings. The result of this research shows that the changes in China’s foreign policy priority have been caused by the demise of the socialist power in the late 1980s and the Tiananmen incident in 1989. Threat to China’s sovereignty and unity has been the basis of the priority to keep the country’s honour and existence. The term baoquan mianzi is used in this matter. It means using the whole potential of the Chinese people to defend the country’s honour. The People’s Republic of China’s international image and glory need to be restored. The normalization of diplomatic relations has proven to be part of baoquan mianzi effort and has given China a big opportunity to participate in regional and global forums.

Keywords
Normalization of relations, China-Indonesia’s diplomatic relations, baoquan mianzi, global opportunities.
BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The freezing of China-Indonesia’s diplomatic relation for 23 years\(^1\) was not compatible with the development of the increasingly globalizing world. China-Indonesia’s relation has its own characteristics. Historically, China was called Zhongguo in Mandarin Chinese, which is usually translated as Middle Kingdom, but it could also be translated as Central State or Central Country. This term is often defined as China being the centre of the civilised world, surrounded by barbarians. Since the dynasty era, China has developed state relationship on tributary system that has given China its cultural superiority (Camilleri 1980: 3–4).

China-Indonesia’s (Nusantara) relation has been going on for thousands of years. Culturally, there are many similarities in terms of Chinese and Indonesian moral values. One of them is concerned with dignity and pride, which in Chinese culture is covered by the concept of mianzi. The influence of those values has been visible in China-Indonesia’s diplomatic relation since 1950, and reflected in the attitudes of the ego centrism which are often shown by the two countries.

When the process of normalization began to look more certain, there was an opinion in the *Beijing Review*\(^2\) that essentially said that Indonesia at that time really needed the normalization of its diplomatic relationship with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (February 1990: 9). That sentiment was very unintuitive considering the condition of China in the early 1990s that was still in decline as a result of the Tiananmen incident in 1989. Was not it the PRC that needed the normalization to enhance its image on the national and international scales? Moreover, when the normalization process was on its final phase, Xinhua, China’s news agency published an article stating that Indonesia since the 1970s had indicated its desire to reopen its diplomatic relationship with the PRC (FBIS-CHI-90-127: 12). On the other hand, data from Indonesian resources showed otherwise.

Two examples of news coverage which emerged from Beijing deliberately showed that Indonesia needed the normalization more than the PRC. Justus M. van der Kroef stated that, even-though China and Indonesia had reached an agreement in the Tokyo meeting on February 1989, Indonesia still had doubts about the process. The problem for Indonesia, especially to the PRC support, related to communist movements and the “Tionghoa”\(^3\) issues (Van der Kroef 1989). These findings bring out a hypothesis that the PRC had practiced denial and been less honest in terms of Indonesia’s position in the history of Chinese diplomacy. Are such data an indication of the influence of values embodied in the mianzi concept?

\(^1\) China-Indonesia’s diplomatic relation was officially established in April 1950 and was frozen in October 1967 because Indonesia suspected that China was engaged in the 30 September coup in 1965.

\(^2\) *Beijing Review* is China’s national newsmagazine, published every week in Beijing since 1958

\(^3\) The Tionghoa term in this thesis used to designate citizens of Chinese descent in Indonesia.
Based on the current hypothesis and background, the fundamental question of this thesis is “What is the primary motivation of China to normalize its relationship with Indonesia?” This question contains some more detailed questions: (1) How did the PRC’s foreign policy, especially its attitude towards Indonesia, lead to the freezing of the diplomatic relation in 1967? (2) What spurred the need for normalization that led to the negotiation process? (3) What were the factors that encouraged the PRC to work on normalizing the relations? Finally, 4) How did the mianzi concept influence the normalization process?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research has used historical research method, which includes a series of heuristic, critical, interpretive, and historiographical processes. Basically, the historical research and writing is an effort to reconstruct events that happened in the past. Historical events cover all things considered, said, done, felt, and experienced by human beings (Kuntowijoyo 1995: 17). The reconstruction of history is expected to reveal various meanings that cover an event in the past, so it could be beneficial to human civilization now and in the future. As an attempt to maintain objectivity in reconstruction, researchers can use concepts, theories, or approaches from other studies that are relevant to analyze various factors covered by the historical events (Kartodirdjo 1992: 3–4). This thesis has used an approach from international relations studies, namely the micro-macro linkage approach to interpret China’s foreign policy. Zhao Quansheng (1996) has been developing this approach to anticipate China’s foreign policy changes.

In this approach the analysis begins with comprehensively observing the influence of various developments at the macro-level (international and domestic) that changed the priority of PRC’s foreign policy, which is reflected in their policies at the micro level (decision-making process). The development at the macro level needs to be observed based on three dimensions: symbolic, institutional, and power/regime dimension. The advantage of this approach is that it emphasizes the linkage between developments at the macro level and the policies that have been drawn at the micro level. It allows the analysis to be conducted alternately, from the macro level and then moving towards a policy that has been generated at the micro-level, or vice versa. In practice, it is very useful for rationalizing the relations of various data at both levels, so the disclosures of facts can be done more accurately.

This thesis aims to examine China’s motivation, and therefore the mianzi concept is also used. Honour as a virtue in the mianzi concept has a very strong root in Chinese culture, which is Confucianism. Cheng Yingchang has stated that “Confucianism, with its theory and practice, no doubt, is the unequivocal ideological background and foundation of the concept of face and face-work in the Chinese language” (Cheng 1986: 337). The teaching of Confucius that serves as the background is wulun or five relationships that are stated in Zhong yong,
The relationship pattern of *wulun* pushes human beings to behave according to their positions in society, so harmony could be created. A person who behaves accordingly with his or her position and moral principles will be honoured by society and vice versa. Therefore, the core precepts of *wulun* is moral and ethics in society; how human beings respect themselves and others according to their quality and status. Herewith, it appears that the teaching of Confucius, especially about *wulun*, is the root of the *mianzi* concept that inextricably links with honour, belief, and integrity.

Naturally, face is one of the most important parts of the human body. It is the main difference between one human being with another. Face is also a window to the human’s heart. It means face has the ability to show one’s emotions or mood and even the character of a person. In communication, face becomes the centre of attention. Somebody will overlook or pay attention to the face of others who talk to him, and vice versa. Stela Ting-Toomey has said that people in all cultures try to pay attention to face and face-works in all communication situations; *baoquan mianzi* ‘saving face’ and *diu mian* ‘losing face’ are two common dimensions of such situations (Ge Gao 1998: 54).

Chinese people in their social life, especially in their relationship with others, whether they realize it or not, must pay attention to the values contained in the concept of *mianzi*. A policy on the normalization of diplomatic relation is related to the relationship of two states. It is run by some actors (government officials) who get a mandate from the individual states. That is why the *mianzi* concept is relevant to be used in this thesis to bring up the psychological aspect that originates from and is affected by cultural values.

**Summary of findings**

China’s foreign policy in the early stages clearly brought messages of resistance to imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism. The guidelines that were stipulated by Mao Zedong were *lingqi luzao* or “turn on the new stove”, and *dasao ganjing wuzi zai qingke* or “clean up the house, then invite the guest”.

The implementation of the guidelines, coupled with the policy of *yi bian dao* or “leaning to one side”, which means leaning toward the socialist pole which

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4 The core of these guidelines is the affirmation that the PRC will start it all with new, not inherited or forward that has been developed by the previous Government (Chiang Kaishek regime).
was led by the USSR. China’s policy at that time made many countries refrain from cooperating with the PRC. On PRC’s first birthday (1 October 1950), there were only 17 countries that had diplomatic relations with the PRC, and Indonesia was one of them.

China-Indonesia’s diplomatic relation since the very beginning has been burdened by two sensitive issues; the communist ideology that is embraced by China and many issues related to the Tionghoa people. In terms of ideology, the PRC could give an assurance to Indonesia that there would be absolutely no effort to impose hegemony or meddle in Indonesia’s domestic affairs. Therefore, ideological issues would not be too disruptive to the two countries’ relations. Whereas, the Tionghoa issue more often became a source of tension in China-Indonesia’s relations. Until 1960 at least there were two events pertaining to this matter taking place: the recall of Ambassador Wang Renshu in 1951 and the anti-Chinese riot related to PP 10/1959.

Entering the 1960s, along with the increasingly tense relation between PRC–USSR, China was more eager to create the third force to compete with the United States and the Soviet Union. In this period, the Jakarta–Peking/Beijing axis had already been there. Hong Liu described China–Indonesia’s relations in that era with a statement, “[...] China worked enthusiastically in trying to win Indonesians’ hearts and minds” (Hong Liu 2011: 155). In the middle of a conducive relationship, on 30 September 1965 in Indonesia a bloody coup occurred, which afterwards was called the G 30 S PKI coup. General Suharto rose as the new leader. Suharto got the full support from ABRI, which was fiercely anti-communist and very sure that the PRC had covertly given their support to the PKI to launch the coup.

The news about PRC’s involvement in the G 30 S PKI coup reawakened the negative view against the PRC. Moreover, PRC’s embassy in Jakarta showed unfriendly attitude to Indonesia’s new ruler. The PRC denied the accusation that they were involved in the coup and stated that they did not know anything about the movement. China demanded that Indonesia declared an apology. Indonesia ignored the PRC’s protest and the tense heightened. The PRC called the new government of Indonesia as a fascist regime. The tension got to its peak on 1 October 1967, and resulted in the decision to freeze China–Indonesia’s diplomatic relation. The freezing of the diplomatic relations was marked by the announcement that the Indonesian government closed its embassy in Beijing on 23 October 1967. The other announcement was the closing of the PRC’s embassy in Jakarta on 30 October 1967.

A very sharp dispute had led to the freezing of the bilateral ties, so it could be understood that the process of repairing the relation became difficult. On the other hand, the ongoing conflict in Cambodia after Vietnam’s invasion in 1978 had made Indonesia’s and China’s officials often had to sit together in the forum of negotiation on the issue of Cambodia. This events opened

5 PP 10/1959 or Presidential Regulation 10 of 1959 is a regulation that prohibits foreigners doing retail business outside urban areas (including rural areas) and required them to transfer their businesses to Indonesians or relocate to urban areas.
opportunity for communication between the two countries. Meanwhile, the *gaige kaifang* program run by the PRC started successfully. The Chinese economy that was growing rapidly attracted Indonesian businessmen’s attention. After getting through a complicated process, including the Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian’s incident and the presence of Tong Djoe, who served as a mediator, finally the CCPIT and KADIN, on 5 July 1985 in Singapore agreed to implement bilateral direct trade.

Deng Xiaoping with the *gaige-kaifang* spirit managed to create changes on a massive scale. The propaganda supported by slogans of building people’s independence, coupled with the increasing level of competition, had slowly but surely developed a pragmatic attitude amongst the Chinese community. Towards the end of the 1980s, the imbalance of reform in various fields caused China’s economy to shake, and people’s life became increasingly difficult. Coupled with the emergence of a broader democratization demands, that condition inflicted mass protests, which led to the bloody incident at the Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989. Violent acts conducted by the government against the demonstrators generated strong reactions from various countries in the world. The Tiananmen incident in 1989 was a blow to China’s stability and national development, and it isolated China from international relations. At the same time, as an impact of the weakening of world’s socialist power, there was a change in the international power constellation, from the bipolar one to a multi polar one. Regionalization tendencies that were not only based on geographical aspects but also on the national interest of each country emerged rapidly.

Successive shocks from inside and outside were interpreted by the PRC as threat against Chinese sovereignty and the existence of socialism in the world. A double burden was borne by the Republic of China at that time, were to restore its existence and image, and also to prove its ability to be an alternative of Socialist-Communist power in the world. With such burden, the PRC needed a great power to rise again. The appeal of nationalism alone was not enough, but a spirit that was informed by *baoquan mianzi* would be able to cover that purpose. For the Chinese people, *baoquan mianzi* in saving the nation’s honour and sovereignty means more than just nationalism. It has a close relationship with *qiangguomeng* or dream (of being) a strong country.

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6 *Gaige-kaifang* (改革开放) or Reform and Liberation is PRC’s development program initiated by Deng Xiaoping and ratified in Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) plenary meeting in December 1978.

7 In April 1985, Wu Xueqian came to Indonesia at the invitation of the 30th anniversary of Asia–Africa Conference. Many parties hoped the visit could facilitate the process of normalization of China–Indonesia relation. However Wu’s meeting schedule did not fit President Suharto’s schedule, so Wu left Jakarta immediately. Although the incident was not considered problematic by the Indonesian government, it became a hot political topic for the domestic and foreign press.

8 China Council for the Promotion of International Trade.

9 Kamar Dagang dan Industri ‘Chamber of Commerce’.
that is free from any kind of pressure or foreign intervention.

Nationalism that was packaged in the spirit of baoquan mianzi arose simultaneously with the tendency of the Chinese community that was increasingly pragmatic. An exclamatory statement that the honour and sovereignty of the state must be enforced was able to incite loyalty inside not only to the state but also to the government that administered the state, and that amounted to a legitimacy for the CCP’s rule. Externally, the baoquan mianzi spirit was defined as the PRC having had an obligation to restore its image in the world.

China had to immediately set up a new diplomacy strategy. In his speech, Deng Xiaoping stated that, facing the current international development, China should “[...] watch and analyze the situation calmly, stabilize its position, face it with great confidence. Don’t be hasty, calm down, calm down, and once again, calm down.” The main message of that strategy was that China needed to consolidate its ability and power to rise without panic. That strategy was then formulated in the form of the revitalization of the five principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Dasa Sila Bandung, in an attempt to make as many friends as possible. The more friends China had would help improve its image domestically and internationally.

The process of the normalization of China–Indonesia’s relation, which at that time still stagnated, was gaining a new momentum to be soon realized. Since August 1989, China’s patient attitude had changed to be more aggressive and active. In short, the importance of the relationship normalization with Indonesia at that moment was reflected in China Foreign Minister Qian Qichen’s words, we consider Indonesia the leader of ASEAN, and believe that the resumption of our diplomatic relation with Indonesia will motivate the only ASEAN countries that do not have diplomatic ties with China – Singapore and Brunei – to establish relations quickly, thus improving our overall relations with ASEAN; also, these moves will impede the flexible diplomacy advocated by the Taiwan authorities and weaken the sanctions against China imposed by Western countries.)

Deng Xiaoping was the second generation of PRC’s leaders. Deng definitely understood the teachings of Confucius, including Chinese cultural values embodied in the concept of mianzi. In dealing with the Tiananmen case, Deng had taken an unpopular, oppressive stance that was considered an impediment to China’s national interest. Clearly, Deng realized that China was on the verge of diu mian. Therefore, Deng perceived the protesters as rioters. According to him, although they said that they were fighting for human rights and human

dignity, “between human rights there is also the right of the state, amongst human dignity, there are also the honour of the country”. Based on this view, it was legitimate to employ the military to take action against the protesters at the Tiananmen Square on June 4th, 1989. All these actions were part of an effort to make baoquan mianzi the task of both the people and the government of China with all their strength and means they had at their disposal.

The normalization of the relationship with Indonesia was an important part of the baoquan mianzi effort. The importance of the role of the mianzi concept in the process of decision-making and talks on normalizing ties can be seen from the three perspectives below.

**Temporal perspective**

Both countries showed a genuine interest to normalize their relationship since February 1989, but there were no certain steps taken to make it happen. The situation changed after the Tiananmen incident in June 1989. When the Paris meeting (August 1989) took place to discuss the conflict in Cambodia, Minister Qian Qichen immediately took advantage of the opportunity to discuss the normalization of relation with Indonesia Foreign Minister Ali Alatas. Qian proposed the establishment of a working group, and then the two Ministers continued the talk in New York on October. After that, they carried out at least four official negotiations in Jakarta, Beijing, and Hong Kong. Finally, they reached an agreement to formalize the relationship normalization, and the event was formalized on 8 August 1990, in Jakarta.

When China was given a sanction and shunned by the US and the West, the PRC was trying hard to rally to power through cooperation with the USSR and some third world countries. Until the mid-1990s, China managed to improve its relation with a number of countries, and the attitude of Western countries also began to soften. However, the results obtained from all that effort were very different from those obtained from the normalization of the diplomatic relation with Indonesia. Just in the next 18 months after normalizing the diplomatic ties, the PRC successfully established diplomatic relations with all of the governments in Southeast Asia. With this success, China’s opportunity for cooperation with ASEAN as an institution was also open widely.

The improvement of diplomatic ties with various countries certainly was very useful for China. Nevertheless, viewed from the temporal perspective and the effectiveness, the success of normalizing the diplomatic ties with Indonesia was the quickest success, and gave concrete solutions to China. Empirically, China clearly saw a golden opportunity that they might get from the normalization of the relationship, so China was highly motivated to make it happen as soon as possible. On the other hand, psychologically, the PRC noticed that they had to take all measures to realize baoquan mianzi; hence, the PRC took the initiative to speed up the process of the relationship

11 “人们支持人权。但不要忘记还有一个国权。谈到人格，不要忘记还有一个国格” (邓小平 (Deng Xiaoping) 1989: 331).
normalization. This can be seen from the initiative of Qian Qichen, as described above.

**Procedural perspective**

In this perspective, the influence of baoquan mianzi could be seen from China’s attitude in the negotiation process, which was very flexible and willing to compromise. There were four fundamental issues that were discussed in the negotiation: 1) the recognition of one China, 2) PRC’s support to the PKI, 3) Tionghoa people’s status, and 4) Indonesia’s debt to the PRC.

PRC’s attitude towards the primary matters reflected its list of priority at that time. For example, on the recognition of one China, the maximum result expected by China were: 1) Indonesia settled with one China policy, 2) Indonesia needed to stop any kind of relationship with ROC/Taiwan, and 3) Indonesia would not use the term ‘Cina’ to refer to the PRC in the Indonesian language. From the three wishes, there was only one that was fulfilled by Indonesia. It was the policy to recognize only one China. Whereas, with regard to the relationship with Taiwan, Indonesia still maintains economic and cultural relations. On the last issue, Indonesia did not grant China’s wish, and still uses the term ‘Cina’ to refer to the PRC (佘文锁 She Wensuo 1989). The result at the time was gratifying enough for China, and China did not try to impose its will on Indonesia. It is obvious that China would not want to be hampered by procedural problems, nor by the fulfilment of the other three conditions. China tended to be open to what was proposed by Indonesia.

**Material perspective**

The analysis of the material perspective was based on the process and results of the negotiation relating to the settlement of Indonesian debts to China. To do baoquan mianzi means China had to put aside things which were not too essential, such as financial issues. Indonesia’s debt to China, which was a legacy of the Soekarno regime, was one of the problems hindering the normalization process.

Data from various documents showed that at first, according to China’s count, Indonesian debt was much larger than the result of Indonesian count. However, the last result agreed upon by both sides was that the PRC agreed to accept the results of the count made by Indonesia. The PRC also agreed to use the ‘Paris Formula’ as a method of debt payment. Thus, China had to release funds worth of USD 84,000,000 and make it easier for Indonesia to pay the debt. China also agreed to make a new debt payment schedule that would be settled in 30-yeartime, and the payment method could be made partially in cash, and could be converted to Indonesia’s export commodities.

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12 This conclusion based on the analysis of the two documents and one news article that are: Agreed minutes of discussion; Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the settlement of Indonesia’s debt obligations to the People’s Republic of China; and Tokyo Kyodo, 2 July 1990, FBIS-CHI-90-128: 6, 3 July 1990.
which were needed.

The PRC’s compromising attitude on financial matters could be seen as a manifestation of *gei mianzi* ‘giving the face’, mean that China respected Indonesia in its effort to resolve the conflict so that the normalizing of the diplomatic ties could be completed soon. That facts simultaneously showed that the passion for *baoquan mianzi* has motivated China to release a considerable amount, and allowed Indonesia to pay debt with easier ways.

**Conclusion**

The analysis using the micro-macro linkage approach has been able to show the big picture of China’s motivation to normalize ties with Indonesia, and that the decision-making process has been highly flexible, rational, and cooperative. The motivations are summed up in terms of strategic, economic, and social aspects. The framework of the *mianzi* concept consists of psychological aspects deriving from cultural values. The approach through the *mianzi* concept has given boost to China’s motivations, namely the passion for *baoquan mianzi* or saving face. The tragedy of Tiananmen 1989 has put the PRC’s position on the verge of *diu mian* or loosing face. That condition has caused PRC to strive with its utmost to *baoquan mianzi*. Normalizing ties with Indonesia is one way to achieve the goals. Thus, China’s stances in the negotiations are likely to be very cooperative and flexible. China has focused more on the essential matters, especially on Indonesia’s recognition of the ‘one China policy’, while other things were flexible and negotiable.

The normalization of the diplomatic relation with Indonesia for the PRC was a success story. The re-establishment of the diplomatic relations between the PRC and all the countries in Southeast Asia that occurred immediately after the normalization of the ties with Indonesia has secured the PRC’s position in the region. The new position has led to a greater opportunity for China to work together with ASEAN. It has given a possibility for the PRC to be an ASEAN’s important partner. China’s economic development has continuously been increasing because of its secure regional position. China was even capable of giving assistance to the neighbouring countries that suffered badly from the economic crisis in 1997–1998, especially to Thailand and Indonesia.

China’s bargaining position in the international forum is continuously rising. In 2001, the PRC finally was accepted as member of the World Trade Organization. China was also successfully appointed as the host for the 2008 Olympics at Beijing and host for world trade affairs in Shanghai in 2010. PRC’s international position is getting stronger and one of the catalysts is the normalization of the diplomatic relationship with Indonesia. Based on that fact, the PRC needs to be more honest in explaining the importance of Indonesia’s position in PRC’s foreign policy development, and Indonesia should be more confident and more assertive in dealing with China’s diplomatic strategy.

There are a number of other historical facts about the role or to be more precise, ‘service’ that was performed by Indonesia in the moment of the emergence or reappearance of the PRC in the international world. First, in the
first year of the founding of the PRC, Indonesia was one of the 17 countries that established diplomatic relationship with the PRC. Second, Minister Zhou Enlai took the opportunity on the occasion of the Asia–Africa Conference in 1955 held in Bandung-Indonesia, to showcase the good side of China. After the conference, there was no doubt that China became the centre of world’s attention. Third, when the PRC was accepted as the United Nations’ member replacing the Republic of China (Taiwan) in 1971, Indonesia showed strong support to the PRC, even though their relationship was still frozen.

Recognized or not, intentional or not, great or small, the role or ‘service’ that had been granted by Indonesia in any moment of the emergence or reappearance of China in the international world should become an important foundation to establish more balanced and meaningful relation between the two countries. When China–ndonesia’s relation was very tense in 1960–1965, China had used every effort to win the hearts of Indonesians. Today, Indonesia is a ‘strategic partner’ for China. It seems that the PRC is using their soft power towards Indonesia. It is time for Indonesia to learn from history. Indonesia should not deal with the PRC based on suspicion. The friendly gesture and the ability to compete while up holding ethical principles could be an effective way to enhance Indonesia’s bargaining position with China. Besides, Indonesia needs to understand the cultural values which are strongly upheld by the Chinese people, not only to focus on their ideology and political strategy. Therefore, communication may go smoothly and the diplomacy target could be maximally achieved.

Scientifically, although the use of the mianzi concept in the research of Chinese diplomacy history (perhaps) is the first, the benefits are clearly visible. Therefore, the research needs to be continued and further developed to enrich the existing approaches in historical studies and specifically in Diplomacy History and Chinese Studies. In addition, the baoquan mianzi spirit should also be observed and studied carefully. Amidst the decreasing Indonesian nationalism, the spirit of baoquan mianzi that has been adapted based on Indonesia’s needs could serve as a reference to build the national characters.

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