



Transformation of the Chinese Press in Indonesia Facing a Ban on Publication, 1958-1965

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the transformation of the Chinese press in the face of the Indonesian government's attempt to shut down the press that used permitted fonts during the Guided Democracy era. This research uses historical research methods to analyze the government's actions in trying to shut down the Chinese press and the transformation of the Chinese press to be able to continue publishing in Indonesia. The Chinese press is a newspaper published in Indonesia using the Chinese language and script. There is also a Chinese press that publishes in Malay, which is published by peranakan Chinese living in Indonesia. The Chinese press has experienced two closure attempts by the government, namely in April 1958 and in 1960 which resulted in the Chinese press in Indonesia transforming. The Chinese press continues to publish in Indonesia by transforming into newspapers that use Indonesian names, language and writing.

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INTRODUCTION

Where did the Chinese press go in Indonesia when Indonesia entered Guided Democracy? What contributed to the disappearance of Chinese-language newspapers in Indonesia during the Guided Democracy period? These are questions that may come to mind when reading and looking at some of the government policies and actions against Chinese newspapers during the transition from Guided Democracy to Guided Democracy. These questions are the two things that will be discussed in this article.

After the proclamation of Indonesian independence in 1945, the Dutch returned to Indonesia. Dutch newspapers in Indonesia were closed during the occupation but started to be published again gradually. The publication of the Dutch press was also followed by the publication of the Chinese press in Indonesia. The Chinese press, which was banned during the Japanese occupation, also reappeared in Indonesia. *Sin Po* and *Keng Po* were two Chinese newspapers in Indonesia that reappeared after Indonesia's independence. The first edition of *Sin Po* after the proclamation of Indonesian independence was published at the end of 1945 in the streets of Jakarta and distributed to cities such as Bandung and Bogor. After that, the *Keng Po* newspaper was also republished (Oey Hong Lee, [1971](#), p. 39).

The number of Indonesian newspapers increased rapidly after the proclamation of Indonesian independence until the recognition of Dutch sovereignty in 1949. The freedom fighters in the press were encouraged by the Indonesian government to publish more newspapers. At the end of 1949, the Indonesian press consisted of three types of press based on the language used, namely the Indonesian Press, the Dutch Press, and the Chinese Press. The press in Indonesia consisted of 75 newspapers with a circulation of 413,700 copies. The newspapers consisted of 45 Indonesian newspapers with a circulation of 227,000 copies, 13 Dutch newspapers with a circulation of 102,300 copies, and 17 Chinese newspapers with a circulation of 84,000 copies (Lembaga Pers dan Pendapat Umum, [1955](#), p. 36). In 1949 there were 17 Chinese newspapers and this number remained until 1957. The circulation of Chinese newspapers was 84,000 copies in 1949, although it dropped the following year, but in 1957 it was 129,500 copies (Lembaga Pers dan Pendapat Umum, [1955](#), p. 36-37).

The press during the Guided Democracy era was a period in which the press did not experience much freedom. All forms of news and writings in newspapers and magazines were under government supervision. Those who did not want to support or only supported Manipol half-heartedly would have their publishing licenses suspended. The press that dared to oppose would experience closure and suspension of publishing licenses ("Menpen Maladi," [1960](#), December 3, Notodidjojo, [1977](#), p. 121). The press in Guided Democracy was a tool of revolution, so the press was



required to be able to disseminate the Political Manifesto and support government programs. Anything that the newspapers did that the government felt could disturb public order and endanger the Indonesian Revolution would receive a warning and the revocation of the publishing license of the newspaper concerned could even be carried out (Smith, [1986](#), p. 191). During the Guided Democracy period, there were many incidents of government actions against the press, such as closures, revocation of permits, warnings and summonses to newspapers or magazines. These actions also occurred against the Chinese press in Indonesia, even before the Guided Democracy period.

In April 1958, the government made its first attempt to clamp down on the Chinese press. The government issued a policy banning newspapers that did not use Latin or Arabic characters in their publications. The regulation led to the closure of 16 Chinese newspapers that used Chinese characters (Smith, [1986](#), p. 174-175). The regulation banning the publication of newspapers that did not use Latin or Arabic characters or Indonesian local languages was revoked in May 1958. Then, in 1960 the government reissued the same regulation in Decree No. 3 of 1960 concerning Restrictions on Printing, Publishing, Announcing, Conveying, Distributing, Trading, and/or Placing Newspapers or Magazines That Use Non-Latin or Arabic Letters or Indonesian Regional Letters. The regulation was the second attempt to shut down the Chinese press in Indonesia (Oey Hong Lee, [1971](#), p. 118).

After the regulations were enacted, the Chinese press was still able to publish in Indonesia with some adjustments. The Chinese press transformed by replacing the Chinese characters in their newspapers with Latin letters, and some newspapers changed their names to Indonesian names. However, the Chinese press in Indonesia closed in 1965 due to the G 30 S incident.

Discussions on the history of the press during Guided Democracy have been discussed by Oey Hong Lee ([1971](#)), Smith ([1986](#)), Said ([1988](#)), and Surjomihardjo ([2002](#)). Oey Hong Lee ([1971](#)) discusses the press in Indonesia during Guided Democracy and the regulations on the press during Guided Democracy. The press, in Indonesia, was regulated by government regulations so that when they violated them, the newspapers could be shut down by the Guided Democracy government. One of the regulations is Pepernti No. 3 of 1960 which regulates the publication of newspapers in Indonesia using letters and languages that can be understood by the Indonesian government. Smith ([1986](#)) in his book discusses the banning of the press in Indonesia. After Indonesia was declared in a state of danger in 1957, the government could shut down newspapers and summon editor-in-chiefs on the grounds of disturbing state security. Smith ([1986](#)) also states that there was a closure action against foreign newspapers in 1958 including the Chinese press in Indonesia. Said ([1988](#)) in his book discusses the development of the press in Indonesia in outline from the Dutch colonial period to discuss the Pancasila press or the press during the new order. The Chinese press that reappeared after independence and the number of Chinese newspapers is discussed in this book because in the development of the press in Indonesia the Chinese press always existed and published in Indonesia until the events of September 30, 1965. Surjomihardjo ([2002](#)) in his book explains how the Chinese press first appeared in Indonesia and the development of the Chinese press in Indonesia. This book also explains that after there were rules restricting Chinese newspapers in Indonesia, so Chinese newspapers had to become Indonesian newspapers to get permission to publish in Indonesia.

The study of efforts to ban the publication of the Chinese press in Indonesia during the Sukarno era can be seen explicitly in the formulation of the problem, namely First, what is the background to the effort to ban the publication of the Chinese Press in Indonesia. Second, how did the Government attempt to ban the publication of the Chinese Press. Third, how did the Chinese press respond to the banning measures taken by the government.

This research aims to show the efforts of the Guided Democracy government to carry out the revolution, so that things that are considered to interfere with it must be limited. The press in this case is a shaper of public opinion so that in the event of a revolution the press that cannot be supervised linguistically needs to be supervised. In addition, it is also to show how the Chinese press tries to continue publishing in Indonesia by transforming into Indonesian newspapers.

METHOD

This article was prepared using the historical method. The historical method is a method used to research, reconstruct, and analyze past events (Gottschalk, [2008](#), p. 39). The historical method includes four steps: heuristics (source collection), criticism (source testing), interpretation, and historiography (historical writing). Heuristics is the process of collecting data sources and finding sources relevant to the problem, which can be written or oral documents of past events as historical sources (Wasino, [2005](#), pp. 11-12). At the stage of searching and selecting documents, primary sources were obtained from research at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia, the National Library of the

Republic of Indonesia, and the Library of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. The archives found were documents of the 1960 Perti Regulation, contemporaneous newspapers such as *Obor Rakyat* and *Merdeka* newspapers, and publications of the Ministry of Information. Secondary sources in this research were obtained from searching collections of books that discuss the Chinese press in Indonesia and the concept of transformation, especially the press obtained from the library and articles in online journals.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Chinese press in Indonesia

The press can be categorized into two definitions, namely the press in a broad sense and the press in a narrow sense. The press in a broad sense is a printed or electronic media that delivers news or reports in the nature of facts, opinions, proposals, and images given to the wider community or its readers. The press in the narrow sense is print media such as daily newspapers, weekly newspapers, magazines and bulletins (Simatupang, 2024, p. 3721). The press in this study is a narrowly printed press that uses Chinese characters. The press has a role as a medium of information, public mouthpiece, entertainment, and social control. In addition, the press also acts as a tool to educate and play a role in the progress of national life. The press has a role as an intermediary between the community and the government as a medium for expressing opinions such as aspirations, criticisms and suggestions (Efendi et al., 2023, p. 8157).

The Chinese press is divided into two in terms of language use, namely the Chinese-language press and the Chinese press that uses Malay, which after 1928 was also referred to as Indonesian (Jayusman & Fachrurazi, 2021, p. 55). The Chinese press is a newspaper published in both Chinese and Bahasa Indonesia, published by Chinese publishers, and read by Chinese people who can read and are financially able. Part of the Chinese press is aimed at reviving interest in Chinese customs, history and culture among the Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia (Smith, 1986, p. 59). The Chinese press is also known as the Chinese Malay Press in Indonesia. This is because these daily and weekly newspapers were published by Chinese people living in Indonesia both after and before Indonesia's independence. The newspapers were published using the Chinese Malay language. The Chinese Malay newspapers were owned and run by peranakan Chinese living in Indonesia. These newspapers were also consumed by peranakan Chinese in Indonesia (Nafisah & Suwarta, 2021, p. 200).

At the beginning of the control of the Chinese press in Indonesia, Chinese newspapers used Indo-Dutch editors, because at that time the legal position of Indo-Dutch was higher. The first Chinese newspaper in the Dutch East Indies was *Li Po*. The *Li Po* newspaper began publishing on January 12, 1901 in Sukabumi. *Li Po* was published irregularly. This newspaper was published by Soekaboemische Snelpresdrukkerij. *Li Po* newspaper in its news contains writings that contain news, letters sent various kinds of Chinese sciences, rules, and history, which the readers of this newspaper need to know for the progress of their nation of Chinese people. *Li Po* newspaper contains many essays that discuss the teachings of Chinese philosophers. This newspaper has its own characteristics, namely by broadcasting many letters sent from their readers. However, after running from 1901 to 1907 *Li Po* did not experience much development, this newspaper was still a small newspaper and was published only once a week. The content of this newspaper also did not develop much, so it lost out to other newspapers that came after it (Surjomihardjo, 2002, pp. 47-48).

One of the newspapers that emerged afterward was the *Perniagaan* newspaper, which was first published in 1903. *Perniagaan* newspaper was originally a weekly newspaper, but after running for one year this newspaper turned into a daily newspaper. In 1905, *Perniagaan* was renamed *Khabar Perniagaan*. As the name suggests, this newspaper disseminated information about trade. One of the pioneering figures of the bumiputera press, Tirta Adhi Soerjo, was recorded as having been on the editorial board of *Khabar Perniagaan* (Nuryanti, 2007, pp. 32-33). The newspaper collapsed with the collapse of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia in 1942 (Surjomihardjo, 2002, pp. 48-49). Another Chinese newspaper that was *Perniagaan's* biggest rival was *Sin Po*, which was founded in October 1910. Just like *Perniagaan*, *Sin Po* was also originally published as a weekly newspaper, but two years later *Sin Po* turned into a daily newspaper. *Sin Po* was a newspaper that had a Chinese nationalist stance, so it often polemicized with newspapers that were against its stance (Smith, 1986, p. 59).

After Indonesian independence, Chinese Peranakan journalists became Indonesian citizens. The change also had an impact on the mention of the Chinese Newspaper, which was originally a Malay or Peranakan Chinese newspaper, then became the Indonesian Chinese Newspaper. After Indonesian independence, many Chinese Press were still published, including the *Sin Po* and *Keng Po* newspapers which were published until the entry of the Guided Democracy period. *Keng Po* is a Chinese newspaper that managed to remain published until the end of Guided Democracy.

However, this newspaper had to stop publishing because it could not compete with New Order newspapers (Surjomihardjo, [2002](#), p. 63).

Attempts to Shut Down the Chinese Press in Indonesia

Before the attempt to shut down the Chinese press, the Dutch press was banned from publishing in Indonesia in late 1957. The ban occurred due to tensions between the Indonesian government and the Dutch government regarding West Irian. Dutch newspapers in Indonesia were forced to cease publication. The Dutch newspapers were rivals to the Chinese newspapers which made the Indonesian newspapers themselves less visible (Hill, [2011](#), p. 25).

Attempts to Shut Down the Chinese Press in Indonesia in 1958

After banning the publication and distribution of Dutch newspapers in 1957, in the following year, the Indonesian government began to make attempts to shut down Chinese newspapers in Indonesia. The attempt to shut down the Chinese press was made to prevent the misuse of Chinese characters to do certain things that could disrupt the security of the country. In addition, the Chinese press in Indonesia presented an even bigger problem from a government policy standpoint. This is because many Chinese newspapers are supporters of the Communist regime in China. *Sin Po*, which is one of the oldest Chinese newspapers in Indonesia, has always been aggressively Chinese nationalistic. *Sin Po* during the pre-war period did not hesitate to criticize Chiang Kai Shek for failing to take a more active stance against Japan. It also criticized Chiang Kai Shek for spending too much time hunting down the Red Chinese. Another Chinese daily, *Keng Po*, long before the war was an active supporter of Mao tse-Tung, the leader of the Chinese Communists, but has since taken a more critical stance. However, after the recognition of Indonesian sovereignty, the daily claimed to speak for the Chinese people who regarded Indonesia as their permanent home (Kroef, [1954](#), p. 343).

The first attempt to shut down Chinese newspapers was made in April 1958, when the government announced a ban on newspapers and magazines that used letters other than Latin or Arabic script or Indonesian regional letters. The announcement prohibited the printing, publishing, announcing, delivering, distributing, trading, and pasting of newspapers or magazines that did not use Latin letters or Arabic script or Indonesian regional letters. The decision to ban was made by the Army Chief of Staff (KSAD) General Major A.H. Nasution as the Central War Authority for the Army region. The ban was issued based on regulation No. 010/1958 which was issued on April 14, 1958. The regulation was issued in consideration of preventing the misuse of letters that were still foreign to the Indonesian people, which were used for certain purposes that could harm public order and security. Based on the regulation, newspapers or magazines that violate the regulation can be destroyed and confiscated. Violation of the regulation will be subject to imprisonment for a maximum of one year or with a maximum fine of ten thousand rupiah. Newspapers or magazines that are prohibited by this regulation may publish their newspapers or magazines using the letters allowed in this regulation ("Larangan Terhadap Surat Kabar Atau Majalah," [1958](#), April 18).

The regulation was the first step towards shutting down Chinese language newspapers, as the Dutch language press had already been banned from publication in 1957. This regulation was issued due to the suspicion that non-Indonesian newspapers could do things that disturb public order in Indonesia. The regulation also led to the suspension of 16 daily newspapers using Chinese characters across Indonesia on April 14, 1958, such as five in Jakarta. On April 23, 1958, 17 editors-in-chief of Chinese publications were summoned by the Jakarta Military Command in connection with the decree issued by the Central War Authorities. The ban was also applied to Japanese, Indian and Russian characters. In other cities outside Jakarta, such as Medan, a number of Chinese newspapers were shut down due to the ban, such as *The Sumatra Times*, *News China Times*, *Sumatra Bin Pon*, *Hwa Choa Jin Pon*, and *Democratic Daily News*. In Makassar there was also a stoppage of publication to the Chinese Press due to the regulation, the newspapers were *Kuo Min-Tang*, *Chiao Seng Pao*, *Daily Chronicle*, and *Daily Telegraph* (Smith, [1986](#), pp. 174-175). The regulation on printing, publishing, announcing, delivering, distributing, trading, and pasting newspapers and magazines that do not use Latin letters or Arabic script or Indonesian local languages was revoked on May 23, 1958 by the Army Chief of Staff Nasution (Oey Hong Lee, [1971](#), p. 118).

Attempts to Shut Down the Chinese Press in Indonesia in 1960

After on May 23, 1958 Army Chief of Staff Nasution revoked the regulation on printing, publishing, announcing, delivering, distributing, trading, and pasting newspapers and magazines that did not use Latin or Arabic characters or

Indonesian local languages, the Indonesian government reissued the same regulation in 1960 with Decree No. 3 of 1960. The regulation was the military's second attempt to shut down the Chinese Press (Oey Hong Lee, [1971](#), p. 118).

Peperti Regulation Number 3 of 1960 enacted in Jakarta on May 26, 1960 regulates restrictions on the printing, publishing, announcing, delivering, distributing, trading, and pasting of newspapers or magazines that use letters that are not Latin letters or Arabic letters or Indonesian regional letters. In this regulation, it is explained that Indonesian regional letters are letters originating from Indonesian regions, such as Javanese letters, letters from the Tapanuli region, letters from the Bali, Toraja and other regions. The word of the letter in question also includes the number of the letter. For newspapers or magazines that do not use Latin letters or Arabic letters or Indonesian regional letters that are printed, published without a license, the newspapers or magazines can be confiscated or destroyed. The stipulation of this regulation is a restriction on the press that does not use Latin or Arabic letters or Indonesian regional letters or the press that uses the letters of origin of the newspapers and magazines, such as the Chinese Press (Peraturan Penguasa Perang Tertinggi, [1960](#)).

The Supreme War Authority then issued a follow-up regulation to Peperti regulation No. 3 of 1960 with Peperti regulation No. 10 of 1960 concerning Publication Permits for the Publication of Newspapers and Magazines. The issuance of a publication license will only be granted to newspaper and magazine publishers who agree to comply with the guidelines given by the Supreme War Authority contained in the application letter for a publishing license. The issuance of newspapers and magazines that have received a publication license can be revoked if the issuance of newspapers and magazines does not comply with the guidelines given (Departemen Penerangan Republik Indonesia, [n.d.](#)).

These regulations led to a reduction in the number of Chinese newspapers in Indonesia. In 1959, the Chinese press consisted of 11 daily newspapers with a circulation of 153,500 copies. A year later, this had decreased to 3 daily newspapers with a circulation of 41,000 copies (Smith, [1986](#), p. 242).

Transformation of the Chinese Press in Indonesia

Transformation is a process of change that occurs gradually until it reaches the desired final stage. The change occurs by responding to influences, which can be internal and external, that lead to a change from the initial form through a process of repeated duplication (Gushevinalti et al., [2020](#), p. 85). According to Roger Fidler, who originated the theory of Mediamorphosis, the transformation that occurred was the result of the interaction effect which was considered difficult from rational demands, competitive pressures, surrounding political factors, and technological innovation (Mardhiyyah, [2023](#)). The transformation referred to in this study was the change in the Chinese press in Indonesia in the face of the ban on publication by the administration of President Sukarno from 1959 to 1965. The transformation that occurred in the Chinese press was caused by the surrounding political conditions in Indonesia. Indonesia was undergoing a revolution at the time, and the press was part of the revolutionary apparatus. Therefore, the press in foreign languages was banned.

In 1958 there were 20 actions and accusations against the Chinese Press and 12 Chinese newspapers were shut down. In addition to the closures, the Chinese Press in Indonesia was also warned four times and detained four times. However, after the massive shutdown of the Chinese Press in April 1958, at the end of 1958 the Army Chief of Staff granted publication permits to 11 Chinese newspaper publishers in Jakarta and also in areas outside Jakarta for six months after the publication permit issued in May 1958 expired. In October 1959 the War Authorities announced a requirement to the Chinese press that for newspapers with Chinese characters, they must also publish editorials in Bahasa Indonesia. In the same year *Sin Po* also received a warning from the PWI that *Sin Po*'s position was unfavorable due to the spread of anti-Chinese actions (Smith, [1986](#), p. 179).

By August 1960 it was known that the press with Chinese names and languages had disappeared from Indonesia. In addition, the enactment of Peperti No. 3 of 1960 was an attempt by the War Authorities to eliminate the foreign-language press and fight with a purely Indonesian press (Oey Hong Lee, [1971](#), pp. 117-118). In 1959 and 1960, the Chinese press was banned which led to the disappearance of the Chinese press in 1961. In 1959 there were two Chinese press closures, one warning, and one detention of the Chinese press. In 1960 there were 8 Chinese press shutdowns which led to the disappearance of the press with Chinese characters (Smith, [1986](#), pp. 208-210).

The shutdown of the Chinese Press in 1959 and 1960 led to the disappearance of Chinese newspapers using Chinese characters. However, the shutdown did not eliminate the Chinese Press itself. Some Chinese presses transformed by changing their names to Indonesian names, such as *Sin Po* and *Keng Po*. Upon entering Guided Democracy, the two presses merged and became more indigenous-like by changing their names and managing the language used in their newspapers. *Sin Po* changed its name to *Panca Warta* which later became *Warta Bhakti*. However, *Sin Po* ceased publication following the fall of Guided Democracy. *Keng Po* changed their name to *Pos Indonesia*. *Keng Po* under the name *Pos Indonesia* managed to publish until the New Order period but could not last long as it could not compete with the New Order newspapers (Surjomihardjo, [2002](#), p. 63).

In addition to *Sin Po* and *Keng Po*, other newspapers such as *Hung Pai Pao* were published in Surabaya and were Chinese newspapers, to prolong their existence *Hung Pai Pao* changed its name to *Harian Merah Putih*. In its daily newspaper, *Hung Pai Pao* published one page of news using Indonesian and the Latin alphabet, and the next page using Chinese language and script. Besides *Hung Pai Pao*, in 1964 two Chinese newspapers appeared in Jakarta under the names *Chung Cheng Pao* and *Hou Chi Pao*. However, at the time of the press crackdown due to the events of September 30, 1965, these two newspapers also experienced a crackdown (Oey Hong Lee, [1971](#), p. 154).

The banning of newspapers in foreign languages in 1958-1965 had an impact on the Chinese press. The Chinese press, which initially used Chinese and some used Malay, then had to change to newspapers in Indonesian. This change caused the Chinese press in Indonesia to use only Indonesian. The Chinese press had to adapt completely to the Indonesian press, as the Indonesian press generally published in Indonesian.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese press has existed in Indonesia since 1901, namely the *Li Po* newspaper. During the Guided Democracy and its transition period, the Chinese press in Indonesia experienced two attempts at shutting down by the Indonesian government. The Indonesian government took action to eliminate the foreign-language press and fought with the Pure Indonesian Press. The first attempt was made in 1958 with a regulation prohibiting the publication of newspapers using anything other than Latin or Arabic characters. The regulation led to the closure of 16 Chinese presses in Indonesia. The next government effort was carried out in 1960 by issuing the same regulation through *Peperti No. 3 of 1960*. The attempt to shut down Chinese newspapers in 1960 led to the elimination of Chinese newspapers with Chinese characters. After experiencing the publication ban twice, the Chinese press then transformed into a press using Indonesian language and writing. The Chinese press then completely disappeared after the events of September 30, 1965 which resulted in the shutdown of newspapers that were considered to support or have communist views in Indonesia.

This research still has shortcomings, there are still many parts of this research that can be continued. Research on the Chinese press is only limited to the two government regulations that prohibit the circulation of Chinese newspapers in Indonesia that use the Chinese language, so research on the Chinese press which is a Chinese newspaper with an Indonesian name and Indonesian language can still be published like other Indonesian newspapers. The Chinese press in Indonesia has been published in Indonesia for a long time, so research on the Chinese press is still very extensive beyond the period of this research. It is still difficult to find recent literature on the Chinese press during the Guided Democracy period or when Sukarno was President.

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