Unwelcomed Guests: Cultural discourse analysis of comments on ethnic Chinese in Indonesian social media

Abstract

This study explicates discourse on Indonesian social media pertaining to Chinese Indonesians by analyzing comments posted on Facebook. Using Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA), we show how Chinese are depicted as the "other" in Indonesian discourse. We also unpack persuasive efforts to convince readers of Chinese Indonesians' other-ness through such rhetorical terms as *cina* (racial slur against Chinese Indonesians) and *pribumi* (native, indigenous, non-Chinese). The functional accomplishment of such discourse works to (1) exert the power to determine indigeneity and inclusivity; and (2) solidify Chinese Indonesians' position as non-native, and a scapegoat for problems in Indonesia. Findings from this study further our understanding of ways to analyze and unpack discursive construction in online communication. They also demonstrate how social media may amplify and/or construct social and political discourses.

Keywords: Cultural Discourse Analysis; Chinese Indonesians; Othering; Facebook

Authors:

Sunny Lie, California State Polytechnic University Pomona, email: slie@cpp.edu

Todd L. Sandel, University of Macau, email: tlsandel@um.edu.mo

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When Joko Widodo, better known as Jokowi, was elected in 2014 as Indonesia's President, the deputy governor at the time, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, (better known as Ahok) was elevated to the post of governor of Jakarta; he replaced the seat vacated by Jokowi. Ahok's rise to the position of governorship—considered a launching pad to the presidency—was remarkable. He was not associated with a national political party backed by business, the military, or Islamic groups (Cochrane 2016). Furthermore, he was associated with two minority groups, ethnic Chinese and Christian. With only 10 percent of Indonesia's population of 260 million identified as Christian, and only one to six percent of Chinese descent (Hatherell and Welsh 2017), Ahok was a politician outside the mainstream of Indonesian society.

Residents of Jakarta initially viewed Ahok with favor, impressed with his efforts to take on corruption, to clean up the streets, to improve the city's infrastructure, and to subsidize health care and education (Cochrane 2016). He was also admired by many for a blunt and abrasive speaking style, marked by "public displays of anger" that differed from the Javanese cultural style of being "*halus* (refined)" and "a deferential manner and polite speech" (Hatherell and Welsh 2017, 175). Yet Ahok did not win the election. Instead, he was charged with the crime of blasphemy for a campaign speech he gave in May 2017, when he made reference to a passage of the Qur'an. In a trial that took place after his loss, Ahok was sentenced to two years in prison (Lamb 2017). It was a dramatic fall not only for a politician, but also for those who hoped Indonesia had turned away from its policies of the past that had separated native (*pribumi* or Indonesian *asli*) from non-native (non-*pribumi*) in an effort to address what are perceived as the ethnic roots of growing social inequalities in the country (Suryadinata 2017; Burhani 2017), and

as will be explained below, a time when ethnic Chinese—even for those who had lived in Indonesia for many generations—were defined as a "problem" population that was non-native (Aguilar 2001; Hatherell and Welsh 2017). We begin this paper with an account of Ahok's political rise and fall as a way to illustrate the controversies and discourses that surround Indonesia's population of ethnic Chinese. Discourses involving and surrounding Chinese Indonesians have played an important role both historically and presently for what it means to be identified as "Indonesian."

Furthermore, such discourses have implications beyond Indonesia, as they resonate with debates concerning relations between minority and majority populations across other contexts, especially Southeast Asian ones. For many Southeast Asian countries, the minority and majority struggle has been framed around the notions of "nativeness" in contrast with "non-natives" (Dominguez and Metzner 2017). In Malaysia, the ruling party is behind the rise of ethnic Malay *pribumi*-ism as it attempts to increase support among the majority-Malay population (Lim 2016; Millar 2017). Similar to Indonesia (Suryadinata, 2017; Burhani, 2017), the revival of public discourses surrounding *pribumi*-ism in Malaysia often goes hand-in-hand with political Islam (Lim 2016). In Thailand, there is a rising trend among the Thai Buddhist majority towards the use of Buddhism as an exclusive marker of citizenship and national belonging (Hutt 2016; Jerryson 2011; Than 2015), thus alienating the Muslim population in the southern part of the country. It is sad fact to acknowledge, but what is happening in Indonesia is not isolated from phenomena across the region, nor other parts of the globe. Finally, as debates concerning Chinese Indonesians now occur on social media, such as Facebook, this study demonstrates the power of online communication to shape discourse at both micro and macro levels.

Our analysis is based upon a thread of 446 comments posted from 2015 to 2018 in response to an anonymous, 1,100-word post on Facebook made on 24 September 2012, translated as "Why do the Pribumi and the Tionghua/Chinese Hate each other???" (Bersatu kita Teguh). The original laid out an historical narrative of Chinese immigration to Indonesia: from the arrival of Chinese merchants in fifth century C.E., to how Dutch colonial rulers categorized ethnic Chinese as *foreign orientals* as part of their "divide and conquer" strategy, to discriminatory policies against Chinese enacted by past Indonesian President and strongman ruler, Suharto, in the 1960s for the sake of "assimilating" the Chinese population, and ending with the May 1998 anti-Chinese riots in the capital city of Jakarta—a time when more than 1,000 people were killed, at least 168 Chinese women raped, and thousands of Chinese businesses were looted and burned (Siegel 1998; Turner 2003).

This analysis addresses the following questions. First, are Chinese Indonesians depicted as the "other" in Indonesian ethnic/racial discourse? Second, how are power dynamics between Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians reproduced *in* and *through* discourse (see van Dijk 2008)? Answers to these questions challenge the notion that prejudice lives only in the minds of certain individuals, show how prejudice is a "socially shared cognitive representation of (certain) groups" (van Dijk 2008, ix), and is manifest in certain media content. Finally, how can a medium be used as a vessel for the dissemination of ideologies of the powerful? By moving the focus of analysis from prejudiced people to prejudiced cognitive representations, and to the realm of "discursive scrutability" (Carbaugh 2007) this allows us to expose their socio-cultural nature: often unfounded, constructed by a group of people, and therefore reversible.

Chinese Indonesians: A "Problem" Population

As a nation of more than 260 million people spread over approximately 15,000 islands, to imagine Indonesia as a single, unified, nation perhaps takes greater imagination than for most others. Yet since Dutch colonial times (1596-1942), though small in number, Chinese have played an out-sized impact on Indonesian society (Ricklefs 2001). For example, when Indonesia's strongman President Suharto took over in a coup in 1965, Indonesia's economy was in poor shape, undergoing a period of hyperinflation (Vickers 2013). Basing the rationale for his coup on defeating the Communist, China-friendly political party, PKI, Suharto directed Indonesians' to express their anger through anti-Chinese violence. Suharto, however, soon discovered that Indonesia's economy could not function without Chinese; thus, he allowed the core economy to be run by so-called "Ali-Baba" firms, where the front person was a Muslim Indonesian (Ali) and the back person was Chinese (Baba) (Ricklefs 2001, 300).

With this context in mind, the 2012 Facebook post maps well onto the basic historical outline of Indonesia as a stratified society, with a very small ruling political class at the top, a small population of Chinese business operators in the middle, and a much larger population of "*pribumi*" at the bottom (Elson 2008). Yet while the basic outlines of a Chinese Indonesian history are known to most Indonesians, a deeper and more accurate understanding is known by few—fueled in part by a society and government that do not wish to address post-Independence violence

Following independence in 1945, a political debate emerged as to who is Indonesian. While it was recognized that the people of Indonesia were diverse, it was also claimed there existed a majority *bangsa* (people, ethnicity, or nation) "Indonesian people," and a minority of separate, other *bangsa*. These included EuroAsians and Indians—few of whom remained after independence—and Chinese (Giblin 2003). Furthermore, since the late nineteenth century all

persons of “Chinese” descent, regardless of place of birth or residence, were claimed by Chinese governments to be citizens of China (Aguilar 2001). Hence, Chinese were a “problem” population, whose citizenship, and by implication, loyalty, were questioned by the new, Indonesian government (Giblin 2003).

The “solution” to the Chinese problem, however, became entangled with the anti-Communist purge and killings of 1965-1966 (Purdey 2003). When General Suharto took over and established the “New Order” regime in 1966, and many Chinese were accused of being Communists, a policy of assimilation was enacted (Turner 2003). Hence, during Suharto’s rule (1966-1998), anti-Chinese assimilationist policies were adopted, including such measures as changing names, forbidding the use of Chinese script, closing Chinese language schools and newspapers, limiting university places for Chinese students, and creating identity cards with a code that identified a person as either Chinese or not (Aguilar 2001; Bailey and Lie 2013; Dawis 2009; Hoon 2006; Turner 2003). Suharto justified these policies upon the ideology of *Pancasila*, a national ideology of five principles developed during the struggle for independence (Elson 2008), claiming it was necessary for achieving development and national security (Hoon 2006, 2008).

Suharto also made policies against ethnic Chinese that were symbolic and linguistic in nature. His government banned the referential/indexical term “*Orang Tionghoa,*” or “Chinese people” preferred by Chinese when referring to themselves. (Tionghoa is based upon the Hokkien pronunciation of China/Chinese, Coppel 1970), Instead he imposed the phrase “*Orang Cina*” to be the official term used by mass media and in public discourse. This change was not made inconsequentially, but “in order to remove a feeling of inferiority on the part of our people [sic], while on the other hand removing the feeling of superiority on the part of the group

concerned" (Aguilar 2001, 505). In previous decades, the word *Cina* was deemed "unprintable" and used in spoken language as a slur "to express disdain and anger" (509). By elevating this term to official use Suharto was permitting and encouraging anti-Chinese discourse in both public and private domains.

Assimilationist policies were lifted after the fall of Suharto in 1998 by successive governments under the principle of "*Reformasi*" (reformation). Public displays of a "Chinese" identity were no longer banned, and Chinese New Year was made a national holiday in 2002 (Purdey 2003). Yet despite these changes, attitudes and distorted stereotypes about Chinese Indonesians remained. It is believed by many in Indonesia that Chinese are a monolithic group, richer and higher in class than *pribumi* (Hoon 2008), and control 70 percent of Indonesia's economy (Turner 2003). This is the image and discourse that we find expressed via social media.

Social Media as a Context for Spreading Anti-Chinese Discourse

Following the growing global trend of utilizing social media as platforms for hate speech against immigrants and other minorities (Awan 2014; Bartlett, Birdwell and Littler 2011; Brown 2009; Caiani and Parenti 2013; Ekman 2015; Glazer, Dixit and Green 2002; Venzo and Hess 2013; Waldron 2012), social media have become the main source used by some Indonesian Muslim extremist groups in reinforcing their hatred against ethnic Chinese (Heychael 2017). Propaganda-esque rather than factual, they pander to select audience members with predetermined beliefs pertaining to Chinese Indonesians. Sadly, these dynamics are not isolated nor on the fringes of the online universe. As will be shown in the following analysis, they have also found their way into mainstream social media such as Facebook.

Social media use in Indonesia has become commonplace. The Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association (APJII) estimated that by the end of 2017, 143 million, or

approximately 55 percent of the population used the internet (Putra 2018). Internet penetration is higher for those who are younger, as half of the under 35 population uses the internet. For those ages 13 to 18, internet use is over 75 percent. Furthermore, most Indonesians access Facebook on a regular basis, making it the Southeast Asian country with the most Facebook users (The Jakarta Post 2018).

These figures underscore the impact of the internet in general, and Facebook in particular, as a powerful tool for the dissemination of discourses across Indonesia. More importantly, when Facebook is used to disseminate anti-Chinese discourses, it may continue the propagation of negative stereotypes among Indonesia's population of youth, who were born after the fall of Suharto and the 1998 anti-Chinese riots (see Siegel 1998).

Methodology

Data analysis is guided by work in Cultural Discourse Analysis (Carbaugh 2007). Cultural discourse analysis (CuDa) follows from the intellectual tradition of work established by Dell Hymes (1974). It stands at the juncture of theories of cultural communication (Philipsen 2002) and communication codes (Philipsen 1997; Philipsen and Coutu 2005). This framework addresses questions relating to functional accomplishment, structure, and sequences pertaining to a specific communication practice. CuDa began with studies of conversation (e.g., Carbaugh 2005) and demonstrated that when people are conversing, not only are they conveying content, they are also "saying things culturally, about who they are, how they are related, what they are doing together" (Carbaugh 2007, 174). More recently, CuDa has been used to study other forms of communication, including cross-cultural analyses of dialogue and communicative practices in online communities (e.g., Witteborn and Huang 2017).

Using CuDa we developed descriptive, interpretive, and critical modes of analysis (Carbaugh 2007). The descriptive mode involved the explication of themes through detailed and nuanced translation and analysis of Facebook postings, in response to the original message detailing the history of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The interpretive mode involved extracting cultural propositions and premises contained in those comments. The critical mode came last, after interpreting data from the point of view of participants. Critical statements about the values and judgments evident in these data are made from an external, ethical vantage point.

Cultural propositions are statements created using participants' own words, as they make sense of their own observations and behaviors. Cultural premises are formed based on propositions and contain highlights of participants' beliefs about: (1) what exists, and/or (2) what is proper or valued. Both propositions and premises are conceptualized based on the notion that as we communicate, we also engaged in meta-cultural commentary about our identity, relationships, actions, feelings/emotions, and sense of place or dwelling (Carbaugh 2007).

Data

Data for this study included 446 Facebook comments—with translation yielding a corpus of 164 pages—written in response to an initial, anonymous post of 1,100 words, on September, 2012: "Why do the Pribumi and Tionghoa/Chinese hate each other??? (We are fully united)" (Facebook 2012). They were posted on the Facebook page of an online watch company called "Grosir-Arloji.com." Because the post was set as public, it allowed Facebook users to insert comments on the original posting, regardless of their "friend status" in relation to the company. While the original posting was anonymous (as in, there was no other author information apart from the watch company's website), the responses required at least a Facebook account and accompanying profile, which revealed an individual's online identity. Given the public nature of

the data, we analyzed both the original Facebook posting and subsequent comments as a communication event (Hymes 1974) within the perimeters of an online Indonesian speech community (see Boromisza-Habashi 2013). We chose this particular post due to its provocative title, which in turn, resulted in a large number of responses over a span of six and a half years.

Comments analyzed in this study were posted from the end of 2012 to mid-2018, with 7 in 2012, 11 in 2013, 58 in 2014, 102 in 2015, 179 in 2016, 76 in 2017, and 14 in 2018. Most were posted from the years 2015 - 2017, corresponding with the time Ahok was Governor of Jakarta and ran for election, indicating how his public affairs raised interest in this issue. Comments ranged in length from a single word, to several hundred, with an average of 39 words. Except for a few comments written in Javanese (6), English (3), or Chinese (2), posts were written in Bahasa Indonesian (435/446).

Findings

Global Analysis

The authors translated, analyzed, and grouped comments into themes pertaining to perceptions of Chinese Indonesians. Themes were extracted through a multi-step process. The first involved a global analysis of the stance of each comment, whether it was anti-Chinese, pro-Chinese, neutral, or undetermined. For example, one person wrote: “The Chinese people are greedy”; this was coded as anti-Chinese. Another wrote: “All people living in Indonesia must be united whatever their ethnicity :)” This was coded as neutral, meaning that it did not promote either a pro- or anti-Chinese stance. A third person wrote: “when reading this, my heart also hurts ... because I'm also a descendant of tinghoa [China], what matters is that we see the future, don't back down”; this was coded as pro-Chinese. Finally, comments such as: “Who are the Pribumi [natives]?” were coded as undetermined. This global assessment yielded the following

totals: 117 anti-Chinese, 130 neutral, 81 pro-Chinese, 103 undetermined. (An additional 15 were not coded as they had no content, were duplicate postings, or written in Javanese.)

Rhetorical Terms

The second level was a line-by-line analysis of comments in order to unpack a "rhetoric of motives" (Burke 1969). That is, we interpreted these Facebook comments as having a rhetorical motive, to persuade and "induce action in people" through the use of language (42). Hence, we produced a list of frequently occuring rhetorical terms (See Table 1).

Table 1. Rhetorical Terms

Term	Translation	Frequency
Indonesia	Indonesia	292
Cina	Chinese—racial slur	282
Pribumi	native (non-Chinese)	239
Tionghoa	Chinese—preferred	223
China	China/Chinese	111
Membenci/benci	hate	60
Agama	religion	57
Etnis	ethnic, ethnicity	55
Islam	Islam	55
Suku	tribe	53
Kaya	rich	53
Bangsa	nation, ethnicity (suku bangsa)	48
Ras	race	48
Membaur/Berbaur	to blend in, mix	29
Asli	native (non-Chinese)	28
Rasis	racist	24
1998	1998 (year)	24
Muslim	Muslim	22
Menghormati	respect	19
Damai	peace/peaceful	19
Sombong	arrogant, vain	16
Kerja keras/rajin	industrious	15
Bos	boss	15
Berteman/teman	friend	14
Miskin	poor	14
Perbedaan	difference, diversity	14
Uang	money	13
Keras	hard, tough, strict	13
Diskriminasi	discrimination	12
Komunis	communist	10
Menguasai	to rule or dominate	10
Pindah/pendatang	to move / immigrant	10
Ahok	Ahok, former Governor of Jakarta	9
Penjajah	colonizers, invaders	9
Asing	foreign	9
Keluarga	family	7

Rukun	harmony, to get along	7
Malas	lazy	6
Pancasila	5 Principles	4
Semangat	energy, drive	3
Serakah	Greedy	2
Kasar	rough, unrefined	2

Our aim in constructing this list was to identify terms that marked or were used with persuasive intent. For instance, Bahasa Indonesian terms for China/Chinese can mark a persuasive stance vis à vis Chinese. While "*Cina*" is a racially loaded term that indexes an anti-Chinese stance, "*Tionghoa*" is a preferred referential/indexical, and can mark a pro-Chinese stance (see Aguilar 2001). We also looked at uses of the term "*Pribumi*": this term of reference is often translated as "native," and as defined by successive colonial and post-colonial governments, refers to all "native" Indonesians *except* Chinese and Euro-Asians (see Aguilar 2001; Bailey and Lee 2013; Coppel 1970). Other terms of reference that we examined included: *bangsa* (nation, ethnicity), *suku* (tribe), *ras* (race), *rasis* (racist), *etnis* (ethnicity).

Next, we looked for co-occuring terms that, based upon an ethnographic study of perceptions of Chinese Indonesians by Hoon (2008), may be used when giving voice to a stereotypical understanding of Chinese. For instance, a positive stereotype of Chinese is that they have a high work drive (*semangat*), are strict (*keras*), and industrious (*kerja keras/rajin*). A negative stereotype is that Chinese are arrogant (*sombong*), unrefined (*kasar*), greedy (*serakah*), rich (*kaya*), and only interested in money (*uang*). These map onto a belief that there is an essential boundary between Pribumi and Chinese, that the latter are invaders (*penjajah*) and forever immigrants (*pendatang*) who cannot blend in (*membaur*). Our search for rhetorical terms was also guided by an inductive analysis of frequently occurring terms that were used to construct a persuasive position. For instance, when writing an anti-Chinese post, the following were used: blend in (*membaur/berbaur*), communist (*komunis*), boss (*bos*). Other posters argued

for an opposing position by using such terms as respect (*menghormati*), peace (*damai*), friend (*berteman*/*teman*), or harmony (*rukun*).

From Table 1 we see that the most frequently occuring terms (except for Indonesia) marked categories of difference. For instance, commenters used either the racially-loaded term, *Cina*, or the preferred term for Chinese, *Tionghoa*. A second group included those that referenced and/or indexed categories of persons, or groups within Indonesia: *etnis* (ethnic, ethnicity), *suku* (tribe), *bangsa* (nation, ethnicity), *agama* (religion), and *ras* (race). Such terms may constitute a vocabulary for Indonesians to discuss within-nation differences, and mark groups of people as the same or other.

A third, less frequently used group of terms, marked the key or emotional quality of the posts. For instance, *membenci* (hate), *sombong* (arrogant, vain), *uang* (money), and *komunis* (communist) appeared in many comments. These resonate with stereotypical views of Chinese, as articulated by Indonesian Pribumi, in Hoon's (2008) study. Some cited the year 1998, a time when anti-Chinese riots broke out in Jakarta. However, some used terms of inclusiveness, such as *menghormati* (respect), *damai* (peace/peaceful), *berteman/teman* (friend), and *perbedaan* (difference, diversity). These were used to articulate a counter-discourse that Chinese were not "other," but included within an understanding of who count as Indonesian.

In sum, we identified the following themes: (1) Chinese do not want to mix with non-Chinese; (2) Chinese are greedy and untrustworthy (3) Chinese are going to take over the country; (4) Indigenous claims to identify with and constitute the motherland; and (5) Indonesia is a pluralistic land. We now turn our attention to a micro, cultural analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

Chinese don't want to mix with non-Chinese

Descriptive analysis begins with the claim that Chinese do not want to mix with non-Chinese. Although Indonesia includes over 300 ethnic groups across an archipelago of approximately 15,000 islands, Chinese are considered as "the other."

Excerpt 1. Chinese don't blend in[1]

> It's not that we natives are anti-Chinese [*tiong hoa*]. It's just that sometimes this ethnic group does not want to **blend in** with others, like other ethnic groups. For example, if there's a neighborhood watch program, they pay someone [to do it] … not everyone does it, but in general it feels as if there's less a sense of ownership. We *pribumi* [natives] if we pay someone to do neighborhood watch for us, we could also do that, but we'd like to **blend in**. My hope for Chinese brothers and sisters: let's **blend in**! Don't just seek profit. Everyone wants to do that, but there are other things that need to be considered.[2]

The author of this post faults Chinese (*tiong hoa*) for igniting anti-Chinese sentiments among "natives." The fault lies in their unwillingness to ***membaur*** (blend in), repeated three times. This is illustrated with the example of local neighborhood watches. Instead of participating personally, Chinese are accused of paying others—presumably non-Chinese—to take their place. This is contrasted with *pribumi* who, even though they could pay another to take their place, choose not to, motivated by the desire to "blend in." The post concludes with a call directly

[1] Excerpts and quotations have been translated into English by the authors. For original comments contact the authors.

[2] Bolding is not in the original and has been added for emphasis by the authors.

addressed to “Chinese brothers and sisters” not to “seek profit”; this plays into the stereotype that Chinese are concerned only with seeking financial profit for themselves and are not concerned with contributing to the welfare of others and civil society.

Generic references (van Leeuwen 2009) to “natives” (*pribumi*), and “Chinese” appear frequently in comments posted on this thread. (However, this poster used the preferred term *tiong hoa*, and not the offensive *cina*.) Generic references refer to the discursive phenomenon wherein social actors are generalized into groups rather than specific individuals (van Leeuwen 2009). They may create an “us-against-them” sentiment. In these Facebook comments, both groups were identified through the identity categories of “Chinese” and “*pribumi*.” As will be discussed further below, the term “*pribumi*” contains indigenous claims to Indonesian soil, which in turn further highlights the “foreignness” of Chinese Indonesians.

Excerpt 2. Descendants of China

> separating oneself and keeping distance is not the right way. In fact, it would ignite future conflicts. Born in Indonesia, living and growing in Indonesia, also dying in Indonesia. Why do you still consider yourselves **descendants of china or tionghoa**? As long as you don’t admit and consider yourselves pribumi, it seems impossible for us to admit and consider you pribumi.

The second comment is similar to the first. A proverbial finger is pointed at Chinese for separating and distancing themselves from pribumi. Yet here the poster goes further and claims it is not possible to accept Chinese as a members of Indonesian society, because: “you still consider yourselves descendants of china or tionghoa?” He/she asks the question why Chinese Indonesians, who are born and raised in Indonesia, and who would most likely die in Indonesia, would still consider themselves Chinese. If Chinese do not “admit and consider” a “pribumi”

identity, then it is impossible for the author (claiming a pribumi identity) to consider Chinese as pribumi. In this case, the identity terms “Chinese” and “pribumi” are discursively set in an agonistic relationship with one another. When identity terms are set in agonistic form, they are contrasted with one another to create and maintain salient social identities (Carbaugh 1988), and in a particular speech community (Milburn 2004). The discursive construction is that to be Chinese (tiong hoa) means to not be native (pribumi). These identity categories are mutually exclusive. Reflecting an Indonesian assimilationist rhetoric (e.g., Purdey 2003), the burden is on Chinese to forgo their heritage, to admit and take on a “pribumi” identity.

One last item of interest is the author’s use of the identity terms, “china” and “tionghoa,” to refer to ethnic Chinese. As explained above, these are preferred self-referential categorical terms, as opposed to the racially loaded term “*Cina*” (Aguilar 2001; Bailey and Lie 2013). That is, while this poster is giving voice to an assimilationist rhetoric, this person does not take the next step of using the term that marks disdain for Chinese.

Chinese are greedy and untrustworthy

The second theme expresses a discourse of untrustworthiness: Chinese profit from questionable business practices. They are accused of being greedy colonizers, who believe money is more important thant God:

Excerpt 3. China is greedy

What makes Indonesia messy is not the colonizers [Chinese] but [that] China is greedy and believe God [Allah] is foolish and who [instead believe] money is more important.

This commenter used the rhetorically loaded term, *penjanjah* (colonizers), to construct a charge against Chinese: They are “greedy,” believe God/Allah is foolish, and believe instead that money is more important.

One commenter began a line of discussion by making a plea to "stop racism." "I am a Batak, my friend is Chinese, Javanese, Kerinci … How good it is [to have] friendship with all of them." Then, in two comments that followed, this call was rejected. The second succinctly wrote, "Cina [Chinese] are crooked"—using the pejorative term, Cina, to reference Chinese. The first wrote a long comment. It began with the claim that Chinese only "hang out with other Chinese [Cina]." This was followed with a long, invented story. A presumably, non-Chinese, land-holding farmer, naively sold a field to a Chinese who built a "yam or palm factory" on it. In the first year, the farmer received a good price for his crop. But in the "second year the customers started to hear that every day the price of cassava went down 5-10 rupiah per kilogram." (One US dollar is approximately 12,000 Indonesian rupiah.) The Chinese factory owner said that the reason for the drop in price, was "because of the flood of fruit, [he] could not sell it." But the factory owner "continued to buy the land next to and build on it (the base of the oppressors)." The story continued with a charge that the Chinese factory owner under-reported his taxes, by giving a bribe to the tax collector, and hiding his profits in a bank in Singapore. Reports of this kind of cheating can be found in the "Panama papers."

The stereotype of the greedy and untrustworthy Chinese whose ends justify the means is a familiar one. It echoes exaggerated stereotypes of Jews made most prominently by the Nazis. Indeed, the Chinese of Southeast Asia have often been compared to European Jews. This stems from an article written by King Vajiravudh Rama VI of Thailand in 1914 (Wongsurawat 2016). The king claimed that just like European Jews, ethnic Chinese in Thailand were unwilling to assimilate to the native population. Being both greedy and cunning, they maintained a closed network of businesses through shady and unethical dealings. Chinese were perceived as looking down on their hosts, thinking better of themselves. This negative stereotype directed against

Chinese in Thailand is commonly found across other nations of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia (see Kuhn 2008).

Chinese are going to take over the country

As themes of Chinese being greedy, untrustworthy cheats were posted, a conspiracy theory of Chinese taking over the country also emerged:

> Excerpt 4. Slaves and Servants
>
> After successfully holding 80 percent of Indonesia's economic assets in their hands, now they [Chinese] would like to enter the political sphere, **as the last phase of their domination over Indonesia**. Their goal is to turn the country against *pribumi*, to turn them into "**slaves and servants**" in their own country.

This poster claimed that Chinese have conspired to take over the country: first through economic dominance, and second, political dominance. Once they have achieved political dominance, those who are *pribumi* will be turned into "slaves and servants" in their own country. These illustrate perceptions of Chinese as greedy, wealthy, and powerful, giving voice to the false belief that Chinese control most of Indonesia's economic activity (see Nazeer 2016; Purdy 2003). These conspiratorial claims may shed light on why the former governor of Jakarta, Ahok, failed to win election to retain his post, and then was jailed for disrespecting the Qur'an.

Indigenous claim to the land

The fear that Chinese are going to take over the country is based on the belief that ethnic Chinese are perpetual foreigners, with no claim to the land. Non-Chinese, *Pribumi*, however, are considered to be legitimate heirs of the country and all its riches:

> Excerpt 5. Heir to the throne

> [Translation] I don't care! The most important thing is **natives** have to be superior in their own country, if everything is owned by Chinese, what's Indonesia going to be called? Should it be changed to **Indochina**? We're not closing off the possibility for the **tragedy of 98** to happen again due to the **egotism, exclusivity and arrogance** of the Chinese race…we as ***pribumi***, **children of the motherland**, as **heir to the throne**.

Note the identity terms in this post for describing non-Chinese Indonesians: "*pribumi*," "children of the motherland" and "heir to the throne." The Indonesian word for "native," "*pribumi,*" roughly translates to "sons of the soil," or indigenous. This term is often used in direct contrast to ethnic Chinese who, regardless of how many generations were born and raised in Indonesian soil, they would never be "of the soil." It is interesting to note that the myth of Indonesian "indigeny" (Aguilar 2001) does not specify the origins of non-Chinese Indonesian ancestry. Having no "traceable origin but one nonetheless believed to be securely 'within' the nation, the … *pribumi* are deemed indigenous to Indonesia" (517). Chinese Indonesians, however, are permanently linked to their ancestors who first set foot in Indonesia from a knowable country of origin: China. This link, in turn, makes Chinese "forever aliens." Being "heir to the throne," the commenter reasoned that it is only fair to expect non-Chinese Indonesians reign as superior in their own motherland. Otherwise, Indonesia might as well change its name to "Indochina" (a play of words combining "Indonesia" and "China") to reflect perceived Chinese dominance over the country.

Lastly, it is worth noting that this comment ended with a threat towards ethnic Chinese that the "tragedy" of 1998 could happen again, as long as they remain "egotistical, arrogant and exclusive." Citing this event, one for which no one has yet been held accountable, evokes the collective trauma shared among Chinese Indonesians (AUTHORS 2017). Mentioning it as a

possible course of action—if and when provoked—indicates coercive power in the hands of non-Chinese Indonesians.

Indonesia as a land of plurality

It is worth noting that not all comments directed towards ethnic Chinese were negative. Some, such as the following comment, called for unity of Chinese and non-Chinese by overcoming perceived differences:

> Excerpt 6. Mutual Respect
>
> Indonesia has these strengths over other countries 1. It's an island nation 2. It has 5 religions 3. The country has thousands of languages 4. The country has a lot of **ethnic** groups, which includes the Chinese, we should be proud of it…try to compare it to other countries??? Please realize that Indonesia is not a country that has 1 race, in fact it has lots of **races**…and (please) respect our country's motto BHINNEKA TUNGGAL IKA. Let us learn to tolerate one another, to mirror and reflect on each other…is it true that every native is good??? Don't exaggerate just because there exists a few Chinese who are not so good…not all Chinese are like that and not all natives are like that (either)? Use your common sense and conscience, instead of hatred and envy…? … Mutual respect & tolerance for one another…not one China, not one native, but ONE INDONESIA…BHINNEKA TUNGGAL IKA……

This commentor began by listing four strengths he/she perceives Indonesia to have as a sovereign nation. The plurality of the island nation is highlighted: an archipelago which is home to diverse peoples with diverse religions, languages, and ethnicities, of which ethnic Chinese are one of many. These are framed as a unique and positive feature of the country, especially when compared with other countries. Then an appeal is made to non-Chinese to use their common

sense and conscience to reflect on the claim that all Chinese are bad, and all non-Chinese are good. This envy-based mindset is not conducive to the country's advancement. The comment ends by evoking the country's national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which translates to "Unity in Diversity."

Religious teachings to value and respect one another

We conclude our descriptive analysis by looking into how some commentators made an appeal for peace and tolerance based on religious teachings. Commentators who evoke religion as a reason to overcome prejudice and discrimination generally made two claims: (1) how religion (i.e., Islam) teaches its followers to value and respect fellow humankind, and (2) how difference could be counted as gift from Allah:

> Excerpt 7. Taught to Value and Respect One Another
>
> what's the point of having a religion? Aren't we taught to value and respect one another?
>
> I am a *pribumi* but I was taught by my religion to **value and respect one another**.

The commentator puts a religious identity over his/her ethnic identity as a *pribumi*, saying how even though he/she is a *pribumi*, he/she was taught by religion to value and respect one another. Adhering to and following this ethical principle is the point of having a religion, and of being a religious person.

> Excerpt 8. Being Different is a Gift from Allah
>
> Allah created different types of humans (with) different languages, cultures, skin color, etc. It's not possible for everyone to be Muslim, and we also cannot force them to convert to Islam. The prophet Muhammad, when he was in Medinah, there were Jews living there, and they kept following their own religion…we should value and respect each other…because **being different is also a gift from Allah**…

Similar to the previous comment, this posting also calls for valuing and respecting one another in the name of religion. But here the commentator goes a step further: he/she urges the reader to consider differences in ethnic, cultural and religious identities as a gift from Allah, something worth honoring and celebrating. Even the prophet Muhammad himself force people practicing Judaism to convert to Islam. Instead of forcing non-Muslims to adopt Islam, an appeal is made to respect and celebrate difference.

Interpretive analysis

In this next section, following the CuDA framework, cultural propositions (statements created using participants' own words) and cultural premises (statements consisting what exists and what is valued) are made to unveil deep-seated cultural beliefs non-Chinese have towards ethnic Chinese in an Indonesian socio-cultural context. Table 2 lists cultural propositions and Table 3 lists cultural premises. The last, Table 4, lists norms regarding proper and acceptable behavior of ethnic Chinese if they would like to be accepted into mainstream Indonesian society, according to non-Chinese. The following table contains cultural propositions, which were created using key terms in participants' own words:

Table 2. Cultural Propositions

Cultural Propositions: Key Terms from the Participants' Own Words
1. Chinese don't want to blend with others
2. Chinese consider themselves Chinese or descendants of Chinese people
3. Chinese are the greediest people in the world
4. Chinese are rich in someone else's country
5. There's a sense of envy among non-Chinese towards Chinese wealth
6. Chinese would like to enter the political sphere as their last phase of domination over Indonesia

7. Chinese have been compiling a strategy to rule over Indonesia for awhile
8. Chinese want to turn natives into servants and slaves in their own country
9. Natives have to be superior in their own country
10. The tragedy of 1998 could happen again due to the egotism, exclusivity, and arrogance of the Chinese race
11. Pribumi are children of the motherland and heir to the throne
12. Indonesia is a country that has many ethnicities and races
13. Not all natives are good and not all Chinese are not good
14. Religion teaches us to value and respect one another
15. Being different is a gift from Allah

Based on the propositions listed above, we then formed cultural premises, which are deep-seated beliefs about what exists and what is valued concerning ethnic Chinese in Indonesia:

Table 3. Cultural Premises

Cultural premises: What Exists and What Is Valued
What exists:
• Identity categories of Chinese and native
• Perception of Chinese as non-native
• Perception of Chinese exclusivity
• Perception of Chinese as greedy and untrustworthy
• Suspicion over Chinese's intention on Indonesia's future
• Perception of concentration of wealth in the hands of Chinese
• A sense of envy from non-Chinese to Chinese pertaining to said wealth
• Tension between Chinese and non-Chinese
• Good Chinese people and not good native people
• Plurality of religious beliefs, ethnicities and races among Indonesians

• Religious teaching to value and respect one another
What is valued:
• Native identity
• Chinese blending in with the larger non-Chinese population
• Forgoing one’s Chinese ancestry to merge with larger non-Chinese population
• Humility and not flaunting one’s wealth
• Superiority of natives in their own country, which includes non-involvement of Chinese in the Indonesian political realm
• Plurality of Indonesia’s ethnic, religious and racial groups
• Understanding of human nature (some people are good, some are bad)
• Religious teaching to value and respect others
• Being different

The last analytical step we took was creating norms of proper conduct of Chinese according to non-Chinese Indonesians. We decided to create these norms based on the list of values on Table 3. Many of these values, to us, conveyed a desire to put Chinese "in their place". Further explication of these norms is included in the discussion below.

Table 4: Norms of proper conduct of Chinese according to *pribumi*

In an Indonesian socio-cultural context, if a Chinese person wants to be accepted into mainstream Indonesian society, he/she **ought to**:
• Blend in with the larger, mainstream Indonesian population
• Forgo his/her Chinese ancestry
• Be humble
• Allow non-Chinese to be superior above him/her
• Celebrate plurality of Indonesia's ethnic, religious and racial groups
In an Indonesian socio-cultural context, if a Chinese person wants to be accepted into mainstream Indonesian society, he/she **ought NOT to**:
• Be exclusive and keep to themselves
• Be greedy and untrustworthy
• Show off their material wealth
• Be and/or act superior over non-Chinese
• Enter into the realm of Indonesian politics

Discussion

Here we further explicate the interpretive analysis conducted in the previous section. We begin by discussing radiants of meaning as found in propositions and premises, and then move on to norms, based on cultural propositions and premises extracted from descriptive data.

As previously discussed, the identity terms “Chinese” and “native” are discursively set in agonistic relation (Carbaugh 1988) with one another. Being mutually exclusive, one cannot be simultaneously Chinese *and* native in an Indonesian socio-cultural context. If Chinese want to be native, then they have to forgo their Chinese ancestry. It is unclear as to *how* exactly one does so, but some form of concealment of Chinese-ness seems to be appreciated. Between the two identities, native identity is valued over Chinese. There does exist a contrasting belief, albeit a minority one, that a plurality of ethnic, religious and racial identities in an Indonesian socio-cultural context should be celebrated. This belief is also discursively stated as being based on Islamic religious teaching of valuing and respecting fellow humankind regardless of differences.

Contrasting, mutually exclusive identity categories are also reflective of how both groups are discursively related to one another. Tension exists among Chinese and non-Chinese. Their relationship is frayed, and the onus is placed on ethnic Chinese and their lack of effort in blending in with the larger non-Chinese population. In this socio-cultural context, relationships are valued. A sense of community is valued. Yet, perceived arrogance and exclusivity on the part of the Chinese, combined with non-Chinese’s suspicion over their intentions towards the country, prevent non-Chinese from developing meaningful connections.

Meaning of action pertaining to ethnic Chinese is primarily related to economic activities. First, there is the perception that Chinese control a disproportionate share of Indonesia’s economy (i.e., Excerpts 4 & 5). Economic success is achieved through unethical means. Given

their perpetual foreigner status, they are colonizers who take what is not rightfully theirs. Dominance over the economic sector eventually leads to dominance in the country's politics. They will turn the country against its own people, the natives, who have legitimate claims to the land.

The above-mentioned acts of using resources not belonging to ethnic Chinese, and of turning "the country" against its "own people" are ripe with meanings of dwelling (Carbaugh 2007). Specifically, the sense of place conveyed in this discourse is tied to indigenity and a claim to the "motherland" as "sons of the soil," that is, *pribumi*. This land belongs to non-Chinese. Therefore, it is only appropriate for non-Chinese to be superior over Chinese in their "homeland." A sense of belonging and perceived indigenity of non-Chinese are interconnected. Being perceived as non-indigenous, ethnic Chinese, in turn, does not belong in Indonesia.

Descriptions of meanings of being, relating, acting, and dwelling (Carbaugh 2007) are laden with negative feelings. "Envy" was the only feeling specifically mentioned in Excerpt 6. Other feelings such as suspicion and resentment were implied in comments about Chinese Indonesians' perceived wealth, corrupt ways to obtain wealth, and the scheme to distract non-Chinese from an agenda of taking over the country by handing them insignificant amounts of money (compared to what they are perceived to have). While other radiants are reflected in one another, it is the meaning of feeling that threads them altogether. Aside from the positive assessment of plurality among Indonesian ethnic groups (of which the Chinese are considered as one of many) on both religious and non-religious grounds, a negative sentiment runs through perceptions of non-Chinese towards the Chinese, be it pertaining to identity, relationships, action, or a sense of place.

Lastly, we discuss implications of this analysis pertaining to norms of proper conduct as set by non-Chinese Indonesians *for* Chinese Indonesians. Communication norms are statements about conduct (Carbaugh 2007), which are granted a degree of legitimacy by a particular speech community (Milburn 2004). A researcher's task is to highlight moral messages that are either explicitly stated or implicitly embedded in certain communicative structures (Carbaugh 2007). In addition to capturing participants' meaning about proper conduct (Hastings 2000; Wodak 2001), norms also establish power relations within discourse (Habermas and McCarthy 1977; van Dijk 2008; Wodak 2001). After all, who gets to decide what counts as proper and improper conduct if not the powerful?

As highlighted in Table 4, norms of proper conduct for Chinese Indonesians include: forgoing one's Chinese heritage, blending in with mainstream Indonesian society, and not acting superior over non-Chinese. Norms explicated here are imbued with sentiments of courtesy and proper mannerisms, which would be expected for a guest staying at another's home. In other words, a "proper" Chinese person is someone who understands his/her position as non-native, therefore a "perpetual foreigner" and guest. A guest would never dream of putting him/herself above the host and utilizing resources that do not belong to them. Nor would a guest take over rule of the house and turn the hosts into slaves and servants. The discursive functional accomplishment (Carbaugh 2007) of establishing ethnic Chinese as perpetual foreigners in an Indonesian socio-cultural context is twofold: (1) It maintains the power to determine indigeneity and inclusivity in the hands of non-Chinese; and (2) it solidifies Chinese Indonesians' position as non-native, therefore putting them in a vulnerable position as outsiders or worse, a "common enemy," who could be used as scapegoats whenever there is political or economic instability in the country.

Conclusion

Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s in Jakarta, I (first author) experienced Indonesia as a member of a Chinese minority, who grew up under the "benevolence" of the Suharto regime. It was a peaceful and stable existence. As long as we refrained from any kind of political act, including demanding equal and fair treatment before the law, they (i.e., "natives") left us alone. I was part of a tight-knit Chinese Indonesian community where I was shielded from the reality that we were a vulnerable minority, the "other" who suffered decades of discrimination, about which my parents' generation was adamantly silent. I knew I was not like most Indonesians due to my Chinese heritage, but I still considered myself first and foremost as Indonesian.

Then the anti-Chinese riots happened in May 1998. This event shattered the illusion of safety and stability under which I was living. After that, there seemed to be a period of hope for us as Indonesians to move beyond ethnic and racial divides. Anti-Chinese legislation, including a ban against the use of Chinese names in public settings (AUTHORS 2017), was repealed. Chinese language and culture began to appear in public/shared spaces in a way I never witnessed as a child and young adult. Some Chinese Indonesians began to re-engage in the political sphere, notably in West Kalimantan where ethnic Chinese were elected to the position of Vice Governor and mayor of the Chinese majority city of Singkawang in West Kalimantan (Hertzman 2017). The unexpected culmination of this new acceptance of Chinese-ness in an Indonesian socio-cultural context seemed to secure the rise of Ahok in Indonesian politics, to the position of governor of Jakarta, and a short step away from being Indonesia's next President (see Hatherell and Welsh 2017).

Yet this period was short-lived. After Ahok was charged for blasphemy in 2017 and subsequently sentenced to two years in prison, there was a noticeable shift in Indonesian politics

toward sectarianism (Tanaga 2017). Some argue that the reliance on identity politics has been used strategically to keep Chinese Indonesians from being fully involved in political decision-making (Tanaga 2017), thus rendering this group vulnerable and unable to fight for equal treatment under the rule of law. A danger we see, is how messages shared openly on Facebook and other social media, can amplify underlying social and political discourses, and break out in offline social movements, such as happened in Egypt's Arab Spring (Lim 2012), or in outbreaks of right wing, racist violence, as happened in 2019 in Christchurch, New Zealand. Although we acknowledge the complexities we face when it comes to balancing freedom of expression with content control for security's sake in our media-saturated world, in the face of rising tribalism and populist sentiments in our global society (Chua, 2018), no place, especially a country as diverse as Indonesia, can be free from the threat of violence when social media are unchecked as a domain for spreading racist, divisive, and hateful speech.

The motivation for conducting this study was to highlight how discourse can "play a key role in maintaining and legitimizing inequality, injustice and oppression in society" (van Leeuwen 2009, 277). Yet, since discourse is socially constructed, it also has the potential to *reverse* the process of inequality, injustice and oppression. We are heartened to know that there are non-Chinese Indonesians out there who support the act of moving away from treating Chinese Indonesians as the "other," and instead celebrate Indonesia's plurality. Our hope is for people to move beyond ethnic and racial divides, and thus, strengthen not only the nation of Indonesia, but nations everywhere.

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