

# The Phenomenon of Strong Rooted Negative Sentiments Against Chinese Ethnic in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Despite the fact that ethnic Chinese have lived in Indonesia for a very long period, particularly from the time of Dutch colonialism there, they have continued to experience discrimination and bad attitudes in their daily lives. This study aims to describe the phenomenon of prejudice against people of Chinese ancestry in Indonesia, explain the traits of Indonesians that contribute to prejudice against people of Chinese ancestry, and identify the social and political effects of the strong prejudice against people of Chinese ancestry that exists in Indonesia. The findings of this study, which used a constructivist methodology from international relations and qualitative research techniques, suggest that the failure of Indonesians to forge a strong collective identity is what leads to the escalation of prejudice against ethnic Chinese in that country. The outcome also demonstrates that the gradual treatment of Chinese ethnic minorities as equals after Indonesian independence highlights the urgent necessity for the government to act as an agent capable of altering social structures and fostering a sense of unity.

**Key Words:** Ethnicity, Discrimination, Indonesia, Chinese, Constructivism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The lengthy history of progress and global trade has made it possible for Chinese people (ethnicity) to travel to Indonesia, which was formerly known as Nusantara. According to government records, the earliest Chinese settlers in the archipelago arrived about the seventh century BC, or more specifically, during the Tang Dynasty (Putri, 2018). However, there are estimations that ethnic Chinese arrived in Indonesia as early as the Han Dynasty or even earlier, between 206 and 220 BC, when it was recognized that a trading route had opened from China to Southeast Asia and Java (Gunawan, 2020). These documents suggest that the Chinese have long interacted with other ethnic groups and have even assimilated into Indonesian society.

Despite this, since the time of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, people of Chinese descent have faced prejudice and hostility in all aspects of daily life, including the legal system. It should be mentioned that the Netherlands enforced regulations restricting movement for ethnic Chinese during the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia, one of which was represented by the *Wijkenstelsel* rule, which excluded ethnic Chinese in terms of settlement or choice of place of abode (Lohanda, 2005). Additionally, the Dutch colonial authority put into effect the *passenstelsel* law, which controls explicitly the requirement for ethnic Chinese people to have a travel

permit if they want to conduct their activities for trade and other objectives (Ainurrahman, 2018). This rule was put into effect due to the ethnic Chinese's refusal to engage in local warfare in Java's coastal cities against the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), who were allied with high-ranking officials on the island of Java. (Firdausi, 2020).

Indonesia only attained independence after a protracted war involving ethnic Chinese. At that point, people of this ethnicity are regarded as *Warga Negara Indonesia* (WNI) / Indonesians Citizens. However, in comparison to other Indonesians, Chinese citizens in Indonesia experience poor social and political conditions that derive from the narrative and perception among Indonesians that people of Chinese ethnicity control the nation's economy. This circumstance frequently makes this ethnic group the target of animosity from other locals (Darini, 2005), it has become more wicked because this ethnic group also received negative sentiments and discriminatory treatment from the Indonesian government. One such discriminatory treatment is reflected in the management of permits, which seems to be a difficult thing for citizens of this ethnic group. Indonesian citizens who have Chinese descent or ethnicity, previously had to go through complicated provisions that required those citizens to have Proof of Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia / *Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan Republik Indonesia* (SBKRI) (Nugroho, 2018).

Image 1. Discriminatory demonstration against Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (BTP) / Ahok



Source: Bengkulu Ekspres, 2016

The closest phenomenon that shows ethnic Chinese as the target of hatred and negative sentiments of the

Indonesian people, occurred in the process of the Regional Head Election / *Pemilihan Kepala Daerah* (Pilkada) in the Special Capital Region / *Daerah Khusus Ibukota* (DKI) Jakarta in 2017. At that time Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (BTP) who was a citizen of Chinese ethnicity had a political contest with Anies Baswedan who was generally known and have an identity as a local man. BTP who represent ethnic Chinese are faced with indigenous-non-indigenous issues that were exhaled during the campaign period (Aziz, 2018), the issue was raised to reduce the gain of support for BTP. This shows that the economic and political inequality obtained by the Chinese in Indonesia is a phenomenon that cannot be measured from one time only, considering that each presidential era in Indonesia has a different discourse for the existence of certain community groups in Indonesia (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

Furthermore, the Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which started in China, has also become a trigger for the Indonesian people to attack the Chinese ethnics in Indonesia (Basuki, 2020). Therefore, the author feels that the application of the International Relations perspective, which also involves the level of analysis at the domestic level, is expected to provide a clearer description of the phenomenon of negative sentiment directed at the Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia, as well as to be the beginning of efforts to combat negative sentiments from the public aimed at these ethnic group.

This study applies a constructivist approach which is an approach that focuses on identity and the interaction between structures and agents (Smith, 2015), which in this study refers to the social structure of society. Meanwhile, the agent referred to in this study refers to the Indonesian government. Constructivism was chosen considering that ethnicity is one aspect that represents individual and group identity and will be an appropriate approach to analyze and interpret social constructions that are the source of negative sentiments in Indonesian society towards ethnic Chinese in Indonesia.

The question that will be answered in this research is "Why is the negative sentiment towards ethnic Chinese deeply rooted in Indonesia?" Then this study also aims to describe the phenomenon of negative sentiment towards the Chinese ethnic, explain the characteristics of the Indonesian people that give rise to negative sentiments towards the Chinese as well as identify the social and political impacts given by the strong negative sentiment that exists in Indonesia towards Chinese Indonesian citizens. This research is also expected to be able to provide new views and insights for readers regarding the phenomenon of negative sentiment towards ethnic Chinese that occurs widely and is deeply rooted in Indonesia. This research is important considering that Indonesia is a country that has various ethnicities, races, and religions, which makes segregation and social discrimination towards ethnic minorities happen. With a constructivist approach, it is hoped that this research will be able to provide a new perspective to enhance the effort to overcome the

symptoms of the threat of intolerance which at any time, can turn into an intra-state conflict in Indonesia due to the bullying of ethnic minorities (Savitri, 2019).

## II. METHODOLOGY

To interpret specific social phenomena and create new meaning and knowledge as a result, this article analysis utilized the qualitative technique, which places an emphasis on the application of interpretive/theoretical frameworks (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the primary sources of this research are collected from official records and interviews with Indonesian Chinese citizens living in Jakarta. Whilst the secondary materials were collected from books, journal papers, and other studies that covered the same subject. These data are then reviewed utilizing the constructivist theoretical frameworks that are thought to be an appropriate point of view to be used in this research topic to generate a complete and understandable conclusion.

Constructivism is a part of theory from international relations studies. This theory believes that identity plays a vital role in creating interest and in turn the actions taken by actors (both individuals and countries) in their interactions in social life. Alexander Wendt as one of the theorists argues that Kenneth Waltz's definition of three dimensions of political structure, namely the ordering principle, the differentiation principle, and the distribution of abilities, has unwittingly analyzed the behavior of actors but failed to define the structure of identity and interest (Art & Jervis, 2016, p. 86). Thus, further analysis of identity and interest should be conducted to answer the phenomenon related to behavior of actors.

Constructivism theory assumes that the normative aspects and existing material structures will ultimately determine the identity of an actor (which in this study refers to ethnicity) in shaping political action and their interaction patterns with other actors (Burchill, 2013: 188). Social constructivism theory has a basic belief that the way an actor acts towards other objects/actors will be based on the meanings or values that these other objects/actors have for them (Art & Jervis, 2016, p. 86), and it will be suitable to see the interaction between ethnic groups belonging to indigenous Indonesians and ethnic Chinese because this theory focuses on non-material structures (Burchill, 2013, p. 197).

## III. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In terms of politics, Indonesia's progress toward a democratic system does not necessarily engender a sense of justice for all facets of society. When faced with the fact that ethnic identity is still an issue and looks to be an integral element of state life, the guarantee of every right owned by citizens to equalize possibilities for every individual is considered as something unrealistic. This condition occurs because ethnic, religious, and political identity is difficult to separate, especially in a multi-ethnic country like Indonesia. Indonesian society seems to forget the fact that a person's diversity is more influenced by heredity and environment,

which incidentally is not a free choice because the place of birth, skin color, language, and religion are primordial realities that are accepted by a person and are not the result of one's own efforts as a natural catalyst for the process of social change that occurs (Castells, 2010, p. xvii).

Ethnicity as a category in political science develops along with changing patterns of identity politics. In a closed political regime, ethnicity is something that continues to be eliminated from the political arena. However, ethnicity continues to have a role in identity politics that often disrupts the stage of the power latent. Meanwhile, in an open political regime, ethnicity is one aspect that continues to develop and the space for expression is getting wider. It is not surprising that ethnicity is often used as a basis for legitimizing socio-political history and political structures at the regional level, especially during the campaign phase when individual actors are involved in contesting in general elections, as in the case of Basuki Tjahja Purnama or Ahok.

Even if the phenomenon of Ahok is can have multiple interpretations since it is also having an inter-religious conflict dimension, Ahok has offended the Muslim majority by criticizing the use of verses in the Quran as a political tool. This condition continues to have implications for the dynamics of Indonesian politics which are closely related to the issue of diversity which often triggers disharmony between groups. Differences based on diversity in Indonesia have many historical records as a major factor in the emergence of conflicts. The conflict is growing not only as a conflict between one identity but has entered a new phase as a conflict between identities. It is also a clear reflection that in *realpolitik* Chinese ethnic remained to be discriminated against in society, where they only get access to limited business activity because of the "Banteng economic movement system" (Idris, 2021), as a policy to drive local citizen (*Pribumi*) to develop their trading and business to be able to compete with Chinese ethnic.

From that condition, Indonesia has encountered the expansion of conflicts between identities as part of the democratization process multiple times, which is more can be described as a "wild democracy" (Lestari Y. S., 2018, p. 20). One of the identity conflicts that occur is the conflict between the indigenous and the Chinese / Chinese, which starts from sentiments that arise due to prejudice or bias that devalues people because of their perception of membership in a social group (Abrams, 2010, p. 3). Thus, further understanding of identity and the emergence of the phenomenon of negative sentiment aimed at the Chinese must be based on an understanding of the history of these ethnic groups in Indonesia.

In historical records, ethnic groups originating from mainland China have visited and inhabited the archipelago for thousands of years. China's location which is geographically closer to Southeast Asia has caused the largest population immigration from that country hundreds of years ago in this region. Some of the oldest records were written by clergy,

such as Fa Hien in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and I Ching in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Fa Hien reported from a kingdom in Java whilst I Ching stopped in the archipelago to learn Sanskrit from someone named Janabhadra, before continuing his journey to India to study Buddhism. With the development of the kingdoms in the archipelago, Chinese immigrants began to arrive, especially for trade purposes. In inscriptions from Java, the Chinese are mentioned as foreigners who settled in addition to the names of ethnic groups from the archipelago, mainland Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent (Hartati, 2020, pp. 1-12). By boat, they sailed to a new land and escaped from the hardships of life in their country. The immigrants were able to play a strong economic role even though the countries they visited were still under the colonies of other countries. In Indonesia, the colonial political economy policies that made the indigenous population economically weaker created a general hatred towards ethnic Chinese based on economic sentiment (Dhani, 2016).

The anti-Chinese riots that occurred in Indonesia can be considered as manifestation of displeasure arising from unequal economic competition. This antipathy is frequently used by irresponsible parties through political pressure, violent acts, or discrimination disguised as economic nationalism or indigenization initiatives. The reason for the hatred needs to be examined from a cultural standpoint in addition to being sufficiently explained using a structural approach. Chinese people have assimilated in a variety of ways, including by marrying local women (particularly noblewomen) and embracing their cultures' religious practices to promote integration naturally. The anticipated outcome is that their economic contribution is seen as a national asset without racial bias (Kodiran, 2012, p. 22).

In Indonesia, the Chinese who carry out this assimilation is called the *Peranakan*. However, in its development, the assimilation efforts which were facilitated by the conditions of the arrival of migrants who were previously alone or without families. The assimilation process became late because the second wave that came around the 1870s to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century mostly brought families. This is one of the factors that can explain why the intensity of dislike for ethnic Chinese is so deeply rooted (Subekti, 1998, p. 5). In addition, the problem of negative sentiment towards ethnic Chinese strengthened during the Dutch colonial era. People of Chinese descent living in Indonesia at that time were treated racistly. Even the earliest anti-Chinese riots in Batavia in 1740 were started by the Dutch (European) populace. Regulations for racial and religious transfer have been developed after that incident. The Chinese had to live in Chinese villages, and they had to bring "medium" with them when they traveled within or between villages. To preserve their economic monopoly, the Dutch strengthened the regulations under the *Wijkenstelsel* and *Passenstelsel* (pass and settlement system) system from 1830 to 1837. This system restricted Chinese people's freedom of movement and created a system of forced agriculture. (Firdausi, 2020).



Increasingly assertive racist policies have also emerged since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch East Indies government divided the population into three groups: Europeans, Foreign Easterners (Chinese, Arabs, and others), and natives. Dutch colonial officials were also very well known for their anti-Chinese sentiments (Ham, 2009, p. 24). One of them was Baud, a Dutch Colonial minister who was famous for being anti-Chinese Indies even though he was a lawyer in Batavia who became rich because he handled many Chinese cases. Anti-Chinese sentiment peaked around the era of *Ethicche Politics* or began in the 1900s. The reason is none other than the desire to protect the natives from the greed and cunning of Chinese traders. From the perspective of Dutch officials who were passionate about ethical politics, at that time the natives were considered "Naive like a child". Anti-Chinese sentiments from other Indonesian officials and elites today may also stem from anti-Chinese sentiments inherited from Dutch colonial officials. This is because many aspects of the post-colonial state are colonial or derived from it.

In addition to legal protection, the prosperity of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies also emerged because of their position as trading partners of the Netherlands. One of the sources of wealth for the Chinese was the sale of the right to collect taxes from the Dutch government, for example on the sale of opium, pawnshop permits, and so on, to them through a patch system that was carried out on the grounds of protecting the natives. The monopoly was only taken over by the Dutch East Indies government in 1905 and deprived the Chinese of one of the largest sources of income and tightened freedom of movement for China. The reaction also emerged in the form of a movement that demanded emancipation or equal rights with the Dutch (Europeans) for the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies. This Chinese movement was the first political-social movement in the Dutch East Indies, but it was very exclusive. This movement consisted only of the Chinese and for the sake of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies. Since then, apartheid characterizes all movements and associations in the Dutch East Indies. Around 1910 most of China's demands were met. *Wijkenstelsel* and *Passenstelsel* which restrict the movement of ethnic Chinese are repealed and there is no longer a need to live in Chinese villages. The Chinese were declared subjects of the Dutch East Indies, or the Queen of the Netherlands, and Dutch civil law was applied to the Chinese including Western family law with inheritance, marriage, and so on. Only in the field of criminal law, the Chinese are still equated with the natives and not with Europeans (Muntholib, 2008, p. 107).

During pre-independence history, several times the Chinese were the target of mass killings or looting, such as the massacre in Batavia in 1740, the Javanese war massacre of 1825–1830, to the riots in May 1998 (Lestari S., 2018). Entering the era of democracy and reform in terms of political, economic, and social aspects in Indonesia, public and world trust regarding Indonesia began to recover and became a sign of good and positive change. However,

Indonesia's macroeconomic conditions, which are recognized as good, do not go hand in hand with microeconomics. This creates high rates of unemployment and poverty so there are huge social inequalities. This condition has led to rampant social unrest in Indonesia, which generally leads to ethnic Chinese, as scapegoats in the riots because they are considered as an ethnic group who generally have good economic conditions. Even though there are not many ethnic Chinese who are classified as rich, the majority of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia belong to the lower middle class. Like in Tangerang and Singkawang, for example, ethnic Chinese live normally and work like other small people (Khasanah, 2018, p. 24), although it is true that some people of Chinese descent control the Indonesian economy that is only about 2% of the Indonesian population (Himawan, 2020).

From research conducted by Eunike M. Himawan (2020), prejudice against ethnic Chinese arises because of the economic gap between indigenous people and ethnic Chinese. Where the indigenous people see the gap occurs because the Chinese dominate the economy. It can be assumed that these sentiments arise from prejudice or negative judgments against a social group that is not based on direct experience and are only based on personal or group beliefs. Negative prejudice against ethnic Chinese has been formed since the New Order government, and sentiments against Chinese ethnic emerged after former president Soeharto came to power. During his leadership, Soeharto tried to eliminate the legacy of the previous president Soekarno who was close to China by removing all Chinese influence, including limiting the rights of citizens of Chinese descent. Since the New Order, citizens of Chinese descent have had to abandon all Chinese attributes, including changing their names to indigenous names. This categorization raises stark differences and leads to prejudice.

Recent events surrounding the Covid-19 Pandemic have exposed the ethnic Chinese community to prejudice once more, as well as the perception of being "unhygienic" and "dirty," which is growing due to the claim that the virus originated in China because of their abnormal eating habits (Fiady, 2020). If we look further, negative perceptions of ethnic Chinese have occurred since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Opium War, negative perceptions of these ethnic groups have developed because of the narrative that calls them "sick people in East Asia" (Scott, 2008, p. 9). The idea that ethnic Chinese immigrants to North America have inadequate cleanliness standards and are more prone to illness is one that only grows stronger. The behavior might be categorized as xenophobia, which is an extreme hatred of or prejudices against people from other countries. The word "phobia" that it contains has more to do with social and political complexities than it does with simple dread. The Covid-19 pandemic now appears to be an excuse for engaging in discriminating conduct and even reviving xenophobia in society.

This condition cannot be separated from the assumption that ethnic Chinese are foreigners in Indonesia. The concept of "outsiders" arises from the public's understanding of nationalism or national identity as a way of

identifying anyone who can be called a citizen. Daniel Chirot, a professor of sociology from the United States, investigated this type of Indonesian nationalism. Furthermore, Chirot uses the categorization of the American sociologist Liah Greenfeld who divides nationalism into two types, namely ethnic nationalism, and civic nationalism. Where ethnic nationalism as a national identity is formed based on one ethnicity or blood ties of one group, and civil nationalism refers to a national identity resulting from shared values across ethnic groups and community groups. According to Chirot, Indonesia falls into the second category (Chirot & Reid, 1997, pp. 31-32). Identification of a citizen is done by determining whether the person is of a genuine ethnicity or not. Unfortunately, the Chinese are not included. The construction of "outsiders" is attached to the community because this group does not have territorial attachments attached to them. Like the Sundanese, for example, which is synonymous with West Java. In addition, Chirot also emphasized that Indonesia is a country that prioritizes communal views over individuals. This attitude of togetherness encourages group competition to be sharp. Oftentimes, the economic success of the Chinese people fuels the envy and hatred of other societies. A Dutch anthropologist and historian, Freek Colombijn, said that the violence that commonly occurs in Indonesia between indigenous people and minority immigrant communities occurs due to the construction of the identity of the immigrant community as "outsiders" (Basuki, 2020).

In the political context, the relationship between the government and ethnic Chinese can be considered as a patron-client relationship or a system of reciprocal arrangements between someone who has authority, social status, wealth, or other personal resources (patrons). In this case, ethnic Chinese and other people who benefit from their support or influence (clients) which in this case refers to government actors or political elites (Rothstein, 1979, p. 28). The democratization and free market economy that entered Indonesia, made ethnic minorities, especially the Chinese, dominate the economy and created an inequality gap. In his dissertation entitled "Chinese Big Business in Indonesia: The State of Capital", Christian Chua said that currently the capitalist Chinese, do not only control the economy, but post-reform they have controlled the country. Christian Chua also described that there was a transition of capitalist China from the "Bureaucratic capitalism" era in the New Order era, then the "Oligarchic Capitalism" period around the 80s to 1998 to the next period of "Plutocratic Capitalism", where the power of capitalist China which initially took refuge in the politico-bureaucrat finally now has superior strength. In a democracy, initially, the capitalists were shocked because they had to offer many concessions to the spreading center of power. However, in line with democracy that relies on money politics, back-of-power politics has returned to the lap of the capitalists. Plutocracy means "the rule of wealth". In politics, "plutocratic capitalism" means a state controlled by the rich. Sometimes a similar term is "Corporatocracy", to denote large corporations that control the state, not individual entrepreneurs. The speed and acceleration of the accumulation of assets of these

capitalists made Jeffrey Winter interested in researching further the closeness of the economic elite and government in the Indonesian democratic system. Winter stated that the wealth gap between the oligarchs and the average citizen in Indonesia is the worst in the world (Winters, 2013, p. 8).

From the previous discussion, it can be considered that a shared identity between Indonesian citizens who do have local ethnicity or are not *Peranakan* or ethnic Chinese, and citizens who have Chinese ancestry cannot yet be created. The condition in which many successful economic actors have Chinese ancestry makes the gaps that appear in the eyes of society so prominent. This is what then makes constructivist theorists believe that the identity of actors (in this case people and their perceptions of other ethnicities) will be important because identity will inform their interests and actions (Smith, 2015, p. 197). Collective identity defined by Francesca Polletta and James Jasper as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection to a wider community, category, practice, or institution", (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) in Indonesia is something that cannot be achieved. The collective identity of a group is often expressed through the culture and traditions of the group as if it cannot fuse the differences between "*Pribumi*" (indigenous) and Indonesian citizens with ethnic Chinese which are one unit. Although indeed the initial identity of the Chinese ethnic group came from outside the Indonesian community. In the end, a collective identity, according to experts, can only be formed on the acceptance of group members towards that identity (Polletta & Jasper, 2001), which becomes very difficult to achieve especially because of such a large difference in the context of belief (Religion). Even though in the era of *reformasi*, particularly starting from Abdurrahman Wahid administration, those ethnic Chinese people were then allowed to get access to politics, create or involving in a political party, and celebrate cultural and religious ceremonies.

Religious issues that have emerged in the past few years have quickly spread to become problems of race and class. For example, we can see how racist messages showing public anger and hatred towards ethnic Chinese appeared in anti-Ahok demonstrations, which were aimed not only at the governor but also at ethnic Chinese as a group that is not an integral part of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Protesters called Ahok's notoriously violent character a testament to the arrogance and sense of superiority of Indonesians over ethnic Chinese (Walden, 2017). This negative view also clearly reflects that many of the public (mostly *Pribumi*) do have a long-rooted distaste for Chinese ethnicity. In the end, this is also a weakness for institutions (in this case Indonesia) to overcome various problems through collective action.

Fundamental differences in culture, character, and religion make it difficult for indigenous people to be close friends with Indonesians with ethnic Chinese. There are even those who argue that marriage between ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese is inappropriate. This can be formed from history that mixed marriages between people with ethnic Chinese and

indigenous people are seen as providing benefits for both parties. For indigenous couples, taking a partner with ethnic Chinese can be economically advantageous. From the point of view of people with ethnic Chinese (especially during the New Order era) marrying into an indigenous family is seen as a good way to assimilate and show a willingness to practice Indonesian culture, especially if the ethnic Chinese couple converts to the religion of the majority of Indonesian people, namely Islam (Setijadi, 2019, p. 204). In this case, indeed Indonesian citizens, both indigenous and ethnic Chinese, are more concerned with interests that in the constructivist view are considered narrow and in the most efficient way possible (Smith, 2015, p. 193). Even though inter-ethnic marriages such as ethnic Chinese and ethnic Makassarese can be an example of acculturation that results in enormous cultural changes in Makassar (Nancy, 2021).

From a constructivist view which states that agents and structures which in this case refer to society and government rules can shape each other (Smith, 2015, p. 197) Researchers see that the phenomenon of negative sentiment that occurs and continues to strengthen against ethnic Chinese shows that the interactions that exist between the government that form a structure in the form of rules have not been able to bring up an identity that can unite ethnic Chinese in Indonesia with society in general. Regardless of whether the opinion regarding the control of national economic activities that commonly seen in the hands of ethnic Chinese (Karmela & Pamungkas, 2017, p. 56). The government as an agent that forms the structure should be able to form new opinions that can balance the narrative that leads to hatred and complaints over the domination of one of these ethnic groups.

From the results of an interview with one of ethnic Chinese that living in Jakarta, there is a statement that the government's role in accommodating the rights of a citizen, for now is much better, although it is still far from neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Singapore, where ethnic Chinese in these countries He has held several political and government positions (Untung, 2021). The informant also said that the government cannot be separated from regulations that create discrimination, such as the requirement to have an SKBRI which in the end makes citizens of Chinese ethnicity place the statement "Follow Mother" to fill in the citizenship column. This creates a sense of distinction and makes it difficult to manage documents that can be used for daily purposes, both for business and education. In addition, in daily life, the interviewees stated that the call "China" with a mocking tone was often received both on the streets and public transportation (Untung, 2021). This is certainly one of the serious obstacles to fostering kinship between the indigenous and ethnic communities. Theoretically, it can be considered that regardless of the difficulties faced, the idealism possessed by ethnic Chinese in Indonesia to achieve a better standard of living than they have so far is formed from challenges and high work ethic because they feel that their position in Indonesia is to be an immigrant in the land of the others (Karmela & Pamungkas, 2017, p. 59), even though

it is clear that Law No. 12 of 2006 concerning Citizenship has become the basis that on Indonesian earth there are no longer Natives and non-Indigenous. Following the words contained in the Law, namely "Those who become Indonesian citizens are the people of the original Indonesian nation and people of other nations who are legalized by law as citizens". From the statement of the source person, it can be assumed that there is currently no confusion about nationality to which the ethnic Chinese must answer.

There is a response that the Chinese ethnicity tends to be exclusive even though as previously discussed, they are no strangers in the history of Indonesian society. It has been centuries and generations of ethnic Chinese living in Indonesia with the Indonesian way of life as well. Historian Ong Hok Ham in an anthology of the History of the *Peranakan* Chinese in Java said that the impression of exclusivity that emerged from social history and political history in Java had a great influence on whether one population group was merged (Ham, 2009, p. 36). On the other hand, the negative utterances that are often obtained by ethnic Chinese from a group of people who claim to be the most indigenous, make them avoid when they see a crowd or group on the side of the road, then choose a place that is considered safe from the possibility of being disturbed (Untung, 2021). These descriptions and conditions can be considered as one of the reasons why the ethnic Chinese community feels alienated, which arises because they are lazy to socialize and get acquainted if they are not treated well. They believe that it is better to focus on their own business and the important thing is not to disturb others (Untung, 2021). This statement is consistent with the belief of constructivist thinkers that ultimately imagination, communication, and true constraints influence what actors see as areas of possibility including how they think they should act, what perceived limits to their actions and what strategies they can envision. , to achieve their goals (Smith, 2015, p. 198). Furthermore, the statement also shows that the tendency of ethnic Chinese to be in separate communities is carried out to avoid the very real threat of verbal violence.

When confirming the development of negative sentiment from time to time, the interviewees said that after the reform era they became more courageous in expressing their opinions and expressing their desire to get the same rights and obligations as other ethnic groups (Untung, 2021). Post-reform rules give rise to institutionalized norms and ideas to condition what is deemed necessary and possible by actors (ethnic Chinese), both in practical and ethical terms (Smith, 2015, p. 198). Just like other Indonesian citizens, ethnic Chinese also feel themselves, nationalists, because the country of Indonesia is the place where they were born and live, the research informant also said that he had no desire to return to the land of origin of his ancestors, let alone to move and settle there. The source person also argues that the nationalism that is echoed today makes ethnic minorities the target of comparison, especially the Chinese are considered not too concerned and only think about themselves (Untung,



2021). Concerning realistic steps that can be taken in the problem of existing negative sentiments, Indonesian citizens with ethnicities both majority and other minorities must be more open and play an active role, get along with all groups, and do not consider themselves better and others worse, according to the constructivist view, which believes that engagement is productive through institutionalized norms (*Norms Making Process*) will be able to shape the identity and interests of actors (Smith, 2015, p. 203), both citizens with Chinese ethnicity and citizens with other ethnicities who are united and accept the differences that exist.

The results of the interview show that Chinese ethnicity Indonesians, who make up less than two percent of Indonesia's population, do play a disproportionate role in the economy and it is undeniable that their non-Muslim status also makes them targets of suspicion in the eyes of Islamist groups, then use various means to fake news to revive anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia. This trend has drawn criticism from other countries, especially from China, which stated that this condition was very worrying (GlobalRiskInsight.com, 2016). The historical relationship of the Chinese ethnicity with communism as previously discussed also makes this ethnic group more vulnerable to negative sentiments, they are even considered scapegoats for the country's economic downturn during the Asian financial crisis because of their involvement in the economy. Recent anti-China sentiment has also been fueled by China's growing economic influence in Indonesia, widespread claims that imported Chinese products have been deliberately infected with bacteria, and concerns that mainland Chinese workers are taking up most of the locally available jobs (Rakhmat & Aryansyah, 2020) become one of the fuels of the strengthening of negative sentiment towards these ethnic groups in the country.

Image 2 Sample Letter of Indonesian Embassy for Indonesian Citizens with Chinese ethnicity (SKBRI)



Source: Author Documentation, 2021

It is even more ironic because currently, many Indonesians on social media use the term "Chinese virus" to refer to COVID-19. Even some conservative religious figures are calling for a fatwa, or religious decree, to ban Indonesians of Chinese ethnicity and Chinese nationals from entering Indonesia. This sentiment is clearly illustrated by the MUI Secretary General, Anwar Abbas, who stated that the presence of ethnic Chinese who are free to enter and leave this country has hurt the Indonesian people, and if this continues, it will certainly build people's trust towards government becomes problematic and it is certainly not good for the life of this nation and country in the future (Nafi'an, 2020). This statement illustrates that the negative sentiments of indigenous people in Indonesia are deeply rooted, and even penetrated the level of government institutions.

The strong negative sentiment towards ethnic Chinese has also given rise to popular conspiracy theories among Indonesians that Jokowi is secretly a puppet of ethnic Chinese Indonesians, and that Jokowi is selling Indonesia for Chinese economic and political gain (Daulay, 2021). This condition is a concrete manifestation of constructivism's belief that important aspects of the relationship between actors are constructed by history and society, not the absolute impact of human nature or other political characteristics (Jackson & Nexon, 2001, p. 93). It is also not surprising that later amid of the ongoing pandemic, some Indonesians claim that the COVID-19 pandemic is a god punishment / "azab" or a backlash (karma) for Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, some even describe the pandemic as a warning from God in response to China's policies, even though the government and several religious figures have also conveyed to the public that the virus that has become a pandemic is not related to religious teachings (Taher, 2020).

At the international level, negative sentiment toward ethnic Chinese and Chinese in Indonesia is believed to create an unfavorable environment for Chinese investments and projects in Indonesia. The development of negative sentiment towards ethnic Chinese can also hinder the Indonesian government's efforts to improve the country's economy which is undeniably very dependent on China. It becomes more complicated because many Indonesian Indigenous people have asked the government to cut ties with China and stop Chinese investment in this country (Rakhmat & Aryansyah, 2020). If we refer to the results of Charlotte Setijadi's research which states that Indonesians who are at the middle-income level are the most uncomfortable with the idea of ethnic Chinese in positions of political power (Setijadi, 2017), so the social symptoms shown by the rejection and significant development of negative sentiments towards ethnic Chinese are something that is truly worrying for Indonesia, especially in realizing the ideals of cooperation and social justice for all its people. It is undeniable that the repeal of discriminatory laws against ethnic Chinese has not been effective in preventing negative sentiments against these ethnicities because of the discriminatory bias that must be continuously

faced and overcome by ethnic Chinese minorities who are socially and economically stratospherically different.

Furthermore, it can be considered that regime change is unable to address the causes of discrimination against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. It can be assumed that the structural reasons behind discrimination against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia will always exist. The statement is based on the understanding that ethnic roots are determined legally and biologically and will continue to expose them to discrimination. Moreover, there is an argument that ethnic Chinese are “*a diverse and socially active group, whose history and agency are heterogeneous and locally embedded and cannot be homogenized into a single framework*” (Post, 2010, p. 3). However, in Indonesia, these differences (for example, the separation of pure Chinese / “*totok*” and crossbreed Chinese) become something that is not too important, because basically, other Indonesian people do not differentiate between ethnic Chinese who have long been described as stingy, scary and dangerous because it is historically related to communism (Walujono, 2014, p. 65). Thus, the author believes the Indonesian political elite fully understands that religion is naturally divisive, especially if it is complemented by negative sentiments towards certain ethnicities. From the discussion in this section, it can be assumed that there is an overgeneralization which is not impossible to create horizontal conflict between ethnic Chinese and part of the indigenous ethnic groups who have strong anti-Chinese sentiments.

Post-Indonesian independence can be seen as a moment where Chinese ethnic are treated equally in a gradual way. In the beginning, they have access to the economy even if it is limited due to the *banteng* movement economic system. In the next regime, they begin to be allowed in running social, religious and cultural life, including celebrating their religious day and conducting cultural ceremonies. Hopefully, this trend would avoid the Chinese ethnic experience of violence, like what happened in 1998. Remembering that collective action will not occur without the existence of “we” / collective identity, thus it is the Indonesian government’s homework to characterize a common nature and specific solidarity. whilst equally important to identify “those” who are responsible for the mobilization of actors that spread the prejudice against Chinese ethnics. Because the requirements of collective identities such as shared orientations, values, attitudes, worldviews, and lifestyles, as well as shared experiences of action, do construct after digitalization widely developed to support widespread of information and knowledge.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

One of the factors that are the reason for the strengthening of negative sentiment toward ethnic Chinese in Indonesia is that the collective identity of the Indonesian people as a unit has not yet been achieved. This makes ethnic Chinese become one of the isolated ethnic groups who are the target of anger and hatred that arise from the lack of communication and conditions in which they are considered

as immigrants or outsiders. The condition of Indonesian politics, especially when it comes to general elections, often becomes a momentum that creates tension and unfounded accusations against ethnic Chinese, so the government needs to ensure that political contestation becomes an arena that can bring many benefits directly to the community, not just become an arena that creates a gap between certain ethnic groups.

The written rules that have been made by the government, have not been fully understood by the public so people still think that the Chinese are a different and foreign ethnicity to them. Thus, the Indonesian government, as an agent that deals directly with the structure, needs to provide more forums that allow ethnic Chinese to mingle with other communities. The Indonesian government also needs to encourage the public to be more active in realizing Pancasila values which are full of meaning regarding respect for existing differences.

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