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Between Hybridity and Identity: Chineseness as a Cultural Resource in Indonesia

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Abstract:

Hybridity is the antithesis to identity. It is a transgressive concept that blurs and traverses the boundaries by which identities are bounded. Between the poles of identity and hybridity lies the multiple positions that depends on how agency and power are exercised. This paper discusses the multidirectionality of the hybridizing process of the Chinese Indonesians, from assimilation during the Suharto's New Order (1966-1998) to "resinicization" following the democratization process after fall of Suharto. It examines the cultural politics of the Chinese Indonesians in negotiating between hybridity and identity, as well as the underlying power dynamics in such negotiations. For many hybridized Chinese Indonesians who are unable to access the cultural resources in Chinese, learning Mandarin and performing Chineseness appeals more to economic rather than cultural logic. In light of the rise of China, this paper attempts to unpack the deeper embedded cultural and economic meaning to the return to primordial Chineseness among the Chinese in post-Suharto Indonesia.

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Between Hybridity and Identity: Chineseness as a Cultural Resource in Indonesia

Chang-Yau Hoon

INTRODUCTION

Chineseness is a much celebrated "ethno-commodity" in post-Suharto Indonesia (Sai and Hoon 2013). This is evident especially during Chinese New Year festive season when colorful parades featuring lion and dragon dances are performed in Chinatowns and Chinese temples; and where major shopping malls are decorated with ornaments in the lucky colour red. The mass media flock to feature Chinese-themed programs ranging from game shows where audiences dress in traditional Chinese costumes to talk shows featuring Chinese *feng shui* and fortune telling (Hoon 2009). These scenes are totally unimaginable two decades ago when President Suharto was in power from 1966-1998.

Historically, the Chinese in Indonesia was divided between the pure-blood, China-oriented newcomer "*totok*" Chinese and the acculturated *peranakan* Chinese who have intermarried with the local population and settled in the Malay Archipelago for centuries. The cultural synthesis of the latter have produced a unique *peranakan* heritage in language, religious, customary and culinary practices. However, after going through the forced baptism of assimilation during the New Order, the cultural gap between the *totok* and the *peranakan* had narrowed because very few practical ways were left to sustain the *totok* culture.

During the New Order regime, Chineseness was subject to suppression as the state perceived it to be a security threat associated with Communism. The People's Republic of China and, by association, the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, were both allegedly involved in the September 1965 abortive coup. After the coup, a surge of anti-Communist and anti-Chinese sentiment swept through the country (Suryadinata 1978a: 138). The ethnic Chinese – their culture, their religion, their role in the nation's economy, and their very existence – were labelled by New Order politicians as the "Chinese Problem" or *Masalah Cina* (Allen 2003: 387). To manage this "problematic" minority, the state implemented a military-backed assimilation policy to prohibit all expressions of Chineseness in the public sphere, including Chinese names, schools, organizations, media and cultural practices. The fact that printed matter in Chinese characters fell under the

category of prohibited imports like narcotics, pornography and explosives when entering Indonesia is a testament to the gravity of the regime's treatment of Chineseness as a menace to the nation.

After the fall of the Suharto regime in May 1998, the draconian assimilation policy was replaced by multiculturalism, which came as part and parcel of democratization and reformation (Hoon 2006). With previously denied legal rights of the Chinese gradually restored, Chinese culture and identity have been revitalized in Indonesia. The resurgence of Chineseness encompassed language, religion, media and politics, as well as cultural symbols and practices including the aforementioned public celebration of Chinese New Year (Hoon 2008). Furthermore, the rise of China along with the economic opportunities the country has to offer have led to renewed pride among the Chinese overseas in their cultural heritage and identity.

It can be argued that the post-Suharto resurgence was dominated by "primordial Chineseness" that is characterized by a naturalistic, fixed and essentialized notion, fundamentally based on tradition, language, generational lineage, physical attribute and "culture".[1] The expressions of such Chineseness were largely promoted and financed by an older generation *totok* business elites who were keen to revive the pre-Suharto "golden age" when Chinese schools, associations and media thrived and flourished (Hoon 2008). Moreover, the primordial version of Chineseness with which the global Chinese diaspora identifies can be used as a strategic resource to tap into Chinese capitalist networks and to achieve trust for business dealings with other members of this imagined community or with China (see Menkhoff et al 2014).

This primordial Chineseness can be contrasted with the more organic, localized and hybridized Chineseness that is reflected in the daily experience of most Chinese Indonesians. In negotiating ways to maintain their own culture and becoming "Indonesian", contemporary Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia had transformed into a creative, adapted, hybridized *Chinese Indonesian* identity (Hoon 2006). Such hybridity is not a harmonious syncretism of Chinese and Indonesian cultures; but it is a process of complex negotiation and identification that intersects with forces of globalization, modernization, primordialism and localization. However, the hybrid identity that characterizes the lived reality of most Chinese Indonesians is hardly represented in the public sphere which privilege the primordial Chineseness as it is seen as more universal, authentic, and economically relevant. For the hybridized Chinese to get a share of the economic

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[1] According to Werbner (1997b: 228), "To essentialize is to impute a fundamental, basic, absolutely necessary constitutive quality to a person, social category, ethnic group, religious community, or nation. It is to posit falsely a timeless continuity, a discreteness or boundedness in space, and an organic unity. It is to imply an internal sameness and external difference or otherness".

pie associated with China's rise, they need to acquaint themselves with primordial Chineseness through a process called "resinicization", such as by learning Mandarin (Setijadi 2016a).

In light of the recent developments, this paper will first discuss the concept of hybridity, and then apply it to the context of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia through a mapping of both historical and contemporary trajectories of their identity constructions. It explores the multidirectionality of the hybridizing process of the Chinese Indonesians, from assimilation during the Suharto's New Order (1966-1998) to "resinicization" following the democratization process after fall of Suharto. For many assimilated Chinese Indonesians who are unable to access the cultural resources in Chinese, learning Mandarin appeals more to economic rather than cultural logic. The paper will attempt to unpack the deeper embedded cultural and economic meaning to the return to primordial Chineseness among the Chinese in contemporary Indonesia.

As the antithesis of identity, hybridity blurs and traverses the boundaries that identities have established, undermining the phantasmic integrity and purity that the boundaries attempt to safeguard. Werbner maintains that, "rather than being open and subject to fusion, identities seem to resist hybridization" (1997a: 3). To resinicize or be "Chinese again" involves returning to primordial identity and the essentialist "cultural stuff" (Barth 1969) in which "identity" is bounded. This paper endeavours to examine the cultural politics of the Chinese Indonesians in negotiating between hybridity and identity, as well as the underlying power dynamics in such negotiations. Lastly, in light of the rise of China, this paper will explore the cultural and political economy of resinicization in post-Suharto Indonesia.

Theorizing Hybridity

There is no easy way to define "hybridity". As one of the most contested ideas to have emerged from the discourse of globalization, this term has given rise to the "new configurations of multilayered identities that are described as 'hyphenated', 'creole', 'mestizaje', 'diasporic', and 'syncretic'" (Bhatia 2011: 405). For Burke, hybridity is a "slippery, ambiguous term, at once literal and metaphorical, descriptive and explanatory" (2009: 54). Hybridity can be described as a transgressive force that encompasses syncretism and the complexities of cultural crossings, borrowing and mixing. It is the antithesis of identity as it disrupts the boundaries that give meaning and definition to identity.

The term "hybridity" traditionally carried the connotation of being "impure", "racially contaminated" and genetically "deviant" in social evolution theory. Borrowing the botanical or biological metaphor for cross-fertilization, "hybridity" was a notion popularly used in the nineteenth and twentieth century colonial discourses to describe "mongrels" or "bastards" – the much frowned upon products of

miscegenation (Burke 2009: 49). Despite the epistemological origin in pseudo-scientific racism, in the late twentieth century, the notion of hybridity has been positively re-appropriated to signal cultural synthesis (Ifekwunigwe 1999: 188). While the transformation of this term within a discourse of dangerous racial contamination into one of cultural creativity can be seen as empowerment (Werbner 1997a: 21), people who purport the dominant essentialist ideology of identity may not accept hybridity because they still perceive mixture as "contamination, a breach of purity and infringement of 'identity'" (Ang 2001: 200).

Nonetheless, hybridity is a useful concept for the understanding of how identities interact and intersect, and the power relations involved in such a process. Although often cited in postmodern literature and discussed as a phenomenon of the late capitalist world, hybridity is by no means a postmodern invention (Ifekwunigwe 1999). In fact, as Said contends, "all cultures are involved in one another … none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous" (1993: xxv). In the same token, Werbner argues that, "despite the illusion of boundedness, cultures, evolve historically through unreflective borrowings, mimetic appropriations, exchanges and inventions" (1997a: 4).

While cultural hybridity as an organic process has been taking place throughout history, the volume and intensity of the cross-cultural flows and cultural mixture have proliferated in recent decades with the advent of globalization (Papastergiadis 2005). The politics of hybridity is intrinsic to the process of migration and dislocation, and has been practised by locals and migrants in their daily negotiation and construction of their identities, consciously or unconsciously. It is thus crucial to note that hybridity is a continuous and often convoluted *process* of cultural translation and negotiation that is never complete. For Bhabha, the space of the "inter" is the "cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the 'in-between' space" (1994: 38). The migrant who experiences "multiple rootedness and consciousness... is forever mixing and mixed, forever crossing, traversing, translating linguistically and culturally. He [*sic*] is not either/or, but both" (Chan and Tong 1995: 7).

However, the emergence and proliferation of hybridity is not only an anathema but also a fear to some governments. This is partly because the "messy reality" that hybridity represented has unwittingly undermined the evocations of social order (Papastergiadis 2000: 172). Guneratne notes that even though there is no historical validity to the concept of racial or cultural purity, the perception of cultural purity is nevertheless an indispensable "precondition for the development of nationalist sentiments" (2002: 20). The impurity, mixture, fusion and lack of authenticity that hybridity manifests are threatening to the state, as it perceives this as a force that might undermine the sovereign identity of the nation, which is usually constructed in terms of cultural purity and authenticity. Therefore, to such governments, "hybridity, whether ethnic or cultural, has to be suppressed, and becomes the site of anxiety" (Silva 2002: i).

In fact, Goldberg argues that, "hybridities are the modalities in and through which multicultural conditions get lived out, and renewed" (1994: 10). While "true" multiculturalism is about the acknowledgment of the existence a matrix of different cultures and identities within *each* individual, multiculturalism as a policy is often more interested in displaying a selection of mono-cultural groups donned in their ethnic costumes that presumably represent their individual culture, making those cultures to appear monolithic and unchanging (Hoon 2006). Such images of "multiracial harmony" are especially conspicuous in Singapore where the state systematically racializes its citizenry. However, is there a possibility that hybridity can be institutionalized as a policy? And how would that look like?

Dean Chan (2005) casts doubt on the possibility of hybridity being institutionalized as a political discourse because current discourses of hybridity have not yet taken into serious consideration the social and economic relations of power. Moreover, he noted that "hegemonic racial hierarchies" based on essentialism are still very much sustained within current institutional practices. For the purpose of this paper, the concept of hybridity is used as "heuristic device" (Ang 2001: 17) and "methodological concept" (Papastergiadis 2005: 56) to analyze the complex identity politics of the ethnic Chinese in contemporary Indonesia. As an analytical tool, hybridity allows us think beyond cultural boundaries that delineate ethnic identities and foregrounds an accommodation of cultures at the local level which constantly challenges various dichotomies between Self and Other.

Hybridity and Resistance: Chinese Identity in Indonesian History

Identities are constructed through difference. It is only through a relation to the "Other" – a relation to what is not and to what is lacking – that identity can be constructed. Thus, identities are the outcome of the production of difference and exclusion rather than symbols of "identical, naturally-constituted unity" (Hall 1996). Identity is also a product of historical development, and is a constant process of change and transformation (Hall 1996). An examination of the continuity and change of Chineseness in Indonesia's history conventionally begins with the primordial *totok/peranakan* distinction that has bifurcated the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. The *totok* referred to China-oriented, China-born, and pure- blood Chinese, while the *peranakan* were the acculturated, local-born, and usually mixed blood Chinese.

The identification of the *totok/peranakan* distinction has historically been based on birthplace and "race" (see Williams 1960; Somers 1964). Centuries of residence in Indonesia caused *peranakan* men to lose many of the features of their "Chineseness" as they adopted local culture, language, customs and practices, and intermarried with local women because most of the Chinese immigrants were male. Some of them had even converted to Islam, adopted Muslim-sounding names and dresses and recognized by the Dutch authorities as natives (Salmon 1996: 193-5). However, Williams argue that by 1900, a large

proportion of *peranakan* had still "never been fully assimilated into the native population" (1960: 13). Although thoroughly hybridized in many aspects of their culture, the *peranakan* had never totally disappeared as an ethnic group. Salmon (1996) divided the *peranakan* into two segments: the "visible" and the "invisible" ones. The latter were those who were merging into local societies such as the Muslim converts, while the former were those who persistently held on to what was left in their "Chineseness", which allowed them to retain their identity as Chinese, distinguishable from the native population.

Among other factors, colonial racial hierarchy, economic privileges, religion, and cultural identity were the main obstacles to assimilation. In colonial society of the Netherlands East Indies, the population was divided into three "racial" groups with different legal rights and privileges: the Europeans were at the top, the Foreign Orientals (mainly Chinese) were in the middle and the natives were at the bottom. Wedged between the Europeans and the native, the Chinese were the tax collectors and loan providers and were granted monopoly privileges to engage in profitable commercial activities such as the selling of opium and the operation of gambling establishments and pawnshops. The granting of exclusive licences to the Chinese proved to be a simple and inexpensive means for the colonial government of raising official revenues from license fees (Williams 1960: 25). The *pribumi* resented the Chinese for their economic roles in the nineteenth century as they perceived the Chinese as blood-suckers of the Javanese (Anonymous 1992). Under the colonial racial regime, there was little incentive for the Chinese to assimilate into indigenous society because it would have meant a drop in social status and the loss of some of these privileges.

The persisting monumental power of identity is demonstrated in the paradox where a community that is hybrid resisting hybridity. This can be seen in the resistance of Islamization by some *peranakan* Chinese associations in the mid nineteenth century. They viewed conversion to Islam as a "serious threat to the survival of Chinese identity" and thus attempted to "resinicize *peranakan* women in order to keep them separate from Javanese and curb the assimilation process" (Salmon 1996: 198). As discussed earlier, identity is formed on the premise of an exclusive boundary between "us" and "them". Hybridity, on the other hand, transgresses such boundary, and thus is seen as "a form of danger, loss and degeneration" (Papastergiadis 2000: 174). With this logic, the fear of these *peranakan* in conversion and assimilating into the native community, was essentially about not wanting to lose their identity as Chinese.

Scholars also attributed the *peranakan* resistance to hybridity as a sign of Chinese chauvinism and a sense of cultural superiority. For instance, Amyot argues, "*peranakan* society distinguishes itself from Indonesian society by what it has retained of Chinese culture. These retentions are due partly to the character of Chinese culture itself which is hardy and singularly persistent even under the most adverse conditions" (1972: 73). Williams also conjectures that Chinese belief in the supremacy of their civilization was possibly

the chief barrier to social communication with Indonesians (1960: 15). This point is further attested by the Chinese scholar, Li Minghuan, who iterates that "feelings of Sino-centrism or Han-centrism prevented the Chinese from integrating completely into the local society" (2003: 223).

Nevertheless, no matter how much they resist hybridization, there was no dispute that the *peranakan* formed a hybrid community. The identity of the *peranakan* was by no means unified, though it was racially and patrilineally defined, i.e. the group was defined and constituted by the race and gender of immigrants. Coppel argues that the "*peranakan* Chinese were a product of particular historical circumstances in particular localities" (2002: 108; for an account of their diversity, see Onghokham 2005). In general, the *peranakan* spoke one of the Indonesian dialects or a type of Sino-Malay language (Bahasa Melayu-Tionghoa), which became an emblem of *peranakan* hybrid identity (Sim 2003: 35-6). Also known as Batavian Malay, the predecessor of the current day Jakarta dialect, the Sino-Malay language combined the use of bazaar Malay and the Hokkien dialect, and was later enriched by borrowings from Dutch and other Western languages (Hidayat 1976: 108-109; Suryadinata 1981: xiv; Oetomo 1988: 97-106). The impact of Chinese culture in Indonesia was manifest in the loanwords from Chinese dialects in the Indonesian vocabulary, many of which were used for food, evincing the Chinese influence in Indonesian culinary culture (see Tan 2008: 93).

Although there is evidence showing that this version of Malay was the *lingua franca* of the Dutch East Indies, the colonial government discredited it as "low Malay" against the court-derived "high Malay". The latter was legitimized and promoted by the Dutch administration through its sponsored publishing house, the Balai Pustaka (see Suryadinata 2007: 153-6). The dualism between low and high Malay was constructed based on the logic that the former was merely a language of communication used particularly by the non-Malays, while the latter was a language of culture, and authentically Malay. Thus, the Dutch administration and a number of puritan philologists were determined to replace the impure, creole Malay with the "purified, authentic and standard Malay' (Coppel 2002: 201). Again, this shows how hybridity, including creole language, were regarded as impure or inauthentic, and thus undesirable.

The same fate was experienced by the Sino-Malay literature (Sastra Melayu-Tionghoa) – the literary product of the *peranakan* community published in the late nineteenth until almost mid twentieth century. Like the Sino-Malay language, this literature was also officially deemed to be of low quality, deserving little attention from Indonesian literary critics and publishers (Allen 2003). This is notwithstanding the fact that the writer of the first "modern" Indonesian novel was a *peranakan* Chinese, Lie Kimhok (1853-1912), who was also known as the "Father of Sino-Malay". Furthermore, Lie's grammar

book, *Malayoe Betawi* (1886), was possibly the first Malay language grammar book ever published in the Malay archipelago (Liaw 1995).

The Sino-Malay literature was further marginalized in postcolonial nationalist discourses that privileged standard Bahasa Indonesia. Consequently, this genre of literature discontinued when *peranakan* writers began to write in standard Indonesian which cannot be differentiated from their *pribumi* counterparts (Suryadinata 2007: 156). Suryadinata observes that publications in low Malay continued to be excluded from national Indonesian literature as being unworthy of study until the 1990s. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of various scholars who discovered "forgotten" literature in the Sino-Malay language and advocated for its recognition, the Sino-Malay literature has now been increasingly regarded as part of modern Indonesian language and literature.[2]

As identity is defined through difference, the arrival of the new wave of Chinese immigrants to Indonesia in the last decades of the nineteenth century confronted the *peranakan* with a different way of being Chinese. In juxtaposition to the earlier predominantly male migrations, these new immigrants include a significant number of women. As a result, it became possible for Chinese men to take a China-born bride rather than to marry an indigenous or *peranakan* woman, and these immigrants formed a distinct *totok* community (Mackie and Coppel 1976: 8). This community was not a unified group because they came from different parts of China and spoke in different Chinese dialects. The 1930 Census showed that the four largest groups were the Hokkiens, the Hakkas, the Cantonese, and the Teochews. However, when contrasted to their *peranakan* counterparts who differed significantly from them in cultural practices, language, and political outlook, the internal heterogeneity of the *totok* seemed unified.

The migration of Chinese from China into Indonesia had halted after the Great Depression of 1929. As a result, *totok* communities were not regenerated with new immigrants (Coppel 2002: 122). Such development rendered the *totok*/*peranakan* distinction based on race, ancestry and birthplace unrealistic. Scholars began to adopt a socio-cultural distinction to account for these communities (Skinner 1963; Suryadinata 1981; Tan 1997). According to this definition, a *totok* referred to those Chinese who were brought up in Chinese culture and use Chinese as the medium of communication even though they were born in Indonesia. Similarly, a *peranakan* referred not only to the Chinese with mixed ancestry, but also to

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[2] For instance, a prominent *peranakan* Chinese journalist and writer, Nio Joe Lan (1904-1973) published a book in 1962 entitled, Sino-Indonesian Literature, to advocate for its recognition as an integral part of Indonesian literature, but attracted little attention (see Coppel 2002: Chapter 12). The monumental work of a French sinologist, Claudine Salmon (1981), who discovered more than 3000 literature published in Sino-Indonesian language once again raised the profile of this forgotten literature.

those pure-blood local-born Chinese who cannot speak Mandarin or any Chinese dialect (see Coppel 2002: Chapter 7).

The two communities generally diverged in their identity, cultural, political and educational outlooks throughout the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, the *peranakan* spoke the Sino-Malay language, went to Dutch or Malay schools and were culturally and politically oriented to either the Netherlands or Indonesia. On the other hand, the *totok* spoke a Chinese dialect or Mandarin, went to Chinese schools and had cultural and political affinity with China or Taiwan (Suryadinata 1981).

However, there were instances where these communities decidedly altered their cultural identity as a result of particular political or social circumstances. A case in point would be the rise of the pan-Chinese nationalism in the Indies in the early 1900s, which led to the emergence of Chinese organizations such as the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK, or the Chinese Organisation), the Sianghwee (Chinese Chamber of Commerce) and a Sino-Indonesian newspaper, Sin Po, and fostered a renewed sense of Chineseness among the *peranakan* (Wilmott 1956: 6). The recently arrived *totok* also presented a version of Chineseness which were appealing to some *peranakan* who longed for cultural belonging and who felt that their hybrid identity and in-betweenness lacked cultural authenticity. These *peranakan* participated in the THHK that sought to reform the "corrupt" Chinese customs practised by the *peranakan*, to promote Confucianism and to provide Chinese schools with a modern curriculum (see Salmon 1996). The resinicized *peranakan* began to reorient themselves culturally and politically towards China as Confucianism and Chinese education "awakened" them to a sense of pride in being Chinese (Somers 1965: 67).

The relevance of the *totok*/*peranakan* distinction gradually diminished after the implementation of the military-backed Assimilation Program during the New Order. Under this program, Chinese schools, organizations and presses were forced to close down. All Chinese were forced to enrol in Indonesian-medium schools and speak Bahasa Indonesia, the national *lingua franca*. Suryadinata (1978b: 32) argues that most Chinese were "Indonesianized" during that period, signifying the breakdown of the dichotomy between *totok* and *peranakan*. After more than three decades of assimilation, the distinction between *totok* and *peranakan* had become so blurred that the categories are confusing, superficial and misleading (Tjhin 2002). The identity of Chinese in the post-Suharto era, especially the younger generation, are hybridized by the forces of globalization, modernization, consumerism, primordialism and localization. They tend to identify themselves as "Chinese Indonesians", the *totok*/*peranakan* dichotomy no longer reflects the complexity and heterogeneity of their identity.

Hybridity and Essentialism: Chineseness in Post-Suharto Indonesia

Although the relevance of the *totok*/*peranakan* distinction has diminished, the cultural inheritance from this historical distinction is still, to some extent, visible in the identity of most Chinese organizations that emerged in post-Suharto Indonesia (see for example, Hoon 2016).[3] This is because these organizations were mostly established and funded by affluent older generation Chinese *totok* elites who held economic power and financial resources. These organizations and their founders were mainly interested in two agendas: the first was a cultural mission to revitalize Chineseness in Indonesia and to resinicize the "rootless" generations that grew up during the assimilationist policy of the New Order (see Hoon 2008), and secondly to use the organizations as a platform to facilitate business networking among Chinese Indonesians and with Chinese businesspeople from China (Setijadi 2017b).

After three decades of being silenced, the cultural euphoria experienced by the Chinese Indonesians in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the New Order was comprehensible. With the newly opened public sphere, Chineseness became fashionable as it captured the curiosity of both the assimilated Chinese as well as the *pribumi* population, who had been influenced by the state's association, and mainstream media's representation, of Chineseness with Communism, corruption, disloyalty and other stereotypes. To fill the lacunae and to gain viewership, films with Chinese Indonesian themes started to emerge and the public media began to host programs to include Chinese characters, which were previously absent. However, perhaps due to a lack of understanding of Chinese culture, or due to the assumption that Chineseness is fixed and unchanging, most of such representations were based on caricatures that are both essentialist and stereotypical. For example, Hoon (2008: 69) observed that "Chinese" characters were increasingly appearing in popular Indonesian TV serials known as *sinertron*. In showing that the characters were acting as "Chinese", the actors had to don a "traditional" Chinese costume, and the male wore a pigtail while the female held a silk handkerchief. The show also deployed popular stereotypes of the Chinese, including the emphasis on "Chinese" appearance – slanted eyes (*mata sipit*) – and "Chinese" characteristics – stingy (*pelit*) and money-oriented (*mata duitan*).

Hence, it can be argued that while the newly found openness in the media provided the necessary condition for re-imagining the Chinese Indonesians, it does not ensure a radical shift in a politics of representation as the Chinese can still be "demeaned and disenfranchised" within these representations (Sen 2006: 182). As the example above shows, the representation of Chineseness in mainstream media only focused on essentialist characteristics of Chinese identity, and not the hybridized culture of the Chinese

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[3] Tong's recent study shows that his Chinese Indonesians interviewees still used the socio-cultural distinction of *totok/peranakan* for self-identification (Tong 2010: 142).

Indonesians. While such representation is far from social reality, it raises the questions of how to represent hybridity and whether hybridity can be caricaturized. How would viewers know that a character is "Chinese" if s/he looks, behaves, converses and dresses exactly the same manner as other Indonesians? In other words, are representations of identity possible without essentialism?

The essentialist representation of Chineseness did not just come from external forces but also from within the Chinese community itself. Even though in reality Chineseness is highly contested, hybrid and diverse, community leaders and power elites may appropriate or reinvent certain aspects of primordial Chinese cultural traditions, homogenize them to represent *the* identity of all Chinese in Indonesia. One example of self-essentialism by Chinese organizations is the annual *Koko Cici* beauty competition that has been held in West Jakarta since 2002. *Koko Cici* (Hokkien terms for older brother and older sister) is a contest jointly organised by the Indonesian Chinese Social Association (Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia or PSMTI) and the West Jakarta Municipality.

With the aim of promoting Chinese art and culture and to showcase Indonesia's multiculturalism and to promote tourism in Jakarta, the show invites participants to go through various stages of audition before the final contest which is broadcast live on television. Besides criteria on physical appearance and personal etiquette, preference is given to contestants who have knowledge of Chinese culture and are able to speak Mandarin. The competitors had to wear "traditional" Chinese costumes – red outfit with Chinese collar for males, and a red *cheongsam* for females – during the contest. As ambassadors of the city and representatives of the Chinese community, the winners are expected to wear the same costumes when attending public events. The contest has been so successful that it has, in recent years, expanded its functions to include a beauty school (the KOCI Academy), charity works (KOCI Peduli) and a talk show (KOCI Talk) (see www.kokocicijakarta.com).

The representations of Chineseness in the *Koko Cici* contest demonstrates what Werbner (1997b) referred to as self-essentialism. She maintains that self-essentializing is a rhetorical performance used by ethnic community leaders to invoke a communal identity (Werbner 1997b: 230). In fact, all discursive act of naming or labelling constitute essentialism; all ethnicities, and by its extension, any form of identity, are essentialist. However, Werbner advocates a critical differentiation between essentialism as "objectification", a positive type of collective self-identification, and essentialism as "reification", which distorts and silences difference (1997b: 229). In her words, "[s]elf-essentializing as a mode of reflexive imagining is constitutive of self and subjectivity. It is culturally empowering. But it is not, unlike racist reifications, fixed and immutable" (ibid: 248). In put it in another way, ethnic identity is voluntaristic and positive, while racialization is imposed and negative. In this logic, we recognize that while essentialism can

never be entirely avoided, the motive of any essentialist representation needs to be scrutinized to determine whether it is an act of self-identification or xenophobic reification.

The politics of representation that determines the strategy taken by cultural actors to express a particular version of Chineseness – essentialist or hybrid – depend largely on how agency and power are exercised. Sai and Hoon argue that, the contentious signs of Chineseness, "are here to stay, *particularly in their essentialized and commodified forms*" (2013: 16, italics in original). The negotiation between hybridity and identity in the social, economic and political circumstances of post-Suharto Indonesia shows that primordial Chineseness was privileged in the contestation. While the post-1998 liberalization of cultural expression has provided a fertile ground for the older generation to express their nostalgia for primordial Chineseness in a bid to reclaim their long suppressed identity, a more salient global force is shaping the expression of Chineseness in contemporary Indonesia.

Hybridity and Resinicization: Chineseness as a Cultural Resource

The momentous rise of China as a new global super power has given rise to essentialist discourses of Chineseness among the diasporic Chinese communities (Kuehn, Louie and Pomfret, 2013). New communication technologies have now enabled the global diasporic Chinese community an instant engagement with China's nationalism. In contemporary Indonesia, the refashioning of Chineseness among hybridized Chinese Indonesians resembles, to some extent, the aforementioned "resinicization" of the *peranakan* during the pan-Chinese nationalism movement of the early twentieth century. With the new economic and political dynamics following China's rise, Ien Ang (2013) asks whether there will be spac for vernacular, localized, hybrid Chinese diasporic identity, or whether they will increasingly be overpowered by homogenizing, essentializing and nationalizing forces of a global China. The answer seems rather obvious, at least in the case of the Chinese Indonesians.

In identifying the Chinese Indonesians as an "economic ethnicity", Tong (2010) argues that the survival of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia as a distinct group does not solely depend on traditional cultural markers but also economic ones. Indeed, the ethnic identity of the Chinese Indonesians who grew up during the Suharto's regime is more aptly defined by their class identity – i.e. the middle class position that most of them occupy – rather than by culture because most of them are unfamiliar with Chinese traditions and cultures, and have lost the ability to speak Chinese. The Chinese ethnicity, thus, becomes a form of social capital which allows this community to maintain a common identity through business networks for economic and ethnic survival (Tong 2010: 238).

For Indonesia and many other countries, the rise of China is not just an empty rhetoric but is economically consequential. In 2016, China overtook the United States to be the third investor in Indonesia, after Singapore and Japan, bringing in USD 1.6 billion of foreign direct investment to Indonesia (*Bloomberg News*, 1 November 2016). China's deepening economic ties with Indonesia is also reflected on other ambitious projects to build roads, ports and railways in the archipelago. Furthermore, Indonesia is expected to be the largest beneficiary of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative in Southeast Asia, which aims to pump around USD 87 billion into infrastructure projects (*The Jakarta Globe*, 18 May 2016).

The growing Chinese investments in Southeast Asia provide China an opportunity to build on the role played by the region's Chinese diaspora. Setijadi (2016b) notes that China has been using the metaphor of a "bridge" (*qiao*) to describe the Chinese overseas since the 1970s, signifying the brokerage role of this community to make connections between their host society and their ancestral land. When China first opened up its economy to foreign investments, overseas Chinese accounted for as much as two thirds of the foreign direct investment flows into China. They were able to capitalize their Chineseness and personal networks to mitigate some of the inherent risks faced by non-Chinese investors. Huang (2014) argues that this same group could play a reverse role in facilitating China's outward investment in Southeast Asia. Cognizant of the role of the Chinese diaspora and to leverage on the economic benefits of a relationship with China, Beijing has attempted to exert strategic influence on the Chinese diaspora through soft-power incentives by promoting Chinese language through the establishment of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms worldwide (see Chang 2013; Suryadinata 2017).

Chineseness has now become an indispensable social capital, cultural resource and ethno-commodity that can benefit commercial dealings with China. The economic incentive that China has to offer has become a major impetus for Chinese Indonesians, particularly the younger generation, to "resinicize" by reconnecting their clan connections, learning Mandarin and enthusiastically consuming Chinese cultural products (Hoon 2008). Setijadi (2016b) observes that Chinese Indonesian entrepreneurs would strategically perform their Chineseness as a way of creating a sense of primordial affinity when dealing with their counterparts from China. However, while they may share linguistic and cultural similarities, observers argue that most ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia do not have affinity with China beyond purely economic interests and investment's profitability (Chang 2013; Huang 2014; Tong 2010: 247).

Conclusion

As a transgressive concept that blurs and traverse the boundaries by which identities are bounded, hybridity is the antithesis to identity. Because of their inability to authenticate with primordial and essentialist

characteristics of identity, hybrid subjects are seen as impure, contaminated and even dangerous. Between the poles of identity and hybridity lies the multiple positions that depends on how agency and power are exercised. In the discussion of the identity of Chinese in Indonesia, this paper has demonstrated that historical, social, political, and economic contexts play a central role in the positionality on which an ethnic subjects takes. The history of the *peranakan* in Indonesia shows a constant negotiation between hybridization and identity. Under a particular historical circumstance, they resinicized when they perceived that their residual Chineseness was in threat of total disappearance into the local community; in another instance, their resinicization was inspired by the pan-Chinese nationalism and prompted by their longing for cultural belonging and identity.

The post-Suharto resurgence of Chineseness shows the persistent nature of identity even under the most draconian assault such as the assimilation policy of the New Order. The fact that the post-1998 scene is dominated by expressions of primordial Chineseness bears testament to the monumental role of economic power in cultural and identity politics. The agendas of the older generation business elites, in tandem with the rise of China, created a situation where the organic, daily experience of hybrid Chineseness to be mitigated by the hegemonic, essentialist and nationalistic Chineseness, which is seen as more authentic, and economically relevant. Because hybridity is not included in the current representation of Chineseness, hybridized Chinese, like their *peranakan* predecessors, have to subject themselves to resinicization in order to be able to access Chineseness as a cultural resource. In this manner, Chinese Indonesians use self-essentialism as a political or economic strategy to achieve solidarity or affinity with global China. Although in reality, post-Suharto Chineseness can never be a simple return to a Chinese primordial identity nor should any particular version of Chineseness be reified as "authentic" – because "authenticity" is always relative and contextual –; it is important to recognize that "identity" is never an objective description of one's state of being but a political process defined by complex dynamics of power relations.

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