

# An Empirical Investigation of Language Ecology in Indonesian Chinese Society

## A Case Study of Chinese Teachers' Language Life in Jakarta

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, together with the case study of Indonesian Chinese teachers' language life, we investigate their language ecology from three aspects: personal language ability, family language life and social language communication. The investigation reveals that the language ecology of Chinese teachers in Indonesian is not optimistic. There is a serious crisis in the survival and development of the Chinese language. It is mainly manifested as follows: the aging trend of Chinese teachers' composition, the decline of Chinese ability among young teachers, the narrowing trend of the Chinese using scope, the weakening trend in Chinese intergenerational transition, the unipolar trend of social language and so on. Besides the impacts of historical era and social environment, this kind of unbalanced phenomena is due to national policy and the unequal development of the national cultures. On the basis, this paper proposes constructive suggestions combined with influencing factors of Chinese education and Chinese developing trend.

**Keywords:** *language ecology, language policy, Indonesian Chinese teachers, the Chinese language, Chinese education*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the fundamental feature of a nation and its culture. The history of nations has been passed down from generation to generation. The disappearance of the national language means the disappearance of the carrier that inherits the national history. Since the 1970s, the increasing endangerment and extinction of many national languages have led to a global "language ecology" crisis. The term "language ecology" was put forward by Haugen (Einar) in 1971. In his words, "language ecology" refers to "the interaction between specific language and environment" (Feng Guangyi, 2013:5). Subsequently, some scholars have further studied and developed this theory, and gradually introduced the concept of "ecology" in biology into linguistics, forming an interdisciplinary theory. For example, P. Finke puts forward the concept of "language world systems" according to the view of ecosystem; W. Trampe points out that the language ecosystem is made up of language, language usage and the environment that the former two factors depend on and interact with (Fan Junjun, 2005).

The Chinese academia started late in this field. Li Guozheng (1991) takes the lead in introducing Eco-linguistics, dividing language environment into external ecology system and internal ecology system. The former includes natural system, social system, cultural system and group system. The latter refers to the relationships between any specific language and other systems. Fan Junjun (2005) inherits the viewpoint of Hogan, and thinks that "ecology" is a metaphor first, and the core of this concept research is "the interaction between language and environment". Feng Guangyi (2013:13-14) points out that "language ecology involves both linguistics and ecology. Undoubtedly, it is a new subject produced by the integration and intersection of linguistics. Language ecology is closely related to language use and language groups. It also involves certain means of communication or pragmatic behavior, which makes it connected with the actual use of language. So, language ecology has obvious characteristics of Applied Linguistics."

The Chinese academia focuses on the current situation of language ecology of a certain ethnic group from the perspective of language application, and emphasizes the interaction between language

and environment. Xu Tianyun (2012) points out that the Chinese language development in Indonesian Chinese society is characterized by features below: regional, mixed, diverse and unstable. What's more, he proposes strategies that include the Chinese socialization, the adoption of Chinese activities and the daily use of Chinese language to promote the development of Chinese in Indonesian. Cai Minghong (2014), from the perspective of language ecology, proposes that in the multi-cultural context, the diversity of social languages can ensure the balance and development of the ecological environment after a survey on the evolution of Singapore's Chinese language. Liao Kaishun (2014) discusses the cultural and ecological status of Indonesian Hakka ethnic group from the perspective of cultural ecology. He proposes that Indonesian Hakka ethnic group has multi-cultural adaptability in modern society.

As the common national language, overseas Chinese is the carrier of learning and inheriting Chinese culture. It is also the extension and development of Chinese culture overseas. It shares the same origin with Chinese.

As the country with the largest number of overseas Chinese, Indonesia should be the best area for the development of overseas Chinese culture and language. However, as Lin Xinnian and Cai Minghong (2015) point out, "What is particularly different from other countries in Southeast Asia is that the Chinese in Indonesia have experienced several times of Chinese exclusion, and their integration with local culture is regarded as the representative of 'forced assimilation' type." After "the September 30 Incident" in 1965, the military regime of Suharto, Indonesia, implemented various policies of assimilating Indonesian Chinese compulsively, forbidding Chinese people to learn, use Chinese and celebrate Chinese festivals. The Chinese suffered from the double imprisonment of culture and language. At present, most of the young generation of Chinese can no longer speak Chinese. As Chinese is an important carrier of Chinese

inheritance, there is a crisis in the inheritance of Chinese in Indonesia at this stage.

This paper takes the language life of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia as an example to investigate the language ecological situation of Chinese teachers in Indonesia, so as to provide data reference for the in-depth development of Chinese education in Indonesia. The survey was conducted in the ways of questionnaire survey and data analysis. The questionnaire included three aspects: the language acquisition, family structure and social environment.

## II. BASIC INFORMATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Our research group collected the data during the undergraduate correspondence teaching in Indonesia. Survey time: August 2016. Location: Jakarta. Respondents: Chinese teachers in various schools in Jakarta, which are referred to as "Chinese teachers". From July to August 2018, I interviewed some Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia, and updated some survey data.

The questionnaire consists of five parts, including the social characteristics of the respondents, their parents' language ability, their own language ability, social language communication and their attitudes towards Chinese language and Chinese culture. In the process of data collection, 222 questionnaires were sent out in total, and 45 surveys were eliminated because some participant responses were incomplete. As a result, 177 complete surveys were obtained with an efficient rate of 79.73%.

### A. Composition of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia

The composition of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia is showed as following "Fig. 1".

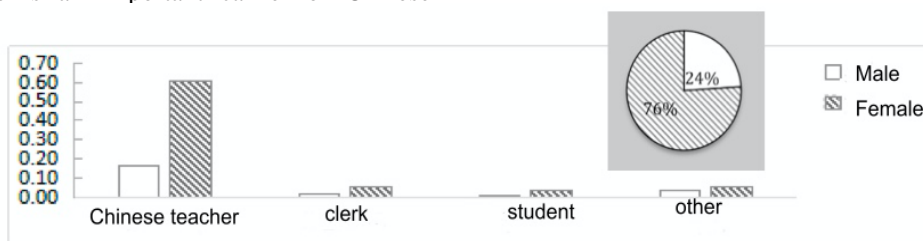


Fig. 1. Composition of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia.

### B. Education level of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia

The education level of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia is showed as following "Fig. 2".

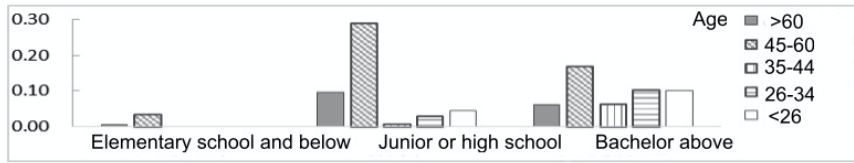


Fig. 2. Education of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia.

C. Community distribution and family structure of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia

The community distribution and family structure of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia are showed as following "Fig. 3".

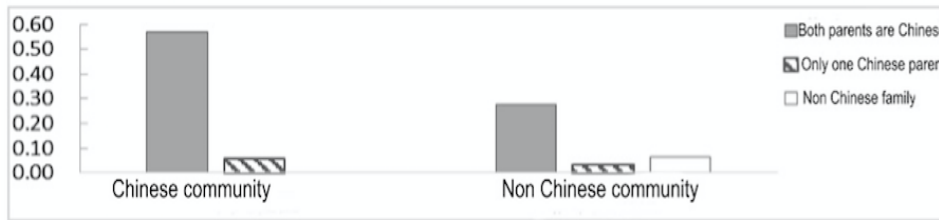


Fig. 3. Community distribution and family structure of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>a</sup> Note: there are three main structural patterns of Indonesian Chinese teachers' families: Chinese parents (both parents are Chinese), Chinese single parent (only one parent is Chinese), non-Chinese families (both parents are not Chinese).

According to the survey, there are three main characteristics among the Chinese teachers in Jakarta. (1) Age structure imbalance: they are mainly middle-aged and old female Chinese teachers. (2) Their educational attainment is generally low, with only about 20% of the young teachers with high quality. (3) They are mainly from Chinese families and communities. However, with the current rapid growth in demand for Chinese teachers in Indonesia, the profession has attracted people from other fields and ethnic groups. In addition, China sends a large number of volunteer Chinese teachers to various parts of Indonesia every year, which effectively relieves the shortage of Chinese language teachers in Indonesia.

depends on people who learn, use and pass on Languages and social environment composed of human. As a result, this paper analyzes the language ecology of Indonesian Chinese teachers from three perspectives: individual (age group), family structure and residential community.

III. ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE ECOLOGY OF CHINESE TEACHERS IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA

A. A survey on the language abilities of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia

The essence of language ecology is a social concept rather than a natural one. The quality

To investigate the individual language competence of Indonesian Chinese teachers, we analyzed the language proficiency, mother tongue identity and language acquisition in childhood. In terms of languages, we mainly investigated the acquisition of Indonesian, Chinese and English. ("Fig. 4")

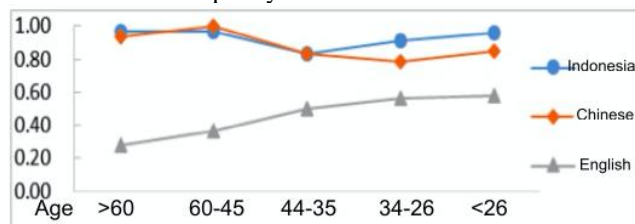


Fig. 4. Languages mastered by Chinese teachers in Jakarta (multiple choices).

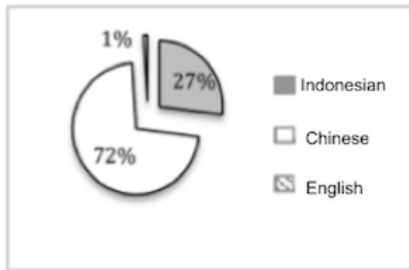


Fig. 5. The mother language identity of Chinese teachers in Jakarta.

As can be seen from "Fig. 4", Indonesia is such a multi-ethnic country that its languages are diversified. Many Chinese teachers are proficient in two or three languages at the same time. Indonesian Chinese teachers from different age groups are all more proficient in Indonesian, followed by mandarin. The acquisition rate of mandarin is lower than that of Indonesian among the people aged 35-44. The same situation is most obvious in the group of 26-34 years old. It is mainly because the Chinese schools in Indonesia were closed after 1966, and the Indonesian government completely banned mandarin. It was not until mid-August 1990 that the Chinese prohibition policy was abolished. As a result, the Chinese teachers aged 26-44 are weak in Chinese language in general. In addition, the younger teachers master English better than the older ones. After the Second World War, with the increase in international communication, English has become the dominant language in the world and the first foreign language in Indonesia.

As is shown in "Fig. 5", there are 72 percent of Chinese teachers who regard Chinese as their mother tongue, indicating that Indonesian Chinese society still has a high sense of Chinese identity. Even though Chinese is the mother tongue of Chinese people, Indonesian has replaced the first acquisition of Chinese. Meanwhile, English impacts Chinese in the second language acquisition. At present, 28 percent of Chinese teachers no longer regard Chinese as their mother tongue, which means that Chinese is only a communication tool for them.

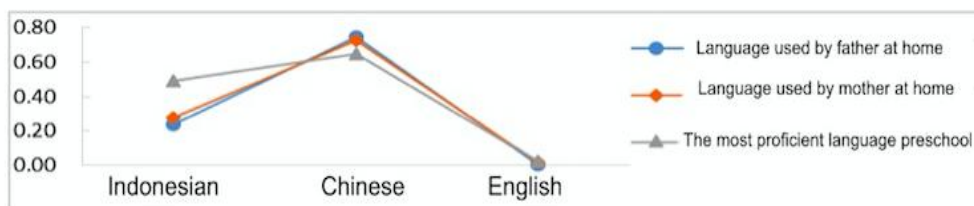


Fig. 6. Language acquisition of Indonesian Chinese teachers at an early age.

Feng Guangyi (2013:194) implies: "mother tongue education is the basic way to ensure the survival and development of a language. No matter what language it is, there will be a crisis in the survival and development of the language without mother tongue education." At present, Chinese Indonesians are unable to acquire mandarin naturally in the mother tongue environment. What's worse, they are suffering from many restrictions on Chinese education that are brought about by the Indonesia language policy. The younger generation is poor in Chinese proficiency. The language ecology of Chinese society is not optimistic. As a consequence, the survival and development of Chinese language in Indonesia is in serious crisis. In response, Pan Wenguo also notes (2018): "When it comes to an endangered language, we are likely to take it as a language of an uncivilized place far away from our primitive tribes. However, the trip to Indonesia changed my mind. It happens to a great nation with a population of more than 10 million and a great language with profound cultural and history. It is true that Chinese is a dying language in Indonesia without any exaggeration." Pan Wenguo was invited to give lectures in Indonesia in November 2017. During 14 days, he investigated 5 cities and visited an Indonesian Chinese newspaper company and three tri-language schools. He came to the conclusion after an in-depth study in Java, Indonesia. This is just in line with our findings based on the survey of Chinese teacher community in Jakarta.

*B. The survey on the family language environment of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia*

As the cell of society, family is in a kind of social language background. As the smallest unit of society, family language environment plays a key role in the personal language. Moreover, the change of family language environment is also the direct factor that leads to the variation of personal language acquisition, so the family environment of Chinese teachers is also the key factor of this paper.

*1) Language environment of Indonesian Chinese teachers in Jakarta in their childhood:* The language environment of Indonesian Chinese teachers in Jakarta in their childhood is showed as following "Fig. 6".

It can be seen from "Fig. 6" that the parents of Chinese teachers in Jakarta are mainly proficient in mandarin and Indonesian, among which the percentage of those who are proficient in mandarin is the highest, over 70%. While there are only about 20% whose both parents are proficient in Indonesian. The reason is that the majority of the respondents are elderly Chinese. There are 116 Chinese teachers over the age of 45, accounting for 65.54% of the total. Their parents' language ability was formed before 1966. That is to say, their Chinese language ability was not influenced by the language policy of 1965. There are 37 respondents over 45 years old who often use southern Chinese dialects at home, such as min, Yue, Ke. Generally speaking, the family language environment of

Chinese teachers in Jakarta is in a multilingual balance. The order of language input frequency in their childhood is: Chinese > Indonesian > English.

In addition, the mastery rate of Indonesian among Chinese teachers at the preschool age has exceeded 50%, which is almost the same as Chinese. It indicates that the status of Chinese as the first language has gradually been replaced by Indonesian language.

2) *Language communication between family members of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia:* The language communication between family members of Chinese teachers in Jakarta, Indonesia is showed as following "Fig. 7".

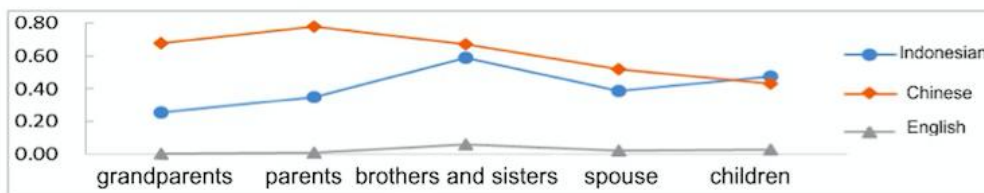


Fig. 7. The investigation on the communication languages between family members.

It can be seen from "Fig. 7" that the languages used by Chinese teachers at home in Jakarta are flexible: (1) While talking to the elders, they prefer Chinese to Indonesian. (2) When it comes to brothers, sisters and spouses, Chinese is still preferred. However, compared with the older generation, the rate of Chinese usage has declined rapidly. The gap between Indonesian and Chinese usage is much smaller than before. (3) When they talk to the children, Indonesian is the dominant language, followed by Chinese.

strong geographical feature of their ancestral places, such as Fujian, Guangdong and Hakka, which also directly affects their language communication with the younger generation.

Although the Indonesian government has long implemented the policy of banning Chinese, Chinese cannot be completely banned at home. Therefore, Chinese is still very important in family communication, which is attributed to Chinese ability of Chinese teachers' elders who has maintained lots of Chinese characteristics. In addition, min, Yue, Ke and other southern Chinese dialects are more frequently used than Mandarin. This is mainly due to the fact that the elders retain a

3) *The survey on the social language environment of Chinese teachers in Jakarta:* W. f. McKee, Wang Dexing (1991:132) states: "Community is probably the most important context for learning a language. Once a child is born, he or she lives in a certain community language environment, which soon replace the family as the most important factor in the child's language development." Based on it, this paper also conducted a survey on the language use of Chinese teachers on social occasions in Jakarta, which mainly include places where they often visit, such as roads, shopping centers, markets, Chinese restaurants, work units, government agencies and local hospitals.

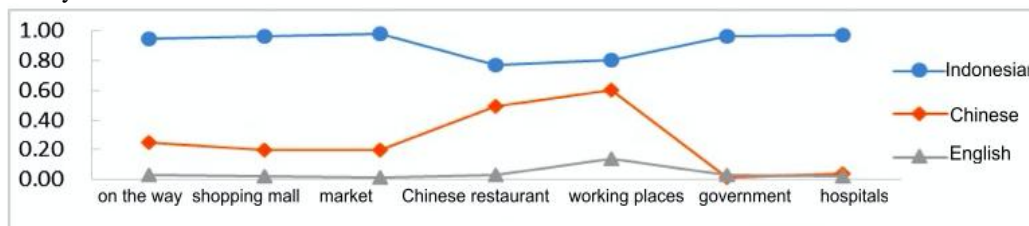


Fig. 8. Language usage of Jakarta Chinese teacher on different occasions.

As can be seen from "Fig. 8", Indonesian Chinese use Indonesian more frequently and more

widely than ever before. Only at certain places with lots of Chinese, such as Chinese restaurants and



workplaces (such as Chinese cram schools), do they speak mandarin. Therefore, Indonesian has an obvious advantage in social communication over Chinese. It has greatly restricted the development

of Chinese and other languages. To some extent, it has changed the language environment of Chinese families.



Fig. 9. The use of Chinese in Chinese restaurants by Chinese teachers of different ages in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Taking language spoken in Chinese restaurants as an example, the usage rate of Chinese decreases with age. That is to say, there is a positive correlation between Chinese usage and age. In addition, the influence of social environment on language is enormous. Under the strong influence of Indonesian, the degree of assimilation of Indonesian Chinese is also increasing as time goes by.

Yu Hui (2008:171) points out that "a healthy language ecosystem is a dynamic equilibrium system in which multiple languages coexist and interact with social environment. The most remarkable feature is the diversity of language. "However, as can be seen from "Fig. 8" and "Fig. 9", Indonesian language is slowly but firmly infiltrating into individual life, family communication and social communication field. The social languages of Indonesian Chinese people

tend to be unipolar. The language ecology is in an unbalanced state. The specific manifestations are as follows: (1) The number of Chinese speakers is decreasing, and there is an aging trend. (2) The social status of Chinese has declined and the use frequency has decreased. (3) The dynamic balance of the coexistence of multiple languages in Chinese society has been upset, and the use of Chinese has been gradually reducing.

IV. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

A. An analysis of the correlation between the age of Chinese teachers and Chinese acquisition

There is a strong correlation between the acquisition of mandarin, the identification with the mother tongue of the Chinese language and the age of the individual. In contrast, the mastery rate of Indonesian is negatively correlated.

TABLE I. CORRELATION TEST BETWEEN AGE AND CHINESE ACQUISITION OF INDONESIAN CHINESE TEACHER

		knowing Chinese well	Chinese as the first language	the mother tongue is recognized as Chinese	using Chinese at the pre-school age
Spearman's rho	Age	.216**	.284**	.253**	.162*
	group	.004	.000	.001	.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
		N	177	177	177

\*\*The correlation was significant when the confidence (bilateral) was 0.01.

\*When the confidence (bilateral) is 0.05, there is a correlation between the two.

"Table I" shows that there is a significant correlation between the two tests (P < 0.01) of "knowing Chinese well, Chinese as the first language, the mother tongue is recognized as Chinese" and " age group". The two-sided test of "using Chinese at the pre-school age" and "age group " P value = 0.031 < 0.05, rejected the original

hypothesis. There is a correlation between the two factors. That is to say, the older the Chinese teachers are, the better the Chinese atmosphere they are exposed to, and the better Chinese ability they have.

TABLE II. CHI-SQUARE TEST BETWEEN AGE AND CHINESE ACQUISITION ORDER OF INDONESIAN CHINESE TEACHERS

	figure	df	Progressive sig. (bilateral)
Pearson square	76.812a	16	.000
Linear and linear combination	29.322	1	.000
N in valid cases	177		

"Table II" shows that the P values of Pearson chi-square test, linear test and linear combination test between "age group and Chinese acquisition order" are all close to 0.000, rejecting the original hypothesis that "age" has a significant impact on "Chinese acquisition order". The younger the age is, the later Chinese is acquired. As a result, the advantage of Chinese as a medium language for Chinese to acquire other languages has gradually disappeared. Therefore, Indonesian, as a common language in society, plays an important role in multilingualism. Such kind of language ecology is contrary to the theory of balance optimization in biology.

Feng Guangyi (2013:83) pointed out that "balance" in the language ecosystem means that different languages have no advantages or disadvantages. All kinds of national languages play the same function in the national society, and their ecological value is the same. We should treat different national languages equally, so that they can get the same space for development. That is to say, we cannot only support the survival and development of a certain language, disregarding the survival and development of other languages. From 1966 to 1998, the Indonesian government adopted a language policy of restricting Chinese. They associated language and political system with national identity, to force Chinese to use Indonesian

and assimilate Chinese. It artificially destroyed the linguistic ecology, which leads to a serious crisis in the survival and development of Chinese.

*B. Correlation analysis between the residential community of Chinese teachers and Chinese language acquisition*

"Table III" data shows that the two-sided test p values of the correlation between each variable of "Proficient in Chinese, the first language is Chinese, Chinese as the mother tongue identity, Chinese as the pre-school language" and "Chinese teachers' residential community" are all > 0.05, accepting the original hypothesis that there is no correlation between the residence of Chinese teachers and their Chinese acquisition. It also shows that Indonesian Chinese teachers generally lack the community language environment to acquire and use Chinese. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of the Chinese language environment in community.

In this way, it can not only improve the frequency of Chinese use and enhance the social status of Chinese, but also enrich the Chinese language landscape, promote Chinese culture, highlight the ethnic awareness of Chinese, and enhance the mother language identity of Indonesian Chinese.

TABLE III. CORRELATION TEST BETWEEN RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES AND CHINESE TEACHERS' CHINESE ACQUISITION

	Proficient in Chinese	the first language is Chinese	Chinese as the mother tongue identity	Chinese as the pre-school language	
Live in a Chinese community or not	correlation coefficient	-.141	.069	-.055	-.080
Spearman's rho	Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.360	.465	.290
	N	177	177	177	177

**V. MEASURES TO PROTECT THE ECOLOGICAL BALANCE OF THE LANGUAGE OF INDONESIAN CHINESE**

*A. To create a better cultural atmosphere of the Chinese community and improve the external environment of the Chinese language ecology*

"Fig. 8" shows that the language ecology of Indonesian Chinese teachers develops in a relatively balanced way in their childhood, with Chinese acquisition and mastery ranking first, followed by Indonesian. It can be seen that a good family language environment is conducive to the language ecological balance. Although most

Chinese teachers live in Chinese communities, they lack the cultural atmosphere to use Chinese, which leads to the fact that the Indonesian language are better acquired than Chinese before entering school. Community cultural atmosphere is an important factor in personal language acquisition. While reducing restrictions on Chinese language and culture in Indonesia, efforts should also be made to build a Chinese cultural atmosphere in the Chinese community.

*B. To improve the status of Chinese education in Indonesia's education system and advocate the harmonious development of multi-culture*

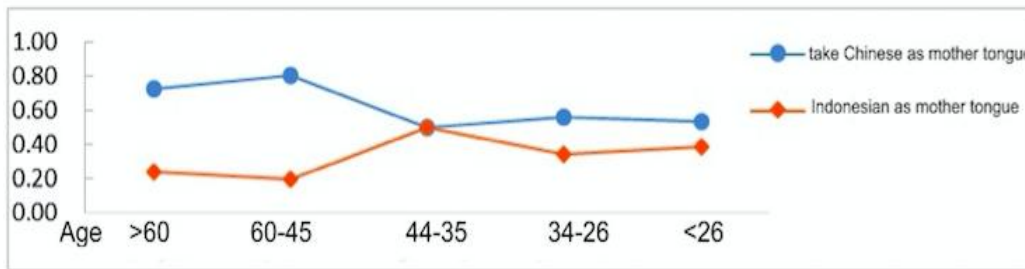


Fig. 10. Native language identity of Indonesian Chinese teachers.

Although there is a relatively high identity sense of Chinese as the mother tongue in Indonesia's Chinese Society (as shown in "Fig. 5"), the identity sense of the new generation of young Chinese teachers has gradually declined compared with that of the middle-aged and old Chinese teachers under the strict "forced assimilation" policy conducted by the Indonesian government. As can be seen from "Fig. 10", it is a "reflected" relationship between the proportion that Indonesian Chinese teachers have an identity sense of Chinese as mother tongue and the proportion that Indonesian Chinese teachers have an identity sense of Indonesian as mother tongue. That is to say, the stronger the native language identity of Chinese is, the lower the identity of Indonesian is. In the age group of 35-44, the proportion of identity is similar. The study of Wenfeng (2008) shows that from 1968 to 1974, the vigorous development of Indonesian special schools for ethnic minorities and the growth of Chinese economy led to the overall prohibition of Chinese education by Indonesian nationalists. It was not until 1990, after the resumption of diplomatic relations between India and China, that the prohibition of Chinese language policy was gradually cancelled. This is the key reason that Chinese teachers of 35-44 years old have the least mastery of Chinese and the lowest sense of identity.

The improvement of Indonesian Chinese social language ecology is closely related to the national language policy executed by the Indonesian

government. However, when Chinese schools around Indonesia made efforts to standardize and scientize Chinese teaching, which had stagnated for more than 30 years, Indonesia's Ministry of Culture and Education issued the "2013 curriculum outline". There is such a rule in the syllabus: "only the senior high state schools are allowed to set up another foreign language course besides English." In other words, as a foreign language course, Chinese can only be opened in the high school Department of the state school, and only two classes a week. How to ensure the progress and effectiveness of students' Chinese learning while not violating the targeted regulations of the Ministry of Culture and Education of Indonesia has become an urgent problem for Indonesian Chinese and schools. This language policy has increased the language convergence in Indonesian social language life. It is an artificial intervention to the normal language ecology.

*C. To advocate the equality of national languages and cultures and maintain the balanced development of language ecology*

As a multi-ethnic country, a certain proportion of other ethnic languages in social life contributes to the harmony of Indonesian society. It will also contribute to the balance of Indonesia's language ecological environment. At this stage, we should try our best to promote language equality and counter language discrimination in Indonesian society.



Through handling of the relationship between the national language (Indonesian), the dominant language (English) and other ethnic languages properly, we can promote the balanced development of the diversity of Indonesian social languages. For the Chinese, first of all, we should develop Chinese education and improve the identity sense of the mother tongue. We should persist in inheriting and carrying forward the Chinese cultural tradition and study Chinese as our mother tongue (ethnic language), rather than as a second language. Secondly, while preserving our own culture, we should also be more compatible with the local culture of Modern Indonesia, so that the indigenous culture can be more compatible with our culture. Only in this way can Chinese develop well in Indonesia's multilingual and cultural environment, and finally promote the harmonious and healthy development of language ecology in Chinese society.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The connotation of multiculturalism is that a society allows the existence of multi culture, multi-ethnic and multi-language and equal rights. Its core focus is "the issue of ethnic cultural diversity and the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities, and its development process is the construction process of the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities" (LV, 2009:12). As a country with the largest number of overseas Chinese, the language ecology of Indonesian Chinese society has been out of balance. The imbalance is closely related to the language policy adopted by the Indonesian government. As a "country of thousands of islands" with many ethnic groups, we should not suppress and restrict the language and culture of other ethnic groups in order to strengthen a single ethnic group, but should complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in the process of multiple language and culture contact and blend, so as to promote and maintain the balance and harmony of Indonesian social language ecology. This will make different national languages respect each other and develop together.

This paper only makes a preliminary investigation of the impact of external ecological environment factors on the language life of Indonesian Chinese teachers, so as to make a reasonable analysis of the language ecology of Indonesian Chinese society. Of course, this is not a comprehensive analysis. If we want to make an in-depth analysis of the language ecology of Chinese people in Indonesia, we need to conduct a large-scale investigation and a comparative analysis combining more influential factors (such as internal ecological factors).

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