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The Case of Indonesian Students in China

Rika Theo and Maggi W. H. Leung

Introduction

The notion of individuals and communities serving as 'bridges' to promote diplomatic, economic, and sociocultural relations is exemplified by Zhang Jianguo, the administrator of the Chinese State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs in New York, who stated, 'Friendly people-to-people exchanges can be conducive to states' relations, with talent exchanges and cooperation in particular serving as bridges and bonds for mutual learning among civilizations' (Hong, 2017). This statement reflects a common image attached to international human mobilities from the state's perspective, wherein individuals and communities are envisioned as 'bridges' that connect places. As the People's Republic of China (hereafter China) intensified its efforts to integrate into and assume leadership in the global arena through trade and political engagements, it also invested in promoting 'people-to-people exchanges' in selected sectors and partner states. The higher education sector is one of these policy arenas. In this policy paradigm, students are seen as future socio-political resources who will carry out informal diplomatic functions such as 'building mutual understanding between the people of both countries', as is also envisioned by the Indonesian state (Anindyati, 2017). While in this chapter we focus on the contemporary student mobility trajectories between Indonesia and China, it is important to note that the coupling of informal or soft diplomacy and international student mobility policy has been practiced in much broader spatial–temporal settings. China began to invest in similar 'people-to-people exchanges' with allied socialist African countries in the 1950s, soon after the Communist Party had assumed power (Wang, 2016). While current discussions of such soft power strategies are often centered on the Chinese state, the USA is well known for its educational exchange programs, which mobilized both the public and the private sector to build US cultural influence, especially during the Cold War period (Bu, 1999).

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In recent years, and especially within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese government has increased its efforts to promote the exchange of people, especially highly skilled people, tourists, and students. It has done so by drafting new policies and renewing old ones, resulting in an increasing number of exchanges. At the opening ceremony and high-level plenary sessions of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in July 2017, China's president, Xi Jinping, announced the Belt and Road Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation Action Plan. The Plan included the setting up of the Science and Technology People-to-People Exchange Initiative, the Joint Laboratory Initiative, the Science Park Cooperation Initiative, and the Technology Transfer Initiative. He also pledged to offer, in the subsequent five years, 2,500 short-term research visits to China for young foreign scientists and to train 5,000 foreign scientists, engineers, and managers. In addition, 50 joint laboratories were to be established (Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China (MOST), 2017). In December 2017, the Chinese government further issued a specific guideline to improve people-to-people exchanges and invited more countries to participate in exchange programs. Education-related mobilities were again put center stage. Study-abroad programs and cooperation between Chinese and foreign schools, universities, and research institutions were key targets (Xinhua, 2017).

In this policy narrative, exchange students are seen as embodiments of human and social capital. Imagined as the best and brightest minds, they are the bearers of high expectations held by the states, institutions, and society in general as 'agents of development' (Raghuram, 2009). In addition to the knowledge and skills they learn while studying abroad, these students' transnational networks are also considered important capital. Many states indeed aim to transform their young people into 'particular kind of transnational subjects' that fit the states' interests through study overseas (Rizvi, 2010). These 'engineering' plans, in turn, serve as a basis to produce, shape, utilize, or restrict particular student mobility flows – who should study abroad, where and for how long, and when they should return, as what, etc. States are not alone in steering student mobility with this expectation. Other expectations or pressures also emanate from home (Rizvi, 2010). Family and parents often expect their children, as international students, to make 'new friends' from different backgrounds, learn their language and culture, and build social networks, all of which are seen as important resources for their children's future.

Yet, young mobile students also enact their own agency, emergent and dynamic aspirations, and expectations while studying aboard. They may be in line with or contradict the bridge-building expectations held by the states or their families. Student mobility experiences can, therefore,

be conceptualized as a journey on which these divergent objectives and aspirations are being imagined, produced, and contested. Focusing on the case of Indonesian student mobility to China, this chapter examines how these people-to-people exchanges have been narrated, orchestrated, negotiated, and experienced by various key stakeholders in the social field. It brings forth students' own aspirations and practices in 'bridging' the diverse geopolitical, socioeconomic, and economic domains they straddle. Drawing on students' biographical narratives, we map their understanding of their role as 'bridges'. We ask: what kind of bridges do the students aspire to become? Why? How do they do so? And what are the impacts of their bridging practices on their lives?

People-to-people Exchanges as 'Bridges'

We conceptualize the notion of 'bridge' in relation to the broader literature on social networks in migration studies. As a metaphor, the bridge visualizes migrants' roles as living links, intermediaries, mediators, brokers, and facilitators between the different places and communities in which they are embedded. In light of Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory, migration theorists generally agree that migrants' social networks result in social capital. In most cases, this capital decreases the costs and risks associated with migration (Schapendonk, 2015). The contradictory effects of social networks have, however, also been highlighted. Putnam (2000), among others, has differentiated social capital that results from 'open networks that are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages' from 'inward-looking [networks that] tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups' (p. 22). The latter version of in-group bonding may enhance the view of migrants as living in an 'enclave' (Li et al., 2009) or an 'outpost' (Bertocello & Bredeloup, 2007), isolated from the larger host society (Bodomo, 2010). This binary demarcation is problematic. In the case of an African trading community in Guangzhou, China, for example, Bodomo (2010) finds that the migrant community acts as a linguistic, cultural, and economic link between the Chinese and Africans in their home countries and also as a connection between the Chinese and their fellow newcomers from Africa in China. Bodomo's findings illustrate how migrant communities 'can never fully be an enclave and isolated nor ever fully integrate in the host community'. This in-betweenness enables and stimulates them to act as bridges.

The bridge metaphor is also commonly used in the international student mobility literature. Central to this narrative is the concept of brain circulation. As bridges, graduates can create transnational communities linking their home and host countries, circulating the knowledge and skills they have and, in turn, contributing to development. A frequently mentioned

example of brain circulation is the case of highly skilled Korean, Chinese, and Indian migrants in Silicon Valley, USA. Analyzing the networks created by these entrepreneurial communities, Saxenian (2002) documents how migrants are embedded in transnational high-tech networks and underlines the impact of these 'circulating brains' in linking, fostering innovations, and creating jobs in both Asia and Silicon Valley.

Anthropologists have focused more on the cultural aspects of brokering performed by migrants. In an early research on group relations in Mexico, Wolf (1956) views a culture broker as a person who is capable of operating within both community-oriented and nation-oriented expectations and whose position is 'Janus-like, they face two different directions at once' (p. 1076). As the broker lives in tension of a possible conflict of interests between the two sides, he [sic] must 'learn to operate in an arena of continuously changing friendships and alliances' (p. 1073). Culture brokering can, therefore, be understood as 'the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change' (Jezewski, 1990, p. 497), which is often performed or expected to be performed, by migrants.

Many of the Indonesian students who have studied in China have a Chinese ethnic background. As such, they are also embedded in the diaspora discourse in which the bridge has been assigned a special symbolic role. The Chinese word for overseas Chinese is 'huaqiao' (華僑), in which the second character 'qiao' (meaning to sojourn, to reside abroad) is pronounced the same way as 'qiao' (橋), which means bridge. This pun has provided a fertile discursive ground for imagining and assigning a bridging role to Chinese migrants and their descendants in connecting China and the different parts of the world in which they settle. Bridging efforts by the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia over the past centuries are well documented. Liu (1999), among many scholars, analyzes the dual role of overseas Chinese social organizations in the making and maintaining of linkages between Southeast Asia's Chinese communities and migrant or ancestral villages (qiaoxiang 僑鄉) in southern China. They link the Chinese homeland state (of national to provincial or village levels) with overseas Chinese communities while representing the interests of specific localities, clans, and trades. Furthermore, they connect sister associations in Southeast Asia with their ancestral towns and villages in China. Extending beyond the localized diaspora practices, Liu highlights the broader changing geopolitical and national agendas in transforming migrants' bridging practices and the nature of the diaspora organizations over time. More recent work includes Setijadi's (2016) study that exemplifies the role of Chinese-Indonesians and their voluntary associations as trade and cultural bridges in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

The ability to bridge or broker is by no means a given; it requires social capital, which needs to be attained. In Bourdieu's (1986, p. 52) words:

> The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term.

Networks are, therefore, not static pre-given entities at a point in time but dynamic relationships. They are constantly being (re)activated, maintained, and sustained, but also changed or terminated. Schapendonk (2015) argues that networks should be approached from a more process-like perspective and that we should shift from 'the noun (network) towards the verb (networking)'. Networking is an active effort invested in 'finding connectivity and mobilising the right connections at the right times'. Network dynamics are emphasized in terms of 'how social connections change over time, affect the accumulation of social capital, and how people actually mobilise social capital' (p. 812). This 'changeability of networks' means that networks can be created, can fail, can be lost, and can undergo shifting power relations and forms of exchange. Diaspora connectivity with the home country, which Schapendonk puts forward as an example, depends on relational efforts, intensifies at a particular moment, and changes character over time.

Extending the above arguments, we bring forth the dynamics of bridging practices. In building bridges, Indonesian students in China do not start from scratch but modify existing networks as they navigate along them. Rather than being free, rational individuals seeking education-related capital, these students are embedded in existing social networks (of family, nation-state, university, workplace, communities, and so on). Their education mobility decision is therefore constituted not only by their own personal aspirations and expectations but also by a complex set of social relations (Rizvi, 2010) that extends beyond the immediate spatial-temporal context in which they find themselves. We concur with Schapendonk's (2014) proposal to shift the network to a 'networking' approach in the practice of bridging. Our research underlines the active efforts, by the students but also by other actors and institutions, required to build and maintain networks. We pay attention to the diversity of bridges spanning across this mobility field. While some bridges are safe and easy to build over calm waters, some are risky to build as they cross troubled waters and remain unstable. Yet others are unpredictable concerning where the bridge actually goes to.

In the following, we first provide an overview of the turbulent sociopolitical relations between Indonesia and China. These ever-changing contexts have highly influenced the politics and policies that regulate Indonesian student mobility to China. Accordingly, we learn about how different generations of Indonesian students have found themselves crossing and making different kinds of bridges that span time and space.

Research Context and Methodology

This chapter draws on a broader qualitative research project on Indonesian student mobility to China (AUTHOR 1, 2018). Field research was carried out between 2015 and 2017 in Indonesia, China, the Netherlands, and Sweden. In total, 50 Indonesian students (33 males, 17 females; age range 20–85) who were studying or had studied in China were interviewed. Their biographies form the core of this study. Furthermore, 29 relevant informants in this student mobility field – including government officials, directors or staff of language institutions, Indonesian students in other places, and Mandarin Chinese language teachers – were also interviewed. This chapter draws on interviews with 45 Indonesian students/former students (20 females, 25 males; age range 20–85) and 19 other relevant informants in the field. Interviewees were approached through purposive and, subsequently, snowball sampling. The final research sample comprised women and men of different ages from a variety of places of origin in Indonesia who were studying or had studied different disciplinary fields at various levels of study in a range of places in China. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were held in formal and informal settings. Interviews were carried out in Beijing and Chongqing in China, while former students were interviewed in Jakarta, Bandung, and Makassar in Indonesia. The interviews were conducted in-depth in the Indonesian language and generally lasted one to two hours. All the interviews were transcribed and translated into English. The English data interviews were then coded and categorized based on the themes that helped answer our research questions. In addition, an ethnographic participatory approach was applied when [AUTHOR 1] took part in a short-term Chinese language program in Beijing, where she shared the experience of transnational living through, for example, interactions with local people and fellow Indonesians.

Indonesian Student Mobility to China: An Overview

While the increase in Indonesian student mobility to China can be seen as an example of any part of the overall intensifying internationalization of the global education field, it should be contextualized in a much longer historical trajectory shaped by historical, national, and geopolitical shifts. Indonesia is home to the largest Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia: it is estimated that 3–7.5 million ethnic Chinese people live in Indonesia (Lim & Mead, 2011). Politically, Indonesia and China were close partners in the post-colonial era and under the communist framework in the 1950s and 1960s. During the Cold War, an authoritarian regime under Suharto seized power in Indonesia. The regime banned communism and implemented a discriminatory assimilation policy against Chinese-Indonesians. It also

suspended diplomatic relations with China. They were revived only after Suharto fell in 1998 when Indonesia introduced reforms that included the restoration of the cultural and legal rights of Chinese-Indonesians.

Indonesia's next (and first democratically elected) president, Abdurrahman Wahid, paved the way to repair the relationship with China, stressing the economic importance with statements such as 'China is the world's most populous country with high economic potentials. We lose if we don't have a good relationship with it' (Utami, 2015). This political economy discourse, namely that both countries are major developing countries and important emerging market economies with regional and global influence, is still frequently stated as the major reason for strengthening cooperation. In the Asian region, Indonesia is an important partner of China's ambitious economic development ambition, the Belt and Road Initiative. It has been included in and, to a large extent, has benefited from the people-to-people exchange machinery. Indonesia is, however, not only a partner waiting to be included by a larger dragon. It has also invested in becoming a 'global maritime fulcrum', as the current president, Joko Widodo, pledged early in his presidency in 2014.

Considering the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic linkages between the two countries, Indonesia is officially seen as a potential niche market for China's internationalized higher education sector and the promotion of its culture. Yet, socio-political contention lingers on; problematic historical ties complicate their cooperation. Moreover, the economic power of contemporary China has provoked fear and skepticism. For the general Indonesian public, rich and powerful China mirrors and strengthens the racialized image of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese during the Suharto era as an exclusive community with special economic privileges, unwilling to change (i.e. integrate) and concerned only with its own economic wellbeing (Laksmana, 2011, p. 25). This long-term distrust is one of the reasons why the development of education collaboration is both late and slow compared to the booming bilateral trade flows and investment projects. The official cooperation in higher education did not start until 15 years after the resumption of diplomatic ties. When the Indonesia–China strategic partnership was finally signed in 2005, the joint statement declared that people-to-people exchanges were acknowledged as consolidating and strengthening the friendly relationship based on equality, mutual benefit, mutual understanding, and respect (Full text of China–Indonesia joint statement, 2005).

In 2010, a formal education cooperation agreement was also finally signed. It marked the beginning of people-to-people exchanges in general and state-promoted student mobility in particular. Five years later, a concrete people-to-people exchange mechanism between the two countries

was officially launched as policy, covering eight areas, namely education, science and technology, culture, health, sports, tourism, youth, and media. In the education sector, China increased the number of scholarships for Indonesian students by 100 each year over a period of three years, donated educational equipment worth about USD 80,600 to the University of Indonesia, and invited 100 Indonesian university students to participate in that year's Chinese Bridge Summer Camp (Xinhua, 2015).[1]

In parallel with the relatively slow-growing official bilateral education cooperation, there has been a rapid rise in the number of self-funded Chinese-Indonesian students studying in China. Table 12.1 shows the significant growth (by as much as 250%) in the number of self-funded students between 2008 and 2012. It also shows that there were considerably fewer Chinese and Indonesian scholarship students than self-funded students.

A particular characteristic of Indonesian students in China is the predominance of short-term language program students (categorized under Humanities in Figure 12.1), who study the Chinese language for a year or less. According to data from the Indonesian Embassy in Beijing, in 2012, 67% of students enrolled in a short-term language program, while only 33% enrolled in a degree program. Figure 12.1 below shows the predominance of the numbers of non-degree and humanities (including language) students.

As published statistics on Indonesian students in China were not available, a personal interview was conducted with the Education Attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in Beijing to gather relevant data, which are shown in Figure 12.1. According to the estimates, most of the Indonesian students are self-funded and from an ethnic Chinese-Indonesian background. There were also a small number of non-Chinese Indonesians who mostly studied in China under a scholarship scheme. For the self-funded students, in particular, the role of non-state actors, namely family and education consultants/agents, is significant in shaping their mobility trajectories.

Table 12.1 Growth of Indonesian Students in China Based on Funding Sources

Year	*Indonesian Scholarship*	*Chinese Scholarship*	*Self-Funding*
2008	6	44	2706
2009	0	77	2933
2010	4	100	6728
2011	8	136	9385
2012	16	150	9473

Source: Education Attaché of Indonesian Embassy in China, 2014.

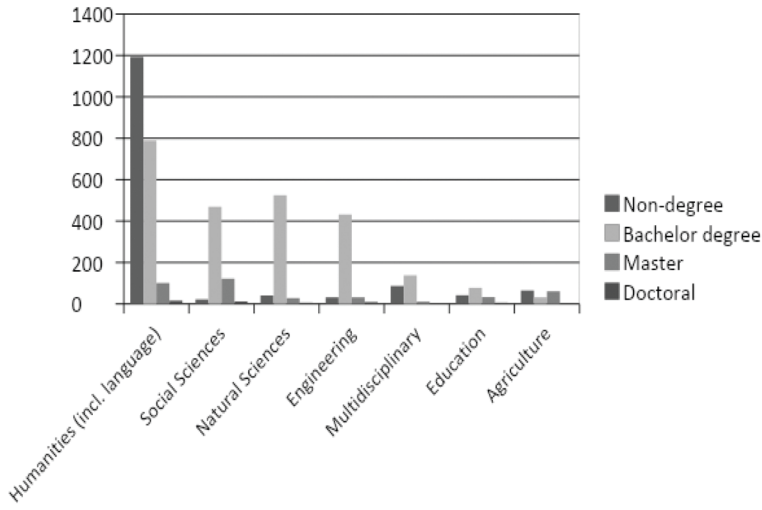

Figure 12.1 Study field of Indonesian students in China in 2012.

Source: Education Attaché of Indonesian Embassy in China, 2014.

Student Mobility as Bridges: Expectations from 'Above'

Indonesia was China's first partner to sign the high-level cultural and people-to-people exchange mechanism agreement. The Joint Statement on Strengthening Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Indonesia (2015) articulates its high expectations concerning the role of the youth:

> … youth is the future of bilateral relations, and enhancing youth exchanges could help carry forward the traditional friendship between the two countries into future generations and ensure the long-term sustainable development of the China–Indonesia comprehensive strategic partnership.

Indonesian students are valorized in this policy discourse as the bridge that connects the two countries here and there, now and into the future, in order to achieve a 'sustainable' China–Indonesia partnership. These transnational youths are considered to be an embodiment of socio-cultural-political resources, dispatched to carry out the state's informal diplomatic mission.

In addition to the state's expectations, students also have to fulfill their family's expectations. Family is not only the source of funding, but it is usually also the closest and most influential element in a student's social network, which shapes the students' mobility decisions. Having grown up in an era of cultural suppression, Chinese-Indonesian parents generally play an active role in persuading their children to study in China, hoping they will reconnect or at least get to know their ancestral homeland and cultural identity. Monica,[2] a Chinese-Indonesian student who studied journalism in Beijing, explained that her parents had persuaded her to study in China:

> They said, you're able to speak the Hokkien dialect, why aren't you learning Mandarin? My mum and dad were raised in the 1965 era. They felt how the Chinese-Indonesians were discriminated against and they are resentful of the Indonesian government for that. They really wanted to return to China at that time, but they were unable to and were forced to stay. When I was young they used to tell me good stories about our ancestral land.

Monica agreed to fulfill her parents' denied wish to return to their motherland. As a result of the suppression of Chinese culture and identity during Indonesia's authoritarian era, many Chinese-Indonesian parents shared a similar imaginary and cultural attachment to the motherland. By having their children live their lost dreams, these parents expect their children to become a bridge between home and the motherland, in a way between imagination and realities, and between the past, the present, and the future (Uesugi, 2003).

Family expectations of the students extend beyond cultural root-seeking. Learning and living in rapidly rising China is expected to create other social and economic opportunities. Gerry, a Chinese-Indonesian student pursuing contemporary Chinese studies in Beijing, received advice from the father of his best friend, another Chinese-Indonesian:

> Uncle [the friend's father] said that I should not study only to seek knowledge, but also to seek friends and contacts. Your university teachers have access; they are well known in party and international politics. The advice was correct. I now have access to the government, policy etc. in China from that university. In China, every business is related to the government, to politics.

As illustrated by the above narratives, the motivations for Chinese-Indonesian students to study in China are multiple. Nonetheless, and not surprisingly, becoming a bridge between the two countries, societies, cultures, and economies is very much the central narrative. In the following,

we present the lived experiences of these students as they practiced these bridging missions at different stages of their journey of (re)connection to their different 'homes'.

Bridging the Knowledge Gaps between Myth, Stereotypes, and Realities

Decades of suspended relations between Indonesia and China have led to a lack of knowledge of each other. The images of China and the Chinese held by Indonesian youth are very much framed by imageries and stereotypes constructed by complex and often hostile racialized identity politics in Indonesia, national and international media, and nostalgic family narratives. During the interviews, many Indonesian students in China said they were aware of the political–cultural misconstructions that happened in both societies. Some admitted that before studying in China, they had held stark stereotypes about China and the Chinese, as well as about Indonesia and their fellow Indonesians from different ethnic backgrounds. Many Chinese-Indonesian youngsters shared the imagination of China as their 'beautiful motherland' as passed on mainly through family narratives. For non-Chinese-Indonesians (or the 'natives'), the dominant image of China is a dictatorial and repressive Communist country, while the Chinese people are characterized as similar to the racialized Chinese-Indonesians. Their academic journey to China helped them deconstruct these images and, in turn, transform themselves into bridges across the divide between China and Indonesia.

The majority of the respondents stated that many of the Chinese they met knew little about Indonesia or Chinese-Indonesians. The questions asked by those who had some knowledge were either about the anti-Chinese May 1998 tragedy,[3] when Chinese people and property were subjected to violence and severe damage in response to the Asian crisis in Indonesia, or about Indonesia's tourism destinations. This lack of knowledge of or interest in Indonesia came as a surprise to Chinese-Indonesian students, who had been raised knowing about Indonesia and attaching much value to their historical and cultural connections with China. Tina, a Chinese-Indonesian who went to China in 2010 to study for a PhD in international relations and stayed to work for a private political think tank, said the following:

> I was curious at the time and then I typed 'Indonesia' into *Baidu* [China's Internet search engine]. The results? Most of the top ten results are about the May 1998 tragedy.

Tina referred to the reduction of Indonesia to two topics and other misunderstandings or generalized stereotypes between both countries and

peoples as resulting from a 'big knowledge gap'. Being Chinese-Indonesian, she said it was her 'moral obligation' to bridge the gap using the knowledge and experiences she had acquired in China. Because of her social position, she could effectively communicate the Indonesian situation to her Chinese friends and to the Chinese government officials to whom she often provided political consultancy. Similarly, Monica, whom we introduced earlier, was motivated to write an essay about the May 1998 tragedy in her modern Chinese history class:

> There are Chinese people who do not know about [the May] 1998 [event]. The news about the reactions to 1998 here [in Beijing] was suppressed by the government. The students from Tsinghua and Peking universities wanted to hold a peaceful protest in front of the Indonesian embassy, but the universities stopped them… I knew about it from writing an essay assignment about 1998 for a Chinese modern history class. At that time there were few foreign students in the class, but the teacher was interested in finding out about a foreigner's different perspective on China. I asked him whether I could write something about the Chinese temporary residents [in Indonesia] instead of about Chinese history.

By doing so, Monica connected the history of the Chinese diaspora to modern Chinese history from her perspective as a member of that diaspora. As a student, she was involved in the Indonesian Student Association (Perkumpulan Pelajar Indonesia, PPI) in Beijing and the publication of *Cabe Rawit* (the Indonesian student magazine in China), which broadened her networks and eventually helped her to secure a job as an Indonesian editor at Chinese Radio International in Beijing. She continued to use her knowledge of both the cultural and the political contexts to bridge the knowledge gap, for example, through her selection of news that reveals little-known facts about Indonesia. The stories of Monica and Tina illustrate how international students and graduates can contribute to filling knowledge gaps and bridging their two 'homes'.

Students also act as a collective to correct what they consider fake news about China and the Chinese in Indonesia. A recent example helps illustrate this. In 2017, anti-Chinese sentiment was inflamed and politicized in Indonesia by a report on the 'invasion' of ten million low-skilled laborers from China. Anti-Chinese sentiment was further aroused during the election of the mayor of Jakarta City, as one of the candidates was the incumbent Chinese-Indonesian governor. Responding to the tensions, the PPI and the student alumni organization paid a visit to BBC Indonesia and Metro TV, two of the most prominent media companies in Indonesia. During the visit, they emphasized the presence of 14,000 Indonesian students in China who

could and would play a role in rectifying the hoax news. In so doing, the students carried out their self-perceived duty to bridge the gap between myth and reality.

Capitalizing on the Bridges

In line with the general narratives on international student mobility, many of our interviewees gave examples of the usefulness of the connections they had built with China and the people they had met during their studies there. For instance, Gerry (introduced in an earlier section) went on to say that his 'uncle's' words had stimulated him to start a marketing communication company that works with and between Indonesia and China. He took his uncle's advice seriously and built 'bridges' whenever he could. He established and maintained contacts at the Chinese university by taking part in student organization activities and with others through the various part-time jobs he did in China. His networks have proven useful in building his company, which has offices in Indonesia and China.

Jaka is another example of a Chinese-Indonesian who studied in China for many years and then used his networks, knowledge, and own mobility experiences in China to create a successful education service agency. He explained his motivation for setting up the agency:

> When I first came to China, I wasn't given any clear information about the education system. I didn't even have an idea about the university. The agent who helped me only gave me a brochure and a price. When I arrived at the airport, nobody picked me up. Reflecting on that experience, I set up an agency business that takes care of students from head to toe.

Network capital is also highly valued beyond the private business sector. For example, Yudha – who in 2007 was among the first Chinese-Indonesian civil servants assigned to study in China – returned after his studies and now works for the Indonesian Ministry of Education. The core of his work is being the 'bridge' between the two countries by facilitating cooperation between universities and different levels of governments of Indonesia and China. Yudha illustrated his achievements:

> At the time there were not that many Indonesian officials or native Indonesians studying in China. There were more people of Chinese descent who studied economics or language. So I took my friends, who were looking for a short training course, to China. Eventually, it spread to the rectors of some universities in Indonesia. They asked if they could collaborate with my campus in China. Finally, on my Chinese campus

> even the dean knew me because I helped them a lot with working with campuses in Indonesia. I helped to mediate and manage their visits, not only to Wuhan but also to Beijing and Shanghai. And I even helped the Hubei provincial government to get involved in educational cooperation with the local government of South Sulawesi province.

Yudha's affinity with both the Indonesian and the Chinese education system and sociocultural context has clearly helped him excel in his career. Gerry's and Yudha's stories can be considered as falling within the general expectations of the kinds of network capital that student mobility can promote. In the following two sections, we discuss two further aspects of bridging in the Indonesia–China student mobility field that might be less expected, namely (1) the role of Islam and (2) bridge-building among Indonesians in China.

Transnational Islam in the Sino-Indonesian Bridge Work

Bridges are also built between non-Chinese Indonesian students and China. In addition to general cultural acquaintance gained by Indonesian students (i.e. getting to know the Chinese language and culture), some Muslim Indonesian students have made a 'surprising' connection to a lesser-known part of Chinese society and to other Muslim students from other countries. In Indonesia, China – as a communist country – is commonly seen as a repressive regime when it comes to religion, especially Islam, and communism is seen strongly as an anti-religious ideology. It was rooted in the country's anti-communist state narrative, systematically produced after the unsuccessful coup in 1965 that was allegedly done by the Communist Party of Indonesia with close ties to China. In recent years, this has been enhanced by Chinese government interventions against Muslims in Xinjiang Province. This perception of 'repressive communist China to Islam' is often a concern for Muslim Indonesians prior to their study in China.

Yudha remembered that before setting off to study in China in 2007, his colleagues, friends, and relatives warned him about Communism and told him that in China, it would be difficult to perform his ritual prayers and find halal food. Similarly, Sita – a Muslim Indonesian woman who had studied for a Master's degree in Nanchang – was initially worried that practicing her belief would be considered a disruption or disturbance. Before leaving for China, she had many questions about how it would be regarding praying, eating, and wearing a veil.

The fact that Muslim international students can practice their religion, although with constraints, came as a pleasant surprise. The universities in China have no or very limited space for religious activities, so Sita and her Muslim compatriots in Nanchang had to find another way to be able to pray:

> In Indonesia we usually do our five time prayers at home, in the mosque, or in *mushallah* available at campus, but here we have to get used to pray anywhere. Our class schedule often coincided with the prayer times, forcing us to pray in the classroom over a newspaper or veils as the base. If we go shopping or sightseeing usually we pray in a quiet place where not many people pass it by. In other words, we can pray as long as we find a clean place where we could lie *sejadah* or newspaper down to pray.

As for eating, Sita found it hard to find halal food restaurants, but she can buy food with halal labels available in the supermarket in China and cook by herself. She could wear a veil in all public places, despite that she frequently had to explain to her local classmates and teachers who asked the reason she wore it.

> The constraints that we have been through are not things to be sorry or mourned. So far, we have never encountered the ban to practice our belief. While outside campus, most local people think we are not foreigners but also Chinese citizens from Xinjiang or from ethnic Hui who is dominantly muslim because Chinese muslim people also wear covered up dress like us.

Furthermore, it was unexpected that in China, she met other Muslim students, such as ones from Jordan, India, Khazakstan, and Turkmenistan. With these Muslim international students, the Indonesian students occasionally practice religious activities together, from the evening praying to breaking the fast during *Ramadhan*.

The fact that there was other treatment of Muslims that differed from what the Indonesian students had heard and imagined also surprised Yudha. He was particularly impressed to see Uighur scripts – which he mistook as Arabic – on China's banknotes:

> On Chinese bank notes, there are Arabic [sic] scripts. I see it as the government's respect for the Islamic ethnic minority. Even in Indonesia, the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world, we don't have any Arabic letters on our bank notes. What I want to say is that China is close to Islam. Who said that all of them there are communists? For me, studying in China really suits the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad: to seek knowledge in China.

While one may question Yudha's interpretation of the Chinese state's 'respect' for and 'closeness' to Islam, his reflection illustrates that the bridging project can bring surprises. In Yudha's case, the expected rough waters were

calmed by students' own bridging efforts in China. Other students have gone further in filling the religious knowledge gap. They looked for Islamic artifacts and buildings in their surroundings, traveled to areas where Islamic ethnic minorities lived in China to find out about different Islamic practices, and interacted with the Islamic communities in China.

Surki was another Muslim Indonesian student who became committed to practicing the people-to-people exchange rhetoric. In 2015, Surki, together with other students who were affiliated with the Great Mosque of Semarang in Indonesia and had studied in Nanchang, initiated a Chinese Islamic and cultural center in the Great Mosque. They did so in close collaboration with the Chinese-Indonesians in Semarang and the Chinese Consulate General. Surki explained:

> The aim is to make people-to-people contact between Islamic societies here and there, to rectify the misperception here and there. For us, this also shows our gratitude to the mosque for sending us to China to practise the knowledge we acquired there. Before we returned, we successfully facilitated several Indonesian private and public universities to cooperate with Chinese universities. The success motivated us to establish this institution.

The center's mandates fit perfectly with the state bridge-making project. The center offers Mandarin language courses to local young people and prepares Chinese scholarship recipients before they leave for China. It also has a library supported by funds from the Chinese Consulate. One of the center's mandates is to facilitate collaboration between private and public institutions in China and Indonesia.

Bridging Among Different Indonesians Away from 'Home'

While the Chinese and Indonesian states, the student's parents, and the students themselves identify connections to China and the Chinese people as the main objectives of the bridging work assigned to Indonesian students, we observed a lot of connection-building among the Indonesian students during their time in China. Like other international student communities, many Indonesian students in China are engaged in social and cultural activities ranging from performing arts, traditional dances, and songs to food fairs, etc., which are often arranged by the Indonesian Student Association (PPI) in China with support from the Indonesian Embassy. PPIT was established by Indonesian leftists who studied in China in the 1960s and re-established by students in 2012 with sponsorship from the Indonesian embassy. It currently has branches in all 24 Chinese cities where Indonesians study.

Interactions with Indonesians from other ethnic background may evoke reflection on national identity, especially among many of the Chinese-Indonesians studying in China. Fian, a Chinese-Indonesian who studied corporate management in Guangxi in 2010, said that it was one of the advantages of studying in China. He even considered it to offset his disappointment with the little new academic knowledge that he was able to acquire from his study:

> I can say that I got hardly any practical academic knowledge from my Master's programme. But I still appreciate my experience there. I was able to improve my Mandarin, make more friends and, in addition, my love for my country is getting stronger. In Indonesia, I often feel negative and hopeless when I see the conditions in the news, for example. In China I think I can feel more for my country. Before going to China I had problems with racism and identity. In China, my eyes were opened. Although I looked like local Chinese people, I was a foreigner, an Indonesian. Moreover, at my university, the PPI was very active in organising events and activities, which sort of nurtured our feelings for Indonesia.

While it is not unusual for international students – or, for that matter, other kinds of migrants – to forge connections with their compatriots while abroad, the case of Indonesians in China is particularly intriguing. Young people like Fian rarely have a chance in Indonesia to connect with Indonesians from other backgrounds because of the prevalent racism and identity politics that Chinese-Indonesians experience or perceive. Interestingly, his 'Indonesianness' grew in China, his ancestral land, but not in Indonesia.

The focus of the student associations on Indonesian cultures, nation-building, and multiculturalism in Indonesia is, however, not 'natural'. The fact that these associations are often funded and logistically supported by the Indonesian Embassy in China allows the latter to exert a certain amount of control over the kinds of activities the students engage in. Most of the students are young, middle-class Chinese-Indonesians. When it comes to politics, many of them are self-censored, cautious, ignorant or skeptical. This is closely related to identity politics in Indonesia, where Chinese Indonesians have been raised to be self-disciplined citizens (Thaniago, 2017). Furthermore, students know full well that critical discussions on sensitive political and social issues would not be welcomed by the Chinese state either. Hence, being far from home, they create a mini-Indonesian comfort zone in China. In a playful way, friendships are forged among Indonesians from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, something that does

not happen easily back in Indonesia. While politically sensitive topics are avoided, daily ethnicized identity politics are still played out in this mainly 'fun' space. Anya, one of the PPI committee members, mapped some of these politics for us:

> Most of the students who are active in the PPI are of Chinese descent, but every year we try to recruit committee members of non-Chinese descent so that people will not think that the PPI is exclusively for students of Chinese descent. Every year, there must be PPI committee members of non-Chinese descent.

Bridging Over Calm and Troubled Waters

The various bridging experiences narrated above have shown that bridging is a highly contextualized and open-ended process. While some of the bridging projects are well supported (by the Chinese and/or the Indonesian states or the student's parents), others are student-driven initiatives that require much more individual effort. In the current 'China rising' era, we might easily be led to think that efforts to bridge with China will always bear fruits without resistance. Yudha's example seems to show that. It is, however, not always the case. Wanda completed her Bachelor's and Master's in Chinese literature in China, then returned to become a lecturer at a Christian university in West Java, where the students and boards are predominantly Chinese-Indonesians. Committed to her dual allegiance to Indonesia and China, she pledged to become a bridge between the two 'homes' and establish a 'diasporic network'. One of her projects was to facilitate the establishment of a Confucius Institute in Indonesia. However, her university's internal bureaucracy and pressure from the Indonesian government generated considerable friction and hampered the process. Her plan took three years to realize, which she considered a very long time. She further reasoned that the friction had been caused by the prevalent identity politics and past traumas that were still deeply felt in Indonesia despite official efforts to promote exchanges and collaborations.

Tina, whose experience we also illustrated above, also shared her frustration regarding the negative sentiments about her in Indonesia because of her active engagement in 'filling the knowledge gap' regarding China:

> Some of my colleagues call me a 'panda-hugger' or a 'Chinese spokesperson'. It's sort of insulting to me, and I take it personally. Because it is my patriotic [toward Indonesia] duty to come here [to China]. I'm proud of it and I work hard on it.

Conclusions

This chapter presented the multiple motivations and experiences among international students as 'bridges' that are expected to link their places of origin and where they pursue their studies. In the Indonesia–China context, student mobility means much more than journeys for the accumulation of human and social capital. After a long history of a turbulent political–cultural relationship, people-to-people exchanges have recently been promoted by the respective states. The Indonesian state hopes that students will play their informal diplomatic roles in learning about China, building connections to the rising power and its people, and working towards a sustainable partnership between the two countries. In addition, the hopes of families – in particular, the hope of Chinese-Indonesian parents that their children will connect to their ancestors' land, people, and culture – represent another set of expectations.

As shown by the different narratives in this chapter, Indonesian students in China indeed assume some of the prescribed roles – learning the language, establishing contacts, and keeping up with their network even after they have finished their studies. Some of them have also internalized the sense of duty to be a bridge. However, in addition to external expectations, they are also driven to be bridges, drawing on their interests, experiences, and reflections. All these factors shape the diverse processes of bridging within broader and ever-changing political-economic and sociocultural contexts. In most cases, students' lived experiences in China have contributed to the correction of myths or stereotypes and the discovery of new knowledge both for themselves and for others in China and Indonesia.

We have also seen the ability of Indonesian students to be intermediaries in bridging institutions in various sectors, ranging from government bodies to universities and companies, spanning China and Indonesia. Our findings also show alternative spatialities in the process of bridging. While Indonesian students are officially on a mission to establish links with China for the past and/or future, they have also gone on other trajectories. We have shown how student mobility has also provided Indonesian students with links to (i) the lesser-known Islamic China and (ii) fellow Indonesian students from other ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

This bridging is not a predetermined, one-off event. Rather, it is a dynamic process that may encounter frictions, challenges, and tensions resulting from the multiple and contradictory agendas of the actors and institutions involved. Hence, students set off to walk on and build bridges of different sorts. Whether it is a smooth or a stormy walk also depends very much on the water under the bridge and the weather around it. Indonesian students mingling with each other in China, for instance, is well-supported

and fun to do. In contrast, more efforts are required to bridge the knowledge gap about China and to rectify deep-rooted stereotypes about the imagined homeland, the rising power, and its people. The long history of tumultuous relations between Indonesia and China and persistent socio-political tension as the legacy of identity contestations in Indonesia continue to make the water rough under this bridge. Yet, the turbulences also drive some of the students to correct the course of the old bridges and to build new ones.

Overall, we conclude that people-to-people exchanges as state policies and objectives may influence the mobility motivations and experiences of students. However, students do not go abroad to study with only this role in mind. They also have their own agendas and interests. They are also connected to other networks and collect new experiences *en route* as a student, a religious person, an Indonesian, a member of the Chinese diaspora, a transnational… . While negotiating these multiple agendas and interests, students decide which connections and exchanges to strive for and, thus, which bridges to build, renovate, or break. Our research illustrates that students are not merely economic and nationalist agents. Rather, they are active social and political agents who negotiate, interpret, and contest their social world by mobilizing and materializing knowledge. As socio-political agents, students are not only impacted and directed by the macro-structures such as family and state narratives, but they are also active agents in working with or challenging these structures, pursuing their own agendas, and creating meanings in and between the societies they bridge.

Notes

1 The Chinese Bridge Summer Camp is a series of Chinese language- and culture-experiencing activities sponsored by Hanban (Office of Chinese Language Council International, or Confucius Institute Headquarters) with the cooperation of the Confucius Institutes all over the world. The program aims at enhancing ethnic Chinese youth exchanges, deepening their understanding of and personal experience with Chinese language and culture, and stimulating their passion for learning Chinese.
2 All interviewees have been given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity.
3 Between 13 and 15 May 1998, Jakarta and several other cities across Indonesia were set ablaze and saw rioting. Many Chinese shops were looted and destroyed. This tragedy traumatized the Chinese-Indonesians, and the news about it spread to China.

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