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***CHINESE INDONESIANS AND CHINA-INDONESIA RELATIONS: A
JUXTAPOSITION OF IDENTITY AND POLITICS¹***

**ORANG INDONESIA KETURUNAN TIONGHOA DAN HUBUNGAN
INDONESIA-TIONGKOK: PENJAJARAN ANTARA IDENTITAS
DAN POLITIK**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I would like to discuss various possibilities of Chinese Indonesian positions within the socio-political and cultural framework of Indonesian nationalism and contemporary globalism. As history has shown, the position of Chinese Indonesians is often determined by the interaction between China and Indonesia in the global context, and vice versa. The impact of 1965 tragic event -which is known as the Indonesian Communist Party's failed coup d'état- on Chinese Indonesians is the clearest example of such a loose position. Today we face the growing power of China globally which is followed by the strengthened bilateral relations between China and Indonesia in various fields. China's "new diplomacy" has changed the way its neighbors view Beijing and Chinese diaspora communities which are previously known as "overseas Chinese". As part of a diasporic community, Chinese Indonesians might have to deal with what Nira Yuval Davies calls "multiscalar citizenship of transnational, national and local", signifying a critical juncture between homeland, citizenship and residency.

Keywords: Chinese Indonesians, China-Indonesia Relations, Identity and Politics

ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini membahas berbagai kemungkinan posisi etnik Tionghoa dalam kerangka sosial-politik dan kultural nasionalisme Indonesia dan globalisme kontemporer. Sebagaimana ditunjukkan oleh sejarah, posisi etnik Tionghoa di Indonesia seringkali ditentukan oleh interaksi antara Tiongkok dan Indonesia dalam konteks global. Dampak dari peristiwa tragis 1965, yang dikenal sebagai kudeta yang gagal dari Partai Komunis Indonesia, terhadap etnik Tionghoa merupakan contoh yang paling jelas dari posisi mereka yang tidak pasti tersebut. Hari ini kita menghadapi meningkatnya pengaruh Tiongkok secara global yang diikuti dengan menguatnya hubungan bilateral antara Tiongkok dan Indonesia di berbagai bidang. 'Diplomasi baru' Tiongkok telah mengubah cara negara-negara tetangganya memandang Beijing (Peking) dan komunitas-komunitas diaspora Cina yang sebelumnya dikenal sebagai 'orang Cina yang tinggal di luar negeri'. Sebagai bagian dari komunitas diaspora, etnik Tionghoa di Indonesia harus berurusan dengan apa yang disebut Nira Yuval Davis sebagai "kewarganegaraan berbagai skala: transnasional, nasional, dan lokal", yang menandakan suatu titik temu yang kritis antara tanah air, kewarganegaraan, dan tempat tinggal.

Kata Kunci: Etnis Tionghoa, Hubungan Tiongkok-Indonesia, Identitas dan Politik.

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INTRODUCTION

A Chinese has become adjective for many things; Chinese people, Chinese language, Chinese community, Chinese newspaper, Chinese school, Chinese restaurant/food etc. By definition, a Chinese is also a person who comes from China or whose family came from China. The term Chinese Indonesians is not as well known as “overseas Chinese” (*huaqiao*), i.e. Chinese who travelled across the sea and lived out of the country (China) in a foreign country. But, as Wang Ling-Chi & Wang Gungwu argued in their book, *The Chinese Diaspora, Selected Essays*, Volume 1 &2, the *huaqiao* term is part of the politicization of the ‘problem’ of overseas Chinese and “the Yellow Peril” (which refers to a series of questions about the loyalty of the Chinese abroad), even though in reality most Chinese living outside China today “no longer see themselves as sojourners, orphans, or patriotic Chinese nationalists whose welfare, sole future, and final resting place is to be in China” (Wang, Ling-Chi, 2003, ix; underline is added), and that “many of them consistently denied any allegiance to the government of China” (Wang, & Wang, 2003, vi; Preface, underline added). Moreover,

“Among the Chinese outside China today, there are clear differences between those who have grown up in different countries or territories. For example, American-born Chinese see the world differently from new Chinese immigrants or Southeast Asian remigrants of Chinese descent. Similarly, with the sizeable communities of settled Chinese in Western Europe, in India, Korea or Japan, in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti or Mauritius. The Chinese in these communities are different again from those who have emigrated recently and directly from Hong Kong, Taiwan or the People’s Republic of China”.

Clearly, the differences between Chinese communities in various places indicate a different level of identification with the country where they are residing, i.e. their sense of belonging or emotional attachment about feeling at home outside their home country, which according to Nira Yuval-Davis (2011, 3) should be differentiate with the politics of belonging. In speaking about Chinese Indonesians, we should see them as a different unity and identity from Chinese living somewhere else, and that there are several perspectives that could be used to understand

them. Firstly, at the global level, Chinese Indonesians could be seen as part of Chinese diaspora like Wang & Wang suggested. And, secondly, at the national level as part of the Indonesian community which has established itself as a nation-state. In accordance to the topic proposed above, in this paper, I would like to combine these two perspectives. But, before we talk about Chinese Indonesians, I think it would be better if we first discuss Beijing’s policy toward Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia.

BEIJING AND CHINESE DIASPORA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

“Over time China’s overseas Chinese policy [read: Beijing’s policy toward Chinese diaspora communities which consist of “PRC nationals who live abroad (*huaqiao*) and ethnic Chinese who have assimilated into their host countries (*huayyi*)] has evolved to reflect changing migration patterns and favorable international conditions. The overseas Chinese have been both a problem and an instrument of China’s domestic and foreign policy agenda. The one constant in Beijing’s domestic agenda has been the need to attract foreign exchange—primarily through the overseas Chinese in the form of remittance or investment. Moreover, there has been significant continuity in its foreign policy and corresponding overseas Chinese policy. One of Beijing’s primary foreign policy objectives has been to restore relations with its neighbors. Therefore, China sought diplomatic relations with its Southeast Asian neighbors and made efforts to solve the overseas Chinese dual nationality problem. Finally, China’s third and fourth generation leaders have undertaken a more pragmatic, sophisticated, and subtler foreign policy approach to achieving Beijing’s ambitions. China’s “new diplomacy” is changing the way its neighbors view the emerging power and their overseas Chinese communities. Thus, the estimated 35 million overseas Chinese have become assets in connecting China to the outside world” (Zerba, 2008, Abstract).

As indicated by Zerba, the PRC’s overseas Chinese policy is “a function of the overseas Chinese themselves—where they [live] and what they [are] capable of doing. Conversely, the capabilities and means of the overseas Chinese themselves [are] a function of China’s prestige” (Zebra, 2008, 61). It means that, for China,

China – overseas Chinese connection is an asset that should be exploited for China’s benefits.

In the past Chinese government, as Zerba pointed out, was “careful not to exploit or employ the overseas Chinese in the area of politics” (Zebra, 2008, 62), but since “China’s pragmatism is creating an environment amenable to overseas Chinese political involvement”, overseas Chinese are now welcomed for their economic links to China (Zebra). In her study, Amy Chang too indicated Beijing’s attempts, in last several decades since 1989, “to highlight the economic benefits of a relationship with China”, as well as “to exert strategic influence on the Chinese diaspora through soft-power inducements” (2013, Executive Summary). She believed this policy adaptation of China was taken due to several considerations; firstly, “historical animosity and distrust in Southeast Asia toward China” has caused Beijing to create a favorable portray of China in the region; and secondly, “most ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia do not possess a bond with China beyond purely economic interests and thus do not want to risk losing political and economic privileges to serve China’s broader interests” (Zebra). This is perhaps, as Zerba has observed, due to the fact that “in many cases they are still viewed with reserve and suspicion” (Zerba, 2008, 62). In his opinion, “It’s a catch-22 for the overseas Chinese: while assisting China in its development and diplomatic relations could improve their status at home, it may also add to the perception that their loyalties lie in China” (Zebra). Amy Chang’s own observation suggests that, “diaspora populations have become important political actors that ‘influence both the political processes of the country in which they reside and the relationship between their country of residence and their country of origin’” (Chang, 2003, 1), and as such they now become a major factor in China’s foreign policy, at least “influence its security calculus”. It should be noted that, by some estimates, the diaspora population has grown to more than 50 million, and about 32 million out of the 50 million reside in Southeast Asia (Chang, 2003).

In the political context of China-Chinese Diaspora relations, we could see a precarious position of Chinese overseas (Chinese Indonesians included), which in Jamie Mackie’s opinion², is

² He suggested the term when I met him in 1990s in Australia to discuss the topic of Chinese Indonesians.

a pendulum-like, at a certain period they were pulled to China’s side, while at another period of time they should take side with the country where they reside. In that position they are always subjected to local governments’ suspicion and Chinese government’s strategic (political) manipulation.

CHINESE INDONESIANS AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The idea of Chinese everywhere as one community is quite problematic, since this perspective ignores “the uniqueness, diversity, interests and welfare of Chinese [living outside China] experience in each country and the different roles they play in it” (Wang, Ling-chi, 2003, ix). According to Wang Gungwu, the thought that “once a Chinese, always a Chinese” was shaped by “great fears among the leaders of nascent indigenous states in Southeast Asia about the power of a nationalistic China appealing to the patriotism of the Chinese [living outside China]” (Wang Gungwu, 2003, 5), particularly since “Sun Yat Sen and his Guomindang party had their origins among the Chinese abroad and identified the *huaqiao* as one of the mainstays of the party” (Wang Wang Gungwu, 2003). Even though, the Communist Party were less dependent of the *huaqiao*, but “their victory in 1949 aroused even greater fears of Chinese expansion through the *huaqiao* in the region and this became the backdrop against which [‘overseas Chinese’] studies were written for several decades” (Wang Gungwu, 2003).

On March 1998, Wang Ling-Chi and his colleagues at the Asian American Studies Programme of the Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, initiated the first International Conference on *Luodi-shenggen* (growing roots where they land) in San Francisco. The theme of that conference, *luodi-shenggen* or “the planting of permanent roots in the soils of different countries”, is considered as representing “a significant departure from two existing paradigms or approaches to the treatment and studies of the [‘overseas Chinese’]. These two paradigms, namely *luo-ye-guigen* (the inevitability of return to China) and *zancao-cugen* (the total elimination of racial identity and cultural heritage) are now characterized as “chauvinistic, regressive and approaching the anachronistic”

Jamie Mackie died in 2011 (<http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/mackie-james-austin-jamie-13754>).

(Wang, Ling-Chi, 2003, x). *Luodi-shenggen* is then associated with the word “diaspora”, which according to J.L. Heilbron, from the Greek word “dispersion”. At the beginning this word “diaspora” was used to refer to the Jews, because as explained by Heilbron, the word “exile” in Hebrew could be closely translated as diaspora, and it was associated with the history of many Jews were being forcibly removed to Babylon (Heilbron, 2003, xii). Nevertheless, the word diaspora carries the meaning of peoples “who after some generations in a new land, may become not only dispersed, but also assimilated in the host country” (Heilbron, 2003). Heilbron sees the analogue between the overseas Chinese and the Jews, since the Chinese have “journeyed far as traders, setting up communities and preserving their customs abroad” (Heilbron, 2003).

Chinese Indonesians have long been part of the life of the Indonesian society, starting from two major migrations of Chinese people into South-East Asia [including Indonesia] in the late 13th and early 15th centuries (Llyod, 2001, 1), following the Admiral Cheng Ho’s seven ‘legendary’ journeys. Difficulties in maintaining contact with faraway China has stimulated assimilation at the local level, but it was only in the mid-16th century, with the arrival of the Dutch and the establishment of VOC, that the Chinese communities developed as “a stable feature of the South-East Asian [and Indonesian] political and economic community” (Llyod, 2001). Although the first Chinese came as traders, but gradually they have become “a dynamic and multifarious community”. They helped to “maintain links between the harbour kingdoms of North Java and West and South-East Sumatera”, and by the beginning of the 18th century, they had become the “predominant commercial minority” in South-East Asia [and in Indonesia] (Llyod, 2001, 1-2). Since the Chinese played intermediary roles between the Dutch colonials & Javanese aristocrats and the masses, according to Anthony Reid, many European colonials identified the Chinese in South-East Asia [and in Indonesia] with the category that had been developed for Jews in Europa, namely ‘outsider’ entrepreneurs (Llyod, 2001, 70), which according to Reid, was used to “shift the negative, disturbing features of capitalism onto these minorities, making it possible for Dutch colonials to see themselves (despite the evidence) rather in the role of

paternalistic protectors of the passive natives”, particularly around 1900 when the Dutch policy took an ‘ethical direction’, that is “turned much of its reforming zeal against these Chinese roles as tax farmers and distributors” (Reid, 2001, 70). The expulsion of the Dutch from Indonesian economic life in the 1950s and the takeover of the state by a new Indonesian intelligentsia, is seen by Reid as a starting point for competition between the Chinese and a newly emerged indigenous entrepreneurial group. However, in the Sukarno years, capitalism remained a dirty word which was “associated with alien evil”, creating moral constraints for the indigenous people to get serious into it. “[I]ts harsh and greedy edges sheeted home to Chinese” as much as they were blamed on Jews (Reid, 2001, 73). Perhaps this image, as well as the situation of the global politics which was divided between Capitalist/Anti-Communist Blocs and Communist Blocs, had led to the 1965 tragic event that placed the Chinese in Indonesia as “a fifth column” (Coppel, 2008, 125) for the Communist China. In contrast, the opening to foreign investment and rapid economic growth under Soeharto gave unprecedented opportunities to Chinese Indonesians business, particularly those crony capitalists who had already “involved in smuggling and other shady business” with Soeharto-related military units before 1965 (Coppel, 2008, 75). Of course, the resentment of the Chinese on the part of the pribumi rose as a consequence, and it accumulated till it exploded in the tragic event of May 1998; even though it was not so much outbreaks of anti-Chinese popular violence as “an outlet for diversionary scapegoating” as another way of attacking Soeharto regime. As Reid indicated, the rise of a majority [indigenous] middle class, marks “the greatest danger for pariah or outsider entrepreneurs”, particularly since the two still-distinct middle classes are now competing directly over a shrinking pie (Coppel, 2008, 77).

The combination between the Chinese’s global connection and Indonesia’s political and economic dynamics had continuously placed Chinese Indonesians in a vulnerable position as “racial, national or class enemies” that are suspected to manipulate the global financial system that caused then 1997 economic crisis and depression in Indonesia (Reid, 2001,78).

THE RISE OF CHINA AND INDONESIA – CHINA'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The rising economic, political and military power of China is commonly considered as “the most geopolitically significant events of this century” (Chang, 2013, 1). In 2007 CSS (Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich) in their CSS Analyses in *Security Policy* Vol 2 No 8 acknowledged China as “the world’s second-largest national economy and third-largest trading power”, with the average growth rates of about ten per cent for more than two decades (p. 1). In military sector, China has undergone a rapid modernization which transformed the People’s Liberation Army into “a multifunctional, mobile, smaller army with a personnel strength of about 2.3 million soldiers”, and this transformation will enhance China’s capability for – initially regional – power projection” (Chang, 2013). China too “is making increasing inroads into the center of Asia” by intensifying its bilateral relations with Southeast Asian states (‘ASEAN+1’ free trade zone was planned for the year 2010) and concluding partnerships with Russia, India and Pakistan (China initiated the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes Russia as well as four Central Asian republics, as a forum for discussing security and trade issues) (Chang, 2013, 2). At the global level, China is also “striving to demonstrate its sense of great-power responsibility” by providing “generous financial and technical support” towards the African continent (Chang, 2013).

For Indonesia, which had experienced the most troubled relationship with China until the early 1990s, the rise of China, as suggested by Rizal Sukma, “constitutes an issue that has captured the attention of foreign policy circles, the business community, defense planners, and academia [of Indonesia]” (p. 139). Even though Indonesia-China relations had begun to enter a new period of active re-engagement and cooperation since 1998, Indonesia’s policy towards China “continues to reflect a degree of ambiguity”. On the one hand, “Indonesia genuinely sees the benefits of having good relations with China and begins to demonstrate increasing comfort in managing the bilateral relations with the country”. On the other hand, however, “Indonesia remains uncertain and anxious regarding China’s long-term role and intentions in the region” (pp. 139-140). Moreover, as indicated by Rahul Mirsha

& Irfa Puspita Sari (2010, 7), “the ethnic Chinese minority has been crucial in keeping [Indonesia and China] apart”, because “the apprehension about the ethnic Chinese still exists”.

Cooperation between Indonesia and China after the resumption of diplomatic ties in 1990 “remained limited to trade and investment” (pp. 143), therefore, as observed by Rahul Mishra & Irfa Puspita Sari, it becomes an astonishment when,

“In a matter of just thirteen years, Indonesia-China relations have improved beyond recognition. The Indonesian minister for foreign affairs Marty Natalegawa opines that China has become an important strategic partner of Indonesia and developing a healthy relationship with China should be one of the priorities for Indonesia. From the then President Abdurrahman Wahid’s visit to China on 24 July 2000 until incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s, there have been thirteen important high official visits from both sides. Indonesian presidents have visited China six times in these years, which demonstrates that China figures prominently in Indonesia’s foreign policy calculus” (2010, 3).

The Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership between Republic of Indonesia and the People’s Republic of China was signed on 25 April 2005 under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s administration, while the 2010 – 2015 Plan of Action for the Strategic Partnership between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Government of the People’s Republic of China was signed on 22 January 2010. The partnership covers a bilateral cooperation in various fields, namely Political, Defence, and Security; Economic and Development Cooperation; Maritime, Aerospace, Science and Technology; as well as Social and Cultural Cooperation.

The improvement in Indonesia – China bilateral cooperations is seen by Rizal Sukma as a result of the changing attitudes in both countries, particularly in related to the 1998 anti-Chinese riots. Both sides managed the issue well; the Chinese government, even though “express[ed] its concern over anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia”, seemed to “[recognize] the sensitivity of the problem, and so “repeatedly maintained that the problem was Indonesia’s internal problem”, keeping a non-intervening policy. In this case, it was obvious that “both

Jakarta and Beijing managed to prevent the issue of ethnic Chinese from complicating and undermining bilateral relations between the two countries". Furthermore, Indonesian authorities too have realized the importance of this issue, therefore, they had "taken steps to bring ethnic Chinese into the mainstream". This, according to Mirsha and Puspita Sari, has "created a positive atmosphere between the two countries as both the common man and the government of Indonesia could witness, for the first time in 50 years, a dehyphenation between the ethnic Chinese and China!" (2010, 7). But, of course it would require a further study to investigate how much this has changed the pendulum-like position of Chinese Indonesians discussed above.

Greta Nabbs-Keller (2011, 32), on the other hand, assigned this change to the Indonesia's democratisation process at the domestic political context that "has engendered a strong degree of policy consensus on China and increasing integration of Indonesia's ethnic Chinese into the mainstream". She argued that "[a]s more and more indigenous Indonesians enter the middle classes the issue of economic inequality is evolving from one that carries a stigma for Chinese Indonesians to one that all Indonesian must face". Also, as she observed, now "there is little political benefit in inciting anti-Chinese sentiment", in contrast to the New Order period. She provides an example of two issues that "failed to cause a stir in Indonesia", namely the recinicization of Indonesia's Chinese through Indonesia's official promotion of Indonesian Chinese culture in China in May 2011, where "more than 300 Indonesian Chinese participated in an Indonesian cultural event in Fujian province, the ancestral homeland of many of Indonesia's Chinese, in an event aimed at "deepening old familial ties", as well as the Wikileaks cable leak concerning "senior Chinese officials 'sought to promote secular Islam in Indonesia by encouraging interaction with China's 20 million Muslims'". This statement might not be totally valid if we consider the recent developments known as 411 and 212. We will discuss it further below.

Aizawa Nobuhiro also observed a significant change in what he called "the triangular relationship between Indonesia, China and the Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia". According to him, during the Soeharto period, the ethnic Chinese were positioned as "a suspicious group unknown

of their loyalty to the nation" (2002, 15), but now it is the government which is the problem for Indonesian people "for its unpatriotic attitudes" (Ibid). Through the case of Falun Gong Incident in Surabaya in 2011, he argues that "the ties between the two governments seem to be closer than the ties between the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia and China". During the Falun Gong march on March 7th, "police in plain clothes attacked the crowd with helmets, including the journalists", so after the incident, journalists in Surabaya reacted in protest, requesting the Chief of the East Java Police to review the case. Interestingly, the Police spokesperson said that "the restrictions on the [Falun Gong] movement in Indonesia were.... upon the request of the Chinese government through its envoy in Indonesia³; while the Chinese vice consulate in Surabaya denied it (p.5). The police comments that one of the reason of aggression came from the concern over bilateral relationship, whether or not the Chinese Embassy has requested, have raised a question of Indonesia's political freedom as a sovereign nation state in the era of the Rise of China; or more specifically, how important is it to meet the political demands of China, especially with the use of force against the Indonesian citizens, or how much influence does China have in changing Indonesia's internal governance rules?

Obviously, the changing situation at the global level with the rise of China has compelled Indonesia to adjust her foreign policy toward China. However, how much the shifting policy of Indonesia toward China has influenced the position of Chinese Indonesians is difficult to determine, because at the global and Indonesia's national context, the so-called Sinophobia remains an issue. As Johannes Nugroho in Today, June 11, 2015 reported,

"Following Chinese Vice-Premier Liu Yandong's official visit to Jakarta late last

³ Police's explanation about "the request of the Chinese government" might have a realistic base if we consider the Cambodia experience. In 2009, Cambodia repatriated to China 20 ethnic Uighur activists who were on China's wanted list for sedition. Before that, the Cambodian police had arrested two Falun Gong members, living there under the protection of the United Nations, and airlifted them to China. According to Johannes Nugroho, those were a real example of "China's habit of flexing its financial muscle to bring about political compliance"(Nugroho, 2015). It should be noted that Cambodia is "a recipient of generous financial aid from China"; it received "up to \$700M yearly from China" (Reaksmeij, 2014).

month, a number of ultra-nationalist and hard-line Muslim news websites began circulating 'reports' claiming that either 10 or 30 million Chinese nationals would be admitted into Indonesia by 2020 under a new agreement between Jakarta and Beijing. In what was clearly the start of a scaremongering campaign, they also predicted the end of economic sovereignty for 'native' Indonesians. These articles were widely shared by Indonesian netizens on social media, generating mostly Sinophobic and anti-government responses. However, the claim proved to be a hoax since the joint communiqué by the Indonesian and Chinese governments stated that the 'Indonesian side expressed the hope that the number of tourists between the two countries in 2020 would reach 10 million people'. Judging from the intensity of the comments on the social media, it is difficult to avoid concluding that anti-Chinese sentiments in the country are still widespread" (Nugroho, 2015, 1).

As mentioned above, the recent development known as 411 and 212 might contradict both Nabbs-Keller and Nobuhiro's observation of the changing situation toward Chinese Indonesians; at least at the society level, anti-Chinese sentiments remain an issue. On 4 November 2016, hence 411, which was followed by 12 December 2016 or 212, more than a month after non-active Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama known as Ahok delivered his speech at Kepulauan Seribu (Seribu Isles)⁴ which mentioned Al Mайдah verse 515, a large mass of people had gathered around Masjid Istiqlal and then Tugu Monas to condemn Ahok as someone who have conducted a religious contempt. During the two episodes, the FPI leader, Habib Rizieq Shihab, rose as its most prominent star. Eventhough the protest episodes run peacefully, especially on 2 December 2016, but in both episodes anti-Chinese sentiments were strongly provoked by the Habib, which to some extent almost created a riot on the first episode of 4 November 2016. One of the allegation the Habib voiced is that the People Republic of China (PRC) will make Indonesia part of PRC in the near future by indicating various unverified issues such as Chinese *yuan* will become the basis of currency

⁴ Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok delivered his speech at Kepulauan Seribu on 27 September 2016.

⁵ Ahok said that Al Mайдah verse 51 was used to deceive Muslims so they will not choose non-Moslem as a (political) leader.

value of *rupiah*, or that the majority of Chinese migrant workers sent to Indonesia have military postures, PRC citizens who come to Indonesia was provided with property rights over house and plantation (Redaksi eramuslim, 2016).

A SIGNIFYING CULTURAL LINKAGE BETWEEN CHINESE INDONESIANS, INDONESIA AND CHINA: "DIASPORIC, TRANSNATIONAL AND (TRANS) LOCAL BELONGING"

The precarious position of Chinese overseas explained above, which is always 'in-between' China and their 'host country', indicates a struggle they have in (re)constructing their diasporic identity. On one hand, China and Chineseness as the signifying cultural linkage is subjectively interpretative at the individual level. On the other hand, the so-called 'local' have fixed and rigid meanings because of its constructed political boundaries. As a diasporic identity, Chinese Indonesian reveals the juxtaposition of identity and politics of 'transnational and (trans) local belonging'.

In the post-modern context of globalization, as Monika Swasti Winarnita had argued, an expression of political aspiration is "negotiated by the community, host nation-state, and home nation-state as transnational and translocal engagement", indicating "'intersectionality'", or what Nira Yuval Davies calls "'multiscalar citizenship' of transnational, national and local" (Winarnita, 2014, 85). In her article, Monika talked about Chinese Indonesians living in Perth who migrated to that country after the 1998 May riots. Through observing the performance of an Ondel-Ondel doll dance by Perth-dwelling (predominantly Chinese) Indonesian-speaking Catholic youth group and the [Indonesian] consulate's xylophone orchestra, Monika proposed that this group of Chinese Indonesians had successfully changed "the meaning of their 'ethnic' identity from an 'alien non-indigenous minority' to a hybrid syncretic mix: a 'Chinese Jakartan'" (p. 91). In that example, Chinese Indonesians might carry a "'sense of place'", or what Deirde McKay termed "a localized place-based subjectivity", within themselves while they are moving through space within the country or outside the country (Winarnita, 2014, 91). This, in Monika's opinion, refers to 'translocal'; in which the ethnic body is, as argued by Anne Marie

Fortier, “‘inscribed by and becomes a signifier of place’” (p. 87). Interestingly, Indonesia, or Jakarta, not China becomes ‘the place’.

As we have discussed above, Chinese outside China, including Chinese Indonesians, is known as Chinese diaspora; and they have been defined as having several shared characteristics such as “dispersal, collective memory, alienation, idealisation and restoration of homeland, and ethno-communal consciousness” (p. 88). Collective memory of the homeland, in Lynn Meskell’s term, is “the residues of the past” and “inescapable in daily life” (2002, 293). But she also believes that, “[i]ndividually, the past is memory - collectively, it is history”, and “[b]oth are constructs entangled with identity issues” (Winarnita, 2014). It follows that, the concept of transnational belonging, which is embedded within the Chinese diasporic identity, might provide Chinese living outside China with what Monika suggested as “a form of ‘ambiguous’ belonging” to ease the feeling of being dispersed and alienated, as well as to restore the collective memory of the homeland. Perhaps it is for that reason that today we witness a paradigm shift among Chinese overseas (Chinese Indonesians included) from *luo-ye-guigen* (the inevitability of return to China) and *zancao-cugen* (the total elimination of racial identity and cultural heritage) into *luodi-shenggen* or “the planting of permanent roots in the soils of different countries. Furthermore, since their expression of political aspiration is the outcomes of what Monika Swasti Winarnita (2014, 87) suggested as “an intercultural process signifying multiple cultural identities” of Chinese, local, and Indonesian components, thus the multifaceted and fragmented nature of diasporic identities undoubtedly enables the related individuals to emphasize both their ‘cultural traditions’ [Chinese values] and the ‘permanency of their settlement in a host country’ [Indonesia]. The suggestion seems to follow Helen Lee’s cautions that “transnational engagement is not only about movement of people and intense engagement but should also describe the ties that are highly valued by different diasporic communities” (Winarnita, 900, which signify a critical juncture between legal and cultural identities, or between homeland, citizenship and residency).

Since diasporic identity, *luodi-shenggen* or “the planting of permanent roots in the soils of

different countries, is a subjective journey of each individual, Chinese Indonesians still have to deal with the question of political loyalty; they will always be seen as having *luo-ye-guigen* (the inevitability of return to China) if they could not do *zancao-cugen* (the total elimination of racial identity and cultural heritage). How the Chinese Indonesians should deal with the enduring China (PRC)-related anti-Chinese sentiments is another aspect of identity issue they must resolve; but it is not an easy thing to do, when their position is always a pendulum-like between China and Indonesia.

CLOSING REMARKS

Nationalism and globalism are always in a dynamic relationship, and Chinese Indonesians’s subjective narration is at the core of that relationship. Their stories does not only reflect a movement of people between places, but also their struggle for becoming ‘locals’ under the compelling forces of nationalism and the pulling influences of globalism. Identity politics is part of their continuous struggle to belong. Indonesia-China relationship provides a stable context for identity (re)construction because of indistinctness between place of origin and place of residence as a ‘preferred home’ for resettled immigrants like the Chinese Indonesians.

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