



The Construction of China's Ethnic Politicians on Legislative Powers in North Sumatera Province

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ABSTRACT

This study departs from the general perception that some legislative candidates understand when campaigning in general elections promising to provide economic welfare to the community. The problem is how to bring economic welfare to the community when the governmental function is the executive's authority. This study aims to answer how the construction of ethnic minority politicians (ethnic Chinese) against the concept of legislative power. Through qualitative research methods, this study will answer research questions using deductive and interpretive data analysis. Data obtained through literature studies and interviews. The results of the research conducted show that Chinese ethnicity has constructed legislative power as a theoretical concept in the modern era but at the level of activity has a variant of skills in articulating.

Keyword: Legislative candidates, Ethnic minorities, Ethnic Chinese

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1. Introduction

There is the oldest research study that examines the relationship between legislative and executive power (Young, 1904). In line with its development, the legislature has attracted the attention of political scientists to be able to find out the farthest limit of the realization of legislative power in government. The focus of attention is on the functions and powers of the legislature. There is a legislative function as oversight and balance to the executive (Cerovic, 2013; Young, 1904). The articulation and aggregation of interests originate from the aspirations of community segmentation groups such as interest groups (Dür, 2008). In the aspect of authority, several studies have explored the actions of the legislature in forming political coalitions with the executive (Silva, 2014; Zubek and Kluver, 2015). Meanwhile, in the context of action, efforts to fight for the interests of the people, action is such as competing in the legislature in forming regulations that are pro-people (Gauja, 2014), communicating with the executive (Hanan, 2012), and doing advocacy (Goldstein, Grant, McCullough, Cairns, & Kurian, 2010).

As the legislative function is so important in a democratic political system, human resources who can carry out these functions are also very much needed. This capacity is measured through internal party selection which then has to undergo final selection through general elections (elections). The study of the legislature of ethnic minorities has long been a concern in political science studies such as by reading works from (Folke, Freidenvall, & Rickne, 2015; Saalfeld & Bischof, 2013; Collet, 2008; Fang, 2015; Loncar, 2013; Yan, 2009; McClelland, 2020; Aydemir & Vliegthart, 2015).

This study stands in a position to explore the established understanding of politicians from ethnic minorities in interpreting legislative power. Chinese ethnicity is an ethnic minority in Indonesia, specifically in the province of North Sumatra. Their long history since the Old Order era and the New Order era places them as the subject of state policy. In the Old Order era, it was related to the value of nationalism and then related to the assimilation program and the limitation of socio-political rights in the New Order era. Based on this experience, this study argues that ethnic minorities experienced a "maturity" delay to understand and interpret politics when Indonesia shifted from a non-democratic system to a democratic system in 1999. In the context of empirical studies, studies on the construction of ethnic minorities have been carried out in the perspective of understanding representativeness (Lončar, 2017). This study stands in a different position where this paper takes a position to explore the construction of ethnic minority politicians (ethnic Chinese) in understanding the concept of legislative power by examining references from theories of power in the classical to modern era.

2. Research Method

This paper is reviewed through a qualitative research method using deductive and interpretive data analysis. Data obtained through in-depth interviews and literature study. In-depth interviews were conducted with several ethnic Chinese politicians who had been legislative candidates in the province of North Sumatra. Information obtained from in-depth interviews is a way to obtain interpretations of the construction of Chinese ethnic politicians in understanding the concept of power. Literature studies focused on the topic of legislative power in classical democratic thought from Montesquieu (1748) "*Spirit of the Laws*" in the book of Cohler, Miller,

& Stone (1989: 21-71), while the development of the concept of legislative power in modern democracies written by Cerovic (2013) was used to obtain a conceptual framework for a theoretical definition of legislative power in modern democracies.

3. Results and Discussion

Ethnic Minorities in the Election Arena

There are several causes for the emergence of ethnic minority participation in the electoral arena, including the following: 1) an open democratic electoral system, 2) stands for interests in the legislature and 3) the prevailing ethnic quota system. An open electoral system provides equal opportunities for every individual to gain political positions. This situation in Indonesia is marked by the holding of direct elections through an open proportional system. An open proportional system is considered relevant to absorb the interests of various individual backgrounds to access political rights, such as being a legislative candidate in elections. The open proportional election model is considered appropriate for use in Indonesia, which has the demographic characteristics of a multi-ethnic and plural society. Ethnic fanaticism in this way can be minimized in the contestation arena between candidates in elections. The chances of success for ethnic minorities in elections in several cases, such as the findings of Juenke & Shah (2015) are influenced by the lack of availability of candidate figures who are eligible/likely to win. On the other hand, this success is also influenced by the skills to build a support network (Mugge, 2016).

It cannot be ignored that the main motivation of most ethnic minority candidates to become legislative candidates is to fight for their interests. This situation is reflected in several countries with high levels of ethnic sentiments, such as..... The condition of social imbalance leads to the presence of ethnic

conflicts or on the other hand it creates state policies that are counter to equal rights. The policy approach is the key to achieving life treatment that upholds equality. In the Indonesian context, especially since the end of the New Order era, discriminatory state policies have ended with the government's commitment in the post-reform era that is pro to democracy. Procedurally democratic democracy is reflected in election contestations which are held regularly. Democracy is substantially articulated in the form of freedom to choose and to be chosen.

Indonesia provides quotas for women's representation in legislative elections. However, ethnic representation is not a priority mechanism in Indonesia. This is as explained in the description of the paragraph above regarding the open proportional system which is considered to have been able to reduce the strengthening of fanaticism based on ethnicity in election contestation. The main priority in segmenting the representation quota is still focused on increasing the participation of women who become candidates in legislative elections. Although the participation of women as candidates in the legislature has strengthened concerning cross-ethnic segmentation (Sweinstani & Mariyah, 2017), the results of legislative elections in Indonesia are not in line with the quantity of participation. The impetus for realizing an increase in women in political positions is reflected in several successful studies such as in a study conducted by Clayton (2015); Matland (1998); Dolan & Lynch (2015); House (2017) which in turn shows that the quantity of women's participation in political positions is the responsibility of political parties (Caul, 1999)

Ethnic Chinese in Local Legislative Election: DPRD North Sumatra

Since Indonesia held democratic legislative elections in 1999 for the first time, the emergence of Chinese ethnic participation in the electoral arena has occurred. In this case, it is like forming a political party (Giblin, 2003: 131-136) and becoming a candidate in the election (Suarso, 2016). In a local context in the province of North Sumatra, the presence of Chinese ethnic political participation in the legislative elections (DPRD) at the provincial level begins with the advancement of Haryanto from the Justice and Unity Party (PKP). As the only candidate to compete in the North Sumatra provincial DPRD elections in 1999, Haryanto failed to achieve success as a legislative member of the nationalist ideological PKP. It was also found that from the elections in 2004, the participation of Chinese ethnic candidates consisted of 3 candidates. The three candidates came from three parties with a nationalist ideology, such as the Democratic Party, the Indonesian Justice and Unity Party, and the United New Indonesia Party.

The number of Chinese ethnic candidates in the next election, or to be precise in 2009, has increased. At least 10 candidates are competing for legislative positions with the support of various political parties. Based on the typology of party ideology, this time there is a Chinese ethnic candidate who advanced from a party with a religious-nationalist ideology (Partai Damai Sejahtera). This participation then increased in the 2014 election where at least 12 ethnic Chinese candidates advanced to the legislature from parties with nationalist and nationalist-religious ideologies (Sinaga, Warella, Yuwanto, & Setiyono, 2019: 74). The strengthening of the political choice to move forward from a party with a nationalist-religious ideology occurred in the 2014 election. The stigma that identifies Chinese ethnicity which is identical to the

political channel to a nationalist ideological party then undergoes a shift to a religious-nationalist party marking the birth of several arguments as the cause, namely: 1) The nationalist-religious party is considered as an alternative party amid high competition for contestation, and 2) the nationalist-religious party strategy is used as a strategy to gain a claim as an open party.

The 1999 to 2014 elections showed the increasing enthusiasm of Chinese ethnics to become the legislature. For example, in the legislative elections in Medan, Sinaga et al. (2019: 76) noted that there was 1 Chinese ethnic candidate in the 2004 elections and 3 ethnic Chinese candidates in the 2009 and 2014 elections. Based on party choices, it appears that Chinese ethnic candidates are very heterogeneous in choosing parties as political channels to advance to become legislative candidates (Sinaga et al., 2018; Sinaga et al., 2019). By the various political dynamics and various demographic voter behavior in each election, in the end, it has not been able to bring an increase in the quantity of success of Chinese ethnic candidates to become legislative. This situation was seen in the 1999 elections which showed the absence of ethnic Chinese candidates who succeeded in becoming the legislature at the provincial level of North Sumatra. However, in the 2004 elections, there was 1 candidate elected to the legislature, 3 candidates in the 2009 election, and 2 candidates in 2014 (Sinaga et al., 2018; Sinaga, Warella, Yuwanto, & Setiyono, 2019). The phenomenon of electability of Chinese ethnic candidates in the proportional electoral arena in the study of ethnic minorities in the electoral arena depends on the appropriateness of candidate figures, related to popularity, accessibility, and ability to build support networks. In the case of the 2009 and 2014 elections, the Chinese ethnic candidate Brilian Moktar successfully won the trust of voters so that he was able to

survive as a member of the legislative branch of the province of North Sumatra for 2 periods.

Construction of Chinese Ethnic Politicians in Legislative Power

In the context of the province of North Sumatra, there are several names of politicians from Chinese ethnic who are popular, such as Sofyan Tan, Haryanto, Brilliant Moktar, Sonny Firdaus (Chong, 2016; Sinaga et al., 2018; Permana, 2017: 98). Of these politicians, some politicians have built popularity in the political arena since the post-reformation era in the 1999 elections. Some other politicians choose to enter the political arena in a more stable Indonesian political condition, that is from the 2004 elections onwards. The Chinese ethnic community in the New Order era received different treatment by the state. Discrimination and restrictions on socio-political rights were experienced by the Chinese in the era of the New Order government (Muzakki, 2010: 81-82). This situation ultimately resulted in the Chinese ethnic being late in finding their political awareness in the post-reform election arena (2004-2014). State policies in the New Order era positioned Chinese ethnicity in private sector economic activities (Chua, 2008: 8). However, there are still individuals of Chinese ethnicity in the province of North Sumatra who can follow political developments and make decisions more quickly to join political parties when the new order regime changes, as was done by Haryanto (Sinaga et al., 2018: 2082)

The 1999 elections were the first elections to be held directly. In this election, Haryanto, who comes from Chinese ethnicity, ran as a legislative candidate at the provincial level. He is the first candidate from ethnic Chinese to run in the contest for the election of members of the North Sumatra Provincial People's Representative Council (DPRD). In the interview, Haryanto described the choice to become a politician by joining the Justice and

Unity Party (PKP) as the first choice to enter a political organization. Haryanto revealed that he had an understanding of the party platform (PKP). Through PKP, Haryanto advanced to become a candidate for DPRD. On the other hand, through legislative powers, Haryanto can realize his dream of upholding the spirit of reform, including equal rights, upholding justice, and hoping for pro-society policies. The 1999 election results did not make Haryanto elected. However, Haryanto ran again in the next three elections (2004, 2009, and 2014). The contestants who tried their luck in the third election have not been able to get Haryanto elected because in every election new politicians with new networks have emerged (Haryanto, interview, 2019).

Other politicians who come from Chinese ethnicity are like Sofyan Tan, Sonny Firdaus, Brilian Moktar, Hasyim, and so on. They began to appear in the political arena after the 1999 elections. Brilliant Moktar explained that to understand the legislative power (DPRD), it could be read the Law. What is more important, according to Brilian Moktar, is that the elaboration of this Law needs to be traced back to the related government regulations. After knowing the ins and outs of statutory regulations, then a legislative can use his right and authority to speak out about the truth of a problem (Brilian Moktar, interview, 2019).

Sukiran, a politician from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), described the life journey of his family that was inseparable from social pressures in the New Order era. These social pressures include intimidation and extortion in the neighborhood around the house which teaches him to be stronger and exercise patience. In the end, Sukiran chose to join the post-reform era as a politician. Sukiran ran as a candidate in the 2014 election with the support of the PDIP. Through his story, Sukiran hopes that he can help the oppressed people through legislative power if he is elected to the DPRD. However, in

the end, Sukiran did not succeed to occupy the legislative seat in the 2014 Sukiran election. Therefore, he continues to serve the community through the professions of a lecturer and lawyer as an early profession before becoming a candidate for DPRD (Sukiran, interview, 2019)

The majority of Chinese ethnic politicians above generally work as entrepreneurs or work in the private sector economy. For example, Sofyan Tan managed a formal education institution before becoming a politician (Lan, 2012: 51). Meanwhile, Haryanto and Brilian Moktar are active in business activities in the private sector (Sinaga et al., 2018: 2083-2084). Government policies in the New Order era that were discriminatory against Chinese ethnicity and democracy that only started in 1999, made it difficult for Chinese people to adapt to the world of politics. Based on the results of interviews and several literature studies that have been carried out, it is found that Chinese ethnic politicians generally understand the concept of legislative power in the concept of extending people's votes to the government. These action skills are highly dependent on the level of mastery of the laws and regulations and the network. Historically in the New Order era, the Chinese ethnic group has been able to feel their position as an oppressed society. This historical aspect can be easily used by them to understand the feelings of the people who are facing problems related to government policies. On the other hand, the authority in the legislative power can only be optimally used if the legislature can master issues from the legal aspect and realize them in action.

4. Conclusion

Conceptually, the theorization of previous experts such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Locke, and Montesquieu discussed the same foundation that places legislative power as an extension of the people's voice to

control government (executive) policy. At this point, the three Chinese ethnic politicians have built thinking following Montesquieu's (1748) theoretical concept "Spirit of the Laws" in the book of Cohler, Miller, & Stone (1989: 21-71) which places legislative power as a constitution. and institutions that exercise control over executive policy. The condition that needs attention in the thinking construction of politicians, in this case, is the aspect of the level of action. Not all Chinese politicians have skills at the action level in fighting for the voice of the people and in communicating with the executive. Skills in understanding the conditions of people's problems and knowledge of regulations, communication in finding alternative solutions, and empowering networks are challenges faced by ethnic Chinese politicians. This situation is closely related to the experience that has been carried out as a legislature and activity in exercising authority in the power of the legislature by every legislative politician.

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