
Struggling for Multiculturalism: The Revival of Chinese Festivals in Three Cities of Java during the Post-Reformation Era and Its Challenges

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ABSTRACT

In the Reformation era, the Chinese-Indonesians enjoy more freedom in expressing their ethnic identity in the public sphere, which was once oppressed under Soeharto's New Order (1967-1998). The return of the Chinese festivals appears to indicate the end of discrimination and the celebration of multiculturalism, which recognizes the acculturation between the Chinese and local cultures. However, several festivals received backlash and resentment from local Islamic groups. Based on fieldwork and observation on the Chinese New Year folk festivals 2019-2020 in Semarang, Solo, and Yogyakarta, this article describes the socio-political dimensions behind the revival of Chinese New Year folk festivals. The findings show that while Chinese cultural icons become obvious, these folk festivals accommodate the acculturation between the Chinese and local ethnic and/or religious cultures, which made them closer to the expression of hybrid and multicultural identities. However, the Islamic groups still felt the exposure of Chinese culture was beyond limit and the hybridity is disturbing the Islamic faith. They protested to limit or cancel these festivals. In mitigating the protests and conflicts, the local governments tend to take pragmatic problem solutions, rather than educating the public regarding multiculturalism and tolerance.

Keywords: *Chinese-Indonesians; folk festivals; identity politics; multiculturalism; Islamic Conservatism*

INTRODUCTION

During Soeharto's New Order regime (1966-1998), the Chinese-Indonesians experienced strict repression that disallowed them to celebrate cultural and religious festivals in the public sphere. Under the Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967, the Chinese culture, language, media, and schools had been fading away from public sphere and even from the habit and memory of many Chinese-Indonesian families. Chinese identity became politically incompatible with the New Order's assimilationist policy, which made younger Chinese-Indonesians grow up with limited knowledge about their ancestral culture and tradition.

The situation changed significantly when President Abdurrachman Wahid (1999-2001), popularly known

as Gus Dur, came into power in 1999 and abolished Soeharto's repressive policy. Since the year 2000, the Chinese-Indonesians enjoyed the return of Chinese festivals and celebrations in many places. Chinese cultural icons, such as red lanterns (*lampion*), lion dance (*barongsai*), red color, and Chinese style gates appear in public places together with Chinese *peranakan*¹ food and entertainment, particularly during the Chinese New Year (*Imlek*) celebrations. The support of the Indonesian government became apparent as the presidents – Gus Dur, Megawati Soekarnoputri and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono – came regularly to the Chinese New Year celebrations, hosted by the Indonesian Highest Council of Confucian Religion (*Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu*

Indonesia – MATAKIN). President Megawati (2001-2004) even declared the Chinese New Year a national holiday in 2003.

The state's and the people's recognition towards the Chinese-Indonesian culture appears to be a significant achievement of multiculturalism in Indonesia. However, the revival of Chinese festivals did not come without backlash and challenges. In several cities, such as Solo and Semarang, there were protests from Islamic groups and local people against the resurgence of Chinese cultural expression. In 2016 and 2017, *Forum Umat Islam Semarang* (The Islamic People's Forum in Semarang – *FUIS*), *Pemuda Muhammadiyah* (The Muhammadiyah Youth), *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (The Indonesian Ulema Council – *MUI*) and other Islamic groups launched protests against the Pork Festival in Semarang (*JPNN* 2016, Fardianto 2016, *Tempo* 2017). A similar case took place in Solo in 2019, when *Laskar Umat Islam Surakarta* (The Islamic People Troop of Surakarta – *LUIS*) considered the number of red lanterns and duration of the Chinese New Year celebration as being too expansive and, thus, inappropriate (Bramantyo, 2019).

There have been several studies on Chinese-Indonesian festivals and cultural expression in the public sphere. For example, Hoon (2009) discussed the reinvention of the Chinese-Indonesian tradition in the post-Soeharto era as the re-emergence of the long pressured ethnic Chinese identity as well as its commodification in several malls. While Hoon conducted his research in big cities, such as Jakarta, several researchers focus on the cultural expressions of the Chinese in local areas. Tanggok (2013), Chan (2013) and Ong, Ormond and Sulianti (2017) focused on the Chinese festivals in Singkawang (West Kalimantan). Tanggok and Chan discussed the performance of *Thatung* (spirit medium performance) during Cap Go Meh festival, which was rooted from Hakka culture, and its current acculturation with Dayak and Malay cultures. Ong, Ormond and Sulianti put emphasis on the contribution of Qing Ming and Cap Go Meh as Chinese diasporic festivals to the local economy and tourism in Singkawang. Lyons and Ford (2013) investigated how there was little resistance of local people in Karimun (Riau Islands) towards daily Chinese cultural expression, such as the usage of Chinese language and practices of Chinese rituals, due to the smooth and harmonious integration between the Chinese and local people.

Those previous research investigated the harmonious social relations between the Chinese and non-Chinese, their manifestation in cultural expression

and the contribution of the Chinese festivals to local economics. Even if Chan's (2013, pp. 153-154) study identified a rejection by the *Front Pembela Islam* (The Front of Islamic Defenders – *FPI*) in the Cap Go Meh festival in Singkawang, there was no discussion on the roles of the local government in managing multiculturalism. This article focuses on the dilemmatic resurgence of Chinese-Indonesian public festivals in the post-reformation Indonesia. After the abolition of the New Order's restriction on Chinese cultural expression, what are the dynamics and challenges of the Chinese-Indonesian festivals? Should the Chinese-Indonesians restrain themselves from expressing their culture? On one hand, this article discusses the potentials and contributions of these festivals in creating meeting points and providing education on multiculturalism for the public. On the other hand, it covers the attitudes of non-Chinese groups towards these festivals, which illustrates the struggle to maintain multiculturalism in Indonesia. On the conceptual level, this paper asks whether multiculturalism has its limits for cultural expressions in the public sphere. On the practical level, it is aimed at how the Indonesian government manage contested cultural expression in the public sphere.

Conceptually, multiculturalism has been studied by many social scientists, among others are Parekh (2000), Kymlicka (1995) and Berry (2017). By definition, they agree that multiculturalism reflects a diverse condition in a society, which may come from variations in gender, socio-economic status, religion, values, worldview, race, and ethnicity. These differences may create two clusters of reactions within a society. There are individuals and groups who welcome, celebrate, and respect the plurality or 'multiculturalists'. However, there are also those who refuse the pluralities by requiring or even forcing different groups to assimilate their cultures into the dominant or mainstream culture (Parekh, 1999, p. 27). Within the scope of policy making, the conflicts and contestations between the majority and minority groups in cultural events stimulate several questions: How should the different interests and cultural expressions be managed? What are the roles of the government in guaranteeing multiculturalism within the nation? Kymlicka (1995) endorsed a liberal approach, in which every culture should be protected and recognized, especially those of the minority and marginal groups, by giving them self-government rights, polyethnic rights, and special representation rights in the central institutions of the larger state. There are critics against Kymlicka's point of view, in which the non-liberal approach considers not all (minority) cultures are worth protecting, especially the

dangerous, biased and outdated ones, such as patriarchal values and practices that are marginalizing women (Spinner-Halev, 2008, p. 550). On a more practical level, Berry (2017, p. 2) examined three principles that may be included in governing diversity. They are multiculturalism, contact, and integration. By endorsing multiculturalism, a society is expected to recognize and accept differences and plurality in peaceful and accepting ways. Contact is another important element to grow understanding and engagement from different individuals and groups, which results in mutual acceptance. Integration works as recognition of one's cultural heritage and connection to the dominant culture in a simultaneous way. In the assessment of the implementation of these principles in 17 countries, Berry et al. (2017, p. 384) concluded that they potentially work well in endorsing intercultural relationships. However, the team also found that there are contextual situations, which hinder multiculturalism, such as the history of intercultural relationship among different groups and universal tendencies against different groups. They are stereotyping, ethnocentrism and social dominance orientation. Using these concepts, this paper aims to describe the dynamics in promoting multiculturalism through creating Chinese festivals as meeting and contact points and the Indonesian contextual situation, that obstructs the efforts of expressing Chinese identities in public sphere.

METHOD

In collecting data, the author conducted field research and visits to Chinese-Indonesian festivals in three cities in Central Java – *Pasar Imlek Semawis* (The *Semawis Imlek* Market) in Semarang, *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival in Solo, and *Pekan Budaya Tionghoa Yogyakarta* (The Yogyakarta Chinese Cultural Week – *PBTY*) in Yogyakarta – in 2019 to early 2020, before the Covid-19 pandemic annulled many public festivals and religious holidays. This research chooses the three cities since they have Javanese and Islam as the dominant culture and religion. Under the Indonesian nationalism discourse, the Javanese as one of the indigenous ethnic groups is considered as the host culture in these three cities. Yet, the Chinese communities in these three cities are relatively visible and active. This research focuses on these three festivals, since they can be categorized as folk festivals (*festival rakyat*), which are significantly different from the luxurious and exclusive *Imlek* festivals in malls, discussed by Hoon (2009, pp. 93-95). This paper analyzes the concept and potentials of folk festivals, which is in line with Gibson and Connell's (2011, p. xvi) concept of community festivals

in non-metropolitan Australia. These festivals are “not particularly lucrative but, through their sheer ubiquity and proliferation, they diversify local economies and advance laudable goals of inclusion, community and celebration.” Therefore, the author defined a folk festival as an event, in which local actors negotiate, collaborate and celebrate cultural identities and economic narratives of their place. The author conducted interviews with the initiators of the festivals and several Chinese-Indonesian and non-Chinese sellers and visitors.

This paper begins with a brief history of the Chinese people's long existence in the archipelago and the racial segregation politics during the Dutch colonial era, which caused problems on the Chinese's position in the Indonesian nationhood. The second part focuses on the Chinese culture and festivals prior to the Indonesian independence. It demonstrates the evolution and creation of *peranakan* culture amidst the implementation of racial segregation politics, which endorses the potentiality of artistic and cultural strategies in promoting multiculturalism and natural integration. Then, the author will discuss about the Indonesian government's policies on Chinese culture during the presidencies of Soekarno and Soeharto, which demonstrated the cultural citizenship applied by the Indonesian government towards the Chinese-Indonesians. The next section covers the theoretical perspective of multiculturalism and its practices in Indonesia, which manifests in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the nation's philosophy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The History and Cultural Expression of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies (1890s - 1945)

The Chinese arrived and lived in the Southeast Asian archipelago long before the coming of the European traders in the sixteenth century. In a written record by Ma Huan, a Muslim Chinese who was a member of the Admiral Zheng He's naval expedition, there is a description about Chinese communities in several Javanese towns. Those Chinese communities assimilated themselves to the local culture and embraced Islam as their religion (Lombard and Salmon, 1993, p. 115-116). Pigeaud and De Graaf (1976, p. 7) and Tan Ta Sen (2009) even argue that the Chinese was an important agent in spreading Islam in Java, considering that several *Wali Sanga* (the nine early Islamic propagators) were Chinese² as well as Admiral Cheng Ho, a Chinese Muslim, who led the maritime expeditions under Emperor Yong Le.

Nevertheless, there are different perspectives among historians, such as Ricklefs (2001, p. 3) who considered the spreading of Islam in Java happened through parallel processes from the Arabian, Indian, and Chinese Muslim traders, as well as from the conversion of local people to Islam. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the differences, the author elaborated the forgotten good relations between Islam and Chinese influences. Foley (2021) investigated the intertwining of the rod puppet art (*wayang golek*), woodworking, and Islamic teaching and Chinese influence, which demonstrates the harmonious collaboration between the Chinese and the native people of Java. Through the woodwork behind the *wayang golek* figures, she demonstrated the close connection between *Sunan Kudus*, the creator of *wayang golek* with another Muslim Chinese wood carver in Jepara. *Sunan Kudus* himself was a grandson of *Sunan Ampel*, who had Chinese and possibly mixed with Persian origin (Pigeaud and De Graaf 1976, p. 7; Foley 2021, p. 160). Foley further suggested that the *Wali Sanga* might have used the *wayang golek* to spread Islam.

The harmonious relations between the Chinese and the local people had been interrupted after the coming of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC – The United East Indian Company) in the seventeenth century. The Dutch applied a racial segregation policy, which classified the people's status based on their racial origins. There were three racial classes: the Europeans as the first class, the Foreign Orientals (*Vreemde Oosterlingen*) as the second and the Natives (*Pribumi*) as the third. The classification negated the long relationship and hybridity between the Chinese and the Natives in the archipelago.

The racial segregation policy entailed the rising awareness of one's ethnic/racial identity, particularly during the higher waves of immigration from China to the Dutch East Indies in the mid-eighteenth century. Even though the Chinese newcomers were regulated under the racial segregation policy, they managed to marry local women, since there was a ban for Chinese females to go abroad at that time. Skinner (1996, p. 52) identified the existence of a creolized society, whose culture was a mixture of the Chinese and local elements. They were called *peranakans* and developed a hybrid tradition, which actually made them distinct and different from the Chinese mainland and indigenous society. Yet, the Dutch classified the *peranakans* and their culture as "Chinese" and considered them "Foreign Orientals."

The segregation of the society was further worsened by the division of labor, through which the Dutch assigned different jobs for the people based on their race. The Foreign Orientals occupied jobs as traders,

tax collectors, and coolies in mining and plantation. The Natives worked mainly as farmers and fishermen. Furnivall (1939) considered the market as the main and only place where different ethnic groups were able to interact during the Dutch colonial period. However, he overlooked the roles of art as another medium of interaction between the Chinese and non-Chinese, which took a form of *komedi stambul* (racially mixed comedy theater) in the late colonial times. The fact that the *komedi stambul* had been a popular performance in festivals, Pausacker argued that it demonstrates the evidence of a "mestizo society" with a joint social life and culture in the Dutch East Indies (Coppel as quoted in Pausacker 2005, p. 185).

The Chinese *peranakans*' holidays and rituals have already attracted observers and social scientists during the Dutch colonial period. In one of the earliest records written by Hoffman (1856), there were six Chinese festivals yearly, which consisted of *Tang Chik* (winter solstice), *Imlek* (the Chinese New Year), *Cap Go Meh* (the first full moon festival)³, *Ching Ming* (tomb sweeping day), *Pehcun* (dragon boat festival), and *Cioko* (hungry ghost festival). While Hoffman provided the details of the dates of these festivals, he did not discuss the ways the Chinese communities celebrated those days.

Tjoa Tjoa Koan's *Hari Raja Orang Tjina* (The Holidays of the Chinese People) (1887) supplements Hoffman's record and provides a far more comprehensive explanation on Chinese religious holidays and festivals, which was based on Tjoa's observation on Chinese communities in Surakarta or also known as Solo, Central Java in the late of the nineteenth century. Tjoa identified thirty Chinese festivals in a year. In these religious holidays, it was very common that the Chinese people conducted worships and praying rituals to their ancestors. Another important pattern identifiable from Tjoa's record is that the Chinese people organized festivals in an inclusive way. After the worship, they incorporated local traditions and arts, such as *gamelan* (Javanese music orchestra), *wayang* (Javanese puppet show), as well as various local dances, such as *tandak bonang*, *tandak angklung*, *tandak srengganen* (Tjoa, 1887, pp. 11, 14, 20, 23). As the local people participated in those celebration, the Chinese festivals became one of the meeting points, other than markets. Tjoa (1887, p. 22) even reported that in the Chinese lantern festival or *Cap Go Meh*, the Surakartan king opened the yard of his palace (*keraton*) for public, during which there were various performances.

Beyond Surakarta, a similar pattern of inclusiveness took place in Batavia. *Bintang Barat*, a

Malay language newspaper, reported the plan of Chinese New Year festival.

“Batavia. We inform to all people that on the 29th of this month [January], the Chinese will organize a bazaar in the evening (*Pasar Malem*), [during which] the *Tramway* will operate in the night. We hope all people will have a lot of fun on that night. May those who want to do business in the festival receive many profits, so that they can enjoy the New Year.

For our Chinese friends, we wish them a good and safe year ahead.

For those who have enemies, we wish them peace and reconciliation so they can enjoy life with a sense of brotherhood. Happy Chinese New Year.” (*Bintang Barat*, 25 January 1870).

A week later, there was a follow-up news about the Chinese New Year event, during which there were 11,304 people, who rode the *Tramway* to visit the festival. There were many Dutch as well as local people joining the euphoric celebration (*Bintang Barat*, 1 February 1870).

While the racial segregation was still implemented and resulted in more distinct and sharper ethnic/racial awareness among various groups, festivals and cultural expression worked as a meeting point and joint celebration across races. Even though there were negative stereotypes and prejudices against the Chinese-Indonesians, the “mestizo society” or *peranakan* culture continued to exist during the Dutch colonial period. The roles of women in constructing the *peranakan* culture were significant and powerful, yet less elaborated and appreciated. During the *Imlek* festivals, many Chinese women wore local attire, as what happened in Semarang.

While the men’s and children dresses were so Chinese (real *Tionghoa!*), the women were different. The Chinese women were wearing the native (*Boemipoetra*) style dress, which consists of a knee-long Javanese style top dress (*badjoe koeroeng jang sainggan loetoet*)... Then, they wore a shawl (*slendang lotjan*) with sprinkled gold on the top. The length [of the shawl] is like the length of handkerchief, but a bit narrow. They draped it around their shoulder.” (*Warna Warta*, 29 January 1927).

Another neglected role of the Chinese women relates to *peranakan* food culture, which combines and modifies the cooking cutleries, style and ingredients from both cultures. The existence of *peranakan* food, such as *lontong Cap Go Meh*, which was usually served on the 15th day after the Chinese New Year, demonstrates the influence of local food culture to the Chinese cuisine. The

Chinese influence on local food is evident in *kwetiauw* (rice noodles), *bihun* (Chinese vermicelli), *bakso* (meat balls), etc. as daily cuisine in many Indonesian families until today. Borrowing from Chapple-Sokol, Wiratri (2017) argued that the acculturation through food and eating habit shows the success of the Chinese immigrants’ soft diplomacy, which may include culinary or “gastronomic diplomacy.” The *peranakan* cuisine is proof of acculturation and acceptance towards the Chinese existence in the archipelago.

Bhinneka Tunggal Ika: Governing Multiculturalism in Post-Colonial Indonesia

After experiencing Dutch colonization for more than two centuries, the Indonesian founding fathers have deliberately defined *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* - simply translated as “Unity in Diversity” - as the main philosophy of the nation building. The philosophy was very crucial to accommodate the rapid transformation from separate ethnic groups, which originally lived under different local rulers and kingdoms across the archipelago, into the Indonesian nation. The formation of the Indonesian nation falls into Kymlicka and Cohen-Almagor’s (2000, p. 90) category of “multination states” or the incorporation of historically different communities into a larger state. However, the implementation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or multiculturalism in Indonesia takes at least two contested trajectories: integrationist versus assimilationist approach. Wriggins (in Poerwanto, 1976, p. 54) defined integration as

“a social process, which tends to harmonize and unite diverging and conflicting units, whether those units be elements of personality, individuals, groups, or larger social aggregations.”

In the case of the Chinese-Indonesians, the integrationist supporters consider that they should not deny their Chinese origins and cultural heritage, yet they can develop a sense of belonging, contribute, and demonstrate loyalty to the Indonesian nation where they were born and have been living in. On the other hand, Lumley (ibid.) defined assimilation as

“The process by which different cultures, or individuals of groups representing the different cultures, are merged into a homogenous unit.”

The proponents of assimilation urge the Chinese to give up their original identity and merge themselves to

the dominant culture/group as a proof of loyalty to the Indonesian nation. This approach promoted the adoption of Indonesian names, conversion to Islam as the dominant religion, and marriage with local people.

During the early post-independence period, Soekarno, the first Indonesian president (1945-1966), allowed Chinese cultural expression in the public sphere even though the divided opinion and attitude between the assimilationist and integrationist proponents continued. The main supporter of integrationist approach was *Badan Permusjawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia* (The Consultative Council of Indonesian Citizenship - *Baperki*) under the leadership of Siauw Giok Tjhan, a Chinese-Indonesian politician (1914-1981). Siauw (1981, p. 10) considered the natural integration process takes place when “someone is not judged based on his/her ancestors, religion or ideology, yet based on the consistency of his/her behavior and words, real and sincere contribution to the people.” One of the prominent proponents of assimilationist approach was Oei Tjeng Hien, a Chinese Muslim, who changed his name into Abdul Karim Oei. He was the advisor of Muhammadiyah – one of the biggest Islamic organizations in Indonesia and the founder of *Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia* (the Association of Chinese-Indonesian Muslims) in 1961.

Regardless of these divisions, the *peranakan* culture was still vibrant since Soekarno implemented some degree of freedom for the Chinese-Indonesian to maintain their identity through Mandarin language learning, Chinese-Indonesian media, organizations, schools and cultural expressions in public sphere, even though there was a requirement to cultivate Indonesian nationalism by means of learning the Indonesian language, arts and culture for Chinese children and youth through schools (Suryadinata, 1972, p. 65; Lee, 1995, p. xv). The spirit of hybrid culture manifested further in performing arts, such as *komedi stambul* and *wayang potehi* (a Sino-Javanese puppet show). Based on her childhood experience, Melani Budianta (2012, pp. 257, 264-265), a Chinese-Indonesian anthropologist who lived in Malang, East Java, shared that in the 1950s, there was a form of *wayang orang* called *Ang Hin Hoo*, a traditional Javanese theatre, owned and performed by the *peranakan* Chinese. *Ang Hin Hoo* reflects the hybrid of Chinese, Malay, Javanese and European cultures. In this era, the Chinese New Year and *Cap Go Meh* festival became public events and marketplaces, where people could meet and enjoy art performances (*Star Weekly*, 27 February 1954, p. 26; *Star Weekly*, 4 February 1956, p. 4).

Starting from 1967, there was a political turn,

during which Soeharto became the second president of Indonesia. Contrary to Soekarno’s integrationist approach, Soeharto applied an assimilationist approach in a strict sense to accelerate the total absorption of the Chinese to local culture. As the author mentioned in the opening of this article, Soeharto banned Chinese cultural and religious expression in public sphere and urged Chinese people to adopt Indonesian names. Ironically, Heryanto (1998) identified inconsistencies and ambiguity in Soeharto’s disciplining policies towards the Chinese. While the Chinese had to give up their identities, such as changing their Chinese names, speaking no Mandarin, and celebrating Chinese holidays in the private sphere only, Soeharto maintained the category of “*WNI Keturunan Cina*” (Indonesian of Chinese descent), required them to have *Surat Bukti Kewarganegaraan RI* (a proof letter of Indonesian citizenship), and applied a special code in their identity cards, which made them vulnerable towards discrimination in politics, social life and civil administration. Furthermore, Soeharto encouraged the Chinese-Indonesian to develop their economic and business network and limited the access to other public professions. This situation created a wider welfare gap and resentment between the Chinese-Indonesian and other ethnic groups. In 1997 to 1998, when Indonesia faced serious economic crises, the negative sentiments against the Chinese-Indonesians exploded in the May 1998 riots, during which there were lootings and burning of Chinese-Indonesian’s shops and houses and rape against Chinese-Indonesian women in several cities (Siegel, 1998; Purdey, 2005; Sutrisno 2002).

The Revival of Chinese festivals as a hybrid culture and meeting point in the Post-Reformation Period

After big demonstrations and pressures from students and the public, Soeharto stepped down after the May 1998 riots and B. J. Habibie – the vice president, took over the presidency for almost two years. In 2000, Abdurrahman Wahid, the successor of Habibie, changed Soeharto’s assimilationist approach into the integrationist by abolishing the Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967. The Chinese-Indonesians, indeed, responded positively and enthusiastically toward the annulment of the New Order’s Chinese public cultural restriction. In 2003, the Surabaya Heritage Society (hereafter the SHS) initiated a street food market, *Kya-Kya*, a Hokkien term which literally means “having fun,” at one of the oldest streets in the Chinatown of Surabaya. The SHS received full support of Dahlan Iskan, the director of *Jawa Pos*, one of

the biggest and most influential media in East Java (*UC News*, 2020). According to Freddy Istanto (2012), the endorsement of Dahlan Iskan, as a non-Chinese, Muslim and activist of pluralism, significantly encouraged the Chinese community in Surabaya to express their culture in the public sphere after a long oppression under Soeharto's regime. The *Kya-Kya* became a representation of Chinese-Indonesian culture since there were a Chinese style gate, lampions, and various *peranakan* style food. The success of the *Kya-Kya*, the author argues, inspired other Chinese communities in several towns to conduct a similar festival. A year later, *Kopi Semawis* (*Komunitas Pecinan Semarang untuk Pariwisata* – the Semarang's Chinatown Community for Tourism) began the yearly *Pasar Imlek Semawis* (The *Semawis Imlek* Market). This initiative was followed by the Chinese-Indonesian communities in Singkawang, Yogyakarta, and Solo, who organize *Cap Go Meh* festival, *Pekan Budaya Tionghoa Yogyakarta* (the Yogyakarta Chinese Cultural Week – *PBTY*) and *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival (the Sudiro festival) respectively.

Borrowing from Hobsbawm's concept of invented tradition, Hoon (2009, p. 93) argued that the Chinese New Year festivals work as symbolic expressions of the Chinese identity. Even though most of the Chinese-Indonesians have limited knowledge and connection to Chinese culture and language, the revival of these festivals demonstrates the efforts to reimagine their long-oppressed ethnicity and tradition. Hoon also pointed out the lavish Chinese cultural icons in these festivals were also followed by their commodification. While Hoon acknowledged the hybridity of these Chinese festivals, he emphasized their commodification as he observed the Chinese New Year celebrations in malls. Using Meilani Budianta's words, it became *mallticulturalism* (pp. 93-95), which works as a cynical critic towards the exclusive celebrations in malls, instead of promoting multiculturalism. However, Hoon overlooked the existence of Chinese-Indonesian folk festivals (*festival rakyat*), which are not conducted in luxurious malls. In the cases of the *Semawis Imlek* Market, *PBTY* and *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival, the Chinese festivals are celebrated on the streets and open for public, not limited to people from a certain economic status. In contrary to *mallticulturalism*, the author argues that there are deeper ethnic relations behind the folk Chinese festivals as the author will show after a brief explanation of each festival.

The *Semawis Imlek* Market in the Chinatown of Semarang was initiated by a Chinese-Indonesian businessman, Harjanto Halim, for the first time in 2003. The festival begins with a hybrid Chinese-Javanese ritual,

known as Knocking [on Heaven's] Door (*tradisi Ketok Pintu*), which is aimed at asking permission and blessings from the Gods and Goddesses prior to the festival. During the *Ketok Pintu* ritual, there is an interfaith meeting where various religious leaders are invited to join in. The tradition adopted the Javanese style by serving a cone-shaped rice dish (*tumpeng*) as an expression of gratitude (*syukur*) and an inclusion of the local culture (*CNN Indonesia*, 25 January 2020). After the ritual is completed, the organizer prepares the festival by inviting hundreds of local and small sellers. Other than selling food and various goods, such as clothing, bags, traditional medicine, and toys, there is a stage where people can watch the performance of dragon dance (*barongsai*), Chinese glove puppet theatre (*wayang potehi*) and Chinese songs. From my observations in 2019 and 2020, thousands of people from various backgrounds visited the festival, which started one week prior to the Chinese New Year.

A similar Chinese New Year festival took place in Solo. Yet, instead of using the Chinese name for the festival, the organizer in Solo adopted a Javanese title "*Grebeg Sudiro*." *Grebeg* is a Javanese ritualistic festival, commonly practiced during special events, such as the birthday of Prophet Muhammad SAW, Eid al-Fitr, and the Javanese New Year. The name *Sudiro* comes from the village, Sudiroprajan, where its three inhabitants, who were Chinese-Indonesians, initiated the festival in 2007. They were Oei Bengki, Sarjono Lelono Putro and Kamajaya. The village headman, his staffs and many artists supported the idea (Adriana, 2013, p. 43). In the following years, a week prior to Chinese New Year, the Surakartans have been enjoying the festival, which is opened with a long march of people carrying a mountainous pile (*gunungan*) of Chinese moon cakes (*kue bulan*). It was followed by various ethnic groups, who performed their respective cultural dances. From my observation on the *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival in 2020, there were at least 15 different ethnic groups who were included in the opening ceremony, such as Chinese-Indonesian, East Javanese, Banjar, Bugis, and Balinese. The festival was conducted at the main market called *Pasar Gede*, where a Chinese temple, *Tien Kok Sie*, is located next to it. Thousands of *lampions* decorated the area. After the opening, almost a thousand small street vendors filled in the nearby streets for a week. In my conversations with several petty sellers during the 2020 *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival, some of them were not Surakartan, but were instead from Pekalongan (Central Java) and Tasikmalaya (West Java). Many of them identified themselves as non-Chinese. The open market lasted for a week and ended on

the eve of Chinese New Year. In the closing ceremony, there were *barongsai*, Chinese dances and songs.

Unlike the *Semawis Imlek* Market and *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival, the *PBTY* in Yogyakarta was initiated by a non-Chinese-Indonesian, Murdijati Gardjito, in 2006. As a researcher on traditional food, Gardjito learned about the cultural and historical aspects of food. When researching on the Chinese food in Yogyakarta, she came into the brilliant idea of making a Chinese festival. The Chinese community who was part of the Jogja Chinese Art and Cultural Center (JCACC) in Yogyakarta enthusiastically welcomed her idea. The Governor of Yogyakarta, Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, expressed a strong support for the idea as well as a way to promote Yogyakarta as a tolerant city.⁴ The *PBTY* is located in *Kampung Ketandan*, in the southern part of Malioboro, one of the major streets in Yogyakarta, which has been known as a Chinese neighborhood (*Pecinan*) since the Dutch colonial period. The *PBTY* usually begins a week after Chinese New Year and lasts for five to seven days. There are several stages in the *PBTY* where visitors could watch *barongsai*, talent shows including Chinese poem readings and Mandarin song singing, and *wayang potehi*. The *PBTY* opened its place for mainly food vendors. In 2019 and 2020, there was a growing number of local and international cuisines, such as *lontong Cap Go Meh*, satay, Japanese food, Korean food and interestingly also, halal Chinese food. Thousands of visitors enjoy the multitude of food from hundreds of food vendors in the *PBTY*.

Ethnic Relations in the Chinese-Indonesian Festivals

In the context of multiculturalism, beyond the fun and entertaining aspects, an analysis of the festivals offer deeper insights on ethnic relations and collaboration, even though there is also potential exclusion, whenever these festivals were organized for certain groups of people only, as it happened in the Chinese festivals in the malls (Hoon 2009) the author argues that there are at least two ways in expressing ethnic relations in the Chinese-Indonesian folk festivals. First, the three festivals display multicultural spectacles, in which they accommodate other local cultures rather than exclusively promoting the Chinese culture, even though they are intended to celebrate the Chinese New Year. In the *Semawis Imlek* Market, the opening ritual, *Ketok Pintu*, shows the accommodation of Javanese culture through the serving of *tumpeng* as the food. The inclusion of different religious leaders also accommodates religious

pluralism. The opening ceremony of the *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival displays various ethnic performances. While there is an emphasis on Chinese art in the *PBTY*, the accommodation of local culture takes place in the selling of various food during the festival, which is closer to the concept of “gastronomic diplomacy” (Wiratri, 2017).

Secondly, the three festivals are economically collaborative and acted as meeting points where the Chinese and non-Chinese people can work together. In my observation, the majority of the sellers in these festivals were non-Chinese. They sold food, clothes, toys, and souvenirs. While the organizers of the festivals are mostly the Chinese, they allowed the Chinese and non-Chinese from local areas to participate and provided equal opportunities to open their kiosks. In these festivals, it was very common that the Chinese and the non-Chinese people opened their kiosk side by side. The non-Chinese, particularly from the local areas where the festivals were conducted, also received extra income from their work as safety guards and parking guards. In my observation in these festivals, the author also found many non-Chinese sellers from out of the town. While they did not get kiosks, they were still allowed to offer and sell their products to the customers with their portable carts. They also considered the festivals as being potential for their businesses.

In his discussion on the potentials of religious peacebuilding, Appleby (2015, p. 185) argued that humanitarian aid and development programs should not be seen as merely an economic and infrastructural development. Whenever these programs are to be implemented in collaborative and inclusive ways, they can potentially develop and strengthen socio-cultural relations in a previously conflicting society. Appleby emphasized several principles that should be implemented in the peacebuilding model through economic development and humanitarian aid: 1) the inclusive and active participation of the local community, 2) the making of consensus about the “rules of engagement” with local community, and 3) the recognition and preservation of traditional values within developmental program, 4) transparency of planning and implementation steps. While Appleby described these principles in the context of religious peacebuilding, the author argues that they are applicable for economic collaboration as an effort of ethnic-based peacebuilding and multiculturalism.

The principles proposed by Appleby have been implemented in managing the three festivals. The formation of the *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival included both Chinese-Indonesians and the non-Chinese people, particularly the Sudioprajan inhabitants. In the beginning,

the Chinese leaders were reluctant to make the festival since they still felt insecure and traumatic for showing their ethnic identity in the public sphere. However, the local Javanese people endorsed and supported the festival. After the negotiation and communication between both groups, they agreed to conduct the Chinese festival with the inclusion of Javanese culture (Hutabarat, 2021, p. 78). In its development, the *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival became more inclusive by accommodating non-Javanese ethnic groups in its opening ceremony. In the *Semawis Imlek* Market, the non-Chinese communities, who live nearby the festival area, actively participated in planning the location of the kiosks, security, parking management and marketing of the festival. In the closing meeting of the 2020 festival, the author observed Harjanto Halim as the leading organizer inviting his non-Chinese partners for reflection and to ask for their feedback in order to prepare for a better festival in the years to come. A similar collaboration has been applied by the organizer of the *PBTY*. They included and conducted deliberations with the local community (*Rukun Tetangga*) of Ketandan neighborhood, where the festival takes place annually.

The festivals brought economic benefits for both the Chinese and non-Chinese people since they were able to make profit from selling food, goodies, souvenirs as well as receiving income when they offered services as security, parking management and/or preparing the stages and festival arenas. While there is no comprehensive study about the economic income of the festivals, my conversations with several petty sellers in the *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival and *Semawis Imlek* Market reveals that the amount of their profit during the festival is similar to one to two months income in their daily life. The co-existence of multiculturalism and shared economic profits show the potentials of the festivals in developing harmony and collaboration that overcome trauma and tension from the previous conflicts and stereotypes between the Chinese-Indonesians and the non-Chinese.

From the visitors' perspectives, the three festivals may also work beyond entertainment and commodification. The shows and performances work as a symbol of harmonious ethnic relations and multicultural education for the public, even though there is critique that, without further deliberation, they may work as mere ceremonies. From my conversations with several visitors, the author found that they shared enjoyment and glee. A non-Chinese-Indonesian visitor, who was a graduate student at the University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, shared the insights she learned from the festivals.

I came from Solo where I watched *Grebeg Sudiro* (Festival) several times. This year, I came to the

PBTY. I found both festivals fun and entertaining. The most interesting fact for me is there are so many local people (*pribumis*) who became dragon dancers (*pemain barongsai*), Chinese glove puppeteer (*dalang wayang potehi*) and music players. It touches me so much, since they show good collaboration. I also learned the meaning behind the Chinese symbols. I just learned from the explanation by the master of ceremony (in a talent show) that red symbolizes good luck and happiness, while firecrackers aim to drive evil spirits away (*mengusir roh jahat*). Prior to the explanation, I was just confused why the color red is everywhere [during Chinese New Year]." (Indah Gitaningrum, Interview, 12 February 2020).

In the emotional dimension, the three festivals also worked as direct meeting point, which offer "collective effervescence." Randall Collins (2004, p. xii) argued that "a highly focused, emotionally entrained interaction is apportioned to the individuals, who come away from the situation carrying the group-aroused emotion for a time in their bodies." The potential to encourage a sense of togetherness and inclusion through direct assembly has been acknowledged by Halim as the chief organizer of *Semawis Imlek* Market.

"This is a folk festival. We welcome everyone to come, regardless of their background. They meet each other and are having fun together. In the middle of the throng (*suk-sukan/berdesakan*), people are unwittingly sharing their sweat (*tuker kringat*). This is a perfect time to enjoy togetherness as a multicultural celebration." (Harjanto Halim, Interview, 8 February 2020).

Elaborating Durkheim's concept of ritual, Collins (2004, p. 38) showed that emotional energy, which is generated from direct experiences and relations, potentially creates a certain morality. In the Chinese-Indonesian festivals, the expected morality is solidarity, understanding, respect and acceptance towards the Chinese-Indonesians. In Berry's (2017, p. 2) concepts, these festivals demonstrate efforts to celebrate multiculturalism by inviting different cultures to participate in the festivals, to open contacts with culturally different audiences and to integrate by promoting the Chinese *peranakan* culture.

Contestations and Challenges against the Chinese-Indonesian Festivals

Regardless of the good intention and positive impacts

of the Chinese-Indonesian festivals, there were still critics and contestations, as Berry (2017, pp. 384-385) pointed out that stereotyping, ethnocentrism, social dominance orientation and the historical burden of previous segregation and interethnic conflicts can still exist as barriers in promoting multiculturalism. Hoon (2009) has discussed the contradictive opinions among the Chinese-Indonesians themselves about the Chinese-Indonesian festivals. On the one hand, there were Chinese-Indonesian groups and people who appreciate the revival of the Chinese-Indonesian culture, while, on the other hand, others consider that they should be more careful (*hati-hati*) and stay low profile. As Hoon's observation focuses on *multiculturalism*, several Chinese-Indonesians and local people, indeed, considered the festivals to be too lavish, over the limit (*kebablasan*) and insensitive towards the local people, many of whom are still living in poverty. While the folk festivals did not necessarily demonstrate luxury and exclusivity, there were still contestation on them. While Hoon has already elaborated the potential conflict between the Chinese-Indonesians and local people, there were no real incidents about Chinese-Indonesian festivals in the first decade of the post-Reformation period.

It was not until 2016 that the controversies began, during which a Muslim culinary businessman, Firdaus Adinegoro, initiated the Pork Festival during the *Imlek* celebration in Semarang. As a Muslim Javanese, Adinegoro felt the mixing of pork and halal food kiosks in the *Semawis Imlek* Market potentially led the Muslims to unintentionally consume non-halal food. Yet, Adinegoro was aware of the Chinese-Indonesians' right to celebrate their holiday. He supported the spirit of multiculturalism by initiating the Pork Festival, where sellers of pork-based food can sell their products with clear information so that the Muslims could avoid them (Firdaus Adinegoro, Interview, 9 February 2020). The scale of the Pork Festival was much smaller than the *Semawis Imlek* Market. There were only 48 to 60 pork food kiosks, with around 2000 visitors per day as opposed to around 10.000 to 12.500 number of visitors at *Semawis Imlek* Market (Safuan, 2019). Since 2016, the Pork Festival incited protest from Islamic organizations, such as *Muhammadiyah*, *Forum Umat Islam Semarang* (The Muslims' Forum of Semarang – *FUIS*), and *Front Pembela Islam* (The Front of Islamic Defenders – *FPI*). These Islamic organizations felt offended with the existence of the Pork Festival. Other than the blatant name of the Pork Festival, they considered the location of the festival was too close to a Muslim-majority neighborhood (*JPNN*, 03 February 2016; Nurdin, 2016).

Responding to the protests, in 2017 Adinegoro signed an agreement about the changing of the festival's title from the Pork Festival to the Chinese New Year Culinary Festival (*Tempo*, 22 January 2017; Purbaya, 2017). With the new title, the food festival serves both halal and non-halal food with a blurred boundary (Wibisono, 2017).

Another resistance and rejection took place in Semarang regarding the plan of *Paguyuban Sosial Marga Tionghoa Indonesia* (The Association of the Chinese-Indonesian Clans – *PSMTI*) in making a *Cap Go Meh* festival in the Great Mosque of Semarang in February 2017. In addition to eating the *lontong Cap Go Meh* together, the *PSMTI* planned an interreligious dialogue, in which the leaders of six formal religions in Indonesia would be invited to discuss multiculturalism and interreligious harmony. The protesters argued that Chinese culture should not be accommodated in a Muslim place of worship (*CNN Indonesia*, 19 February 2017). As a conflict mitigation, the mayor of Semarang, Hendrar Prihadi, relocated the event at the municipal hall.

A similar protest happened in Solo in 2019 by *Laskar Umat Islam Solo* (the Muslim Army of Solo – *LUIS*) as a reaction to an expanded *lampion* installation during the *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival. The *LUIS* refused the plan of the organizer of the *Grebeg Sudiro* Festival in adding more *lampions* and keeping them for the whole month. In their perspective, the *lampions* would change the image of Solo into a Chinatown and it would be beyond the limit (*berlebihan*) (Purnomo, 2019). From the perspective of the *LUIS*, it is unfair that the Chinese could set up thousands of the *lampions* for a month in celebration of Chinese New Year, while the Islamic New Year, New Year's Eve, and Hindu New Year last for one to three days only (Bramantyo 2 February 2019). They considered it as a type of "cultural domination" (Purnomo, 2019).

Among the Chinese festivals in the three cities, the Chinese festival in Yogyakarta went smoothly and received no rejection. However, in 2003, there was resistance and rejection against Chinese Muslims who conducted *sholat* to celebrate *Imlek*. The *Imlek sholat* was initiated by a Chinese Muslim, Budi Setyagraha (Huang Ren Cong), who was a regional parliament member. It incited controversies since many Muslims considered *Imlek* to be a Confucian religious event (Chiou, 2013). The rejection of the *Imlek sholat* goes beyond Islamic puritanism. It shows the replication of the New Order's ethnic segregation, since many Muslims were more relaxed towards the syncretic practices between Islam, Hindu, and local cultures, such as Javanese *selamatan* or *kenduren*.

The resistance and protests by non-Chinese and Islamic conservative groups demonstrate that the Chinese-Indonesians matches within the category of non-Native or “Other” in the concept of Indonesian nation. Some even called the Chinese-Indonesian as “asing” (foreign) and “aseng” (Chinese nickname) as derogatory expressions. This attitude ignored the facts of long interactions and integration between the Chinese-Indonesians and the local people. These incidents leave questions on the management of multiculturalism. Should there be a limit to cultural expression? How will the relations between the majority and minority groups affect cultural expression? On the conceptual level, liberal multiculturalism prescribes the preservation of culture as the rights of all citizens, including minority groups, that should be guaranteed. The non-liberal approach takes a different standpoint, in which they endorse negotiation and deliberation between the majority and minority groups to decide the options and limits of cultural expression of each group (Spinner-Halev, 2008). The non-liberal approach assumes that every individual/group has equal agency and position to negotiate their interests and aspirations. In the cases of the Chinese-Indonesians and other minority groups, the non-liberal assumption of equality is improbable. The rise of Islamic conservatism has reduced the room for deliberation and negotiation. Even worse, the radical groups may use vigilantes to force stop religious and/or ritual activities, that they disagree with (*VOA Islam*, 2012; Ahnaf and Salim, 2016). As minority groups with a long history of political discrimination and exclusion, in my opinion, Chinese-Indonesians and other minority groups in Indonesia need affirmative actions and protection from the government to maintain their cultural practices, which is closer to Kymlicka’s argument of liberal multiculturalism. Instead of limiting the minority groups’ cultural expressions, the government may educate the public with historical facts that Indonesian culture has been interacting with other cultures, including Chinese culture, for many centuries, as what has been discussed above. Yet, as it will be discussed in the following part, the perspectives and commitments of the local governments vary and do not necessarily comply with the constitution, which guarantees religious liberty and freedom of expression of every citizen.

“Protecting” Multiculturalism in the Three Cities: Semarang, Solo, and Yogyakarta

For the scope of this paper, the author discusses the ways that the Indonesian government manages

diversity in the Reformation period (2000 – present) and the implementation of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the philosophical foundation of the multi-ethnic Indonesian nation since the independence of Indonesia in 1945. The author focusses on the rising of Islamic conservatism, which limits the application of multiculturalism and the freedom of the minority’s cultural expressions, for the sake of the support of Islamic groups as the majority population in Indonesia.

Since the Reformation, the political landscape in Indonesia has changed significantly. While there was positive change from the authoritarian style of leadership to a more democratic one, Indonesia bore witness to the rising of Islamic conservatism (Bruinessen, 2013). As a social movement, several Islamic organizations use strong enforcement and/or violence to endorse stricter practices of Islam, according to their own interpretation. The notorious examples are the Front of Islamic Defender (*Front Pembela Islam – FPI*), the Paramilitary Group of Islamic Jihad (*Laskar Jihad Islamiyah*) and *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI)*. However, the puritan ideology has already influenced “moderate” Islamic organizations, such as *MUI*, *Pemuda Muhammadiyah*, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, who joined the radical groups in limiting the minority groups’ expressions (*Antara News*, 2011; Fardianto, 2016; Sutrisno 2021). In facing the rising violence and paramilitary actions by these Islamic groups, there were neither protection for the minority groups nor legal sanction against Islamic paramilitary group’s actions the Indonesian government’s, particularly under Presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014). Even worse, these groups enjoyed impunity for their political negotiation and close relationship with political elites (Nathaniel, 2019). The government’s indecisive attitudes have stimulated the rising arrogance and threats from the conservative and radical Islamic groups towards the minorities.

In the political sphere, many Islamic parties came into being and participated in the general election, such as *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperity and Justice Party – *PKS*), *Partai Amanat Nasional* (National Mandate Party – *PAN*), *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (United Development Party – *PPP*), *Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa* (National Awakening Party - *PKB*) dan *Partai Bulan Bintang* (Moon and Star Party – *PBB*). While the election process becomes more open, fair, and guaranteeing individual votes, under decentralization, the elected headmen and legislative members from both Islamic and nationalist parties in several provinces tend to promote Islam through the legalization of sharia laws (*peraturan daerah syariah* or abbreviated as *perda syariah*). From

1998 to 2013, there are 443 *perda syariah* in Indonesia, which Buehler (2016, pp. 10-11) argues that they were the results of the political lobbying and negotiation between political elites and Islamic activists. These *perda syariah* regulate all inhabitants of areas in which the laws are implemented, even though they are non-Muslims. For example, in Aceh, since the provincial government implements the Islamic Criminal Law (*Qanun Jinayat*), everyone, including non-Muslims, who are caught doing gambling, alcohol consumption, adultery, same-sex relations, and premarital dating may be punished with a caning sentence (*hukum cambuk*) (*Tempo*, 27 October 2015). Even though President Joko Widodo finally banned the *HTI* and *FPI* because their ideology was considered contradictive to *Pancasila* and the *FPI* did vigilant activism in 2017 and 2020 respectively, conservative Islamic groups are still flourishing in Indonesia.

While ‘protecting multiculturalism’ (*merawat kebhinnekaan*) becomes a commonly used phrase in many governmental policies and speeches, the author shows that there is no standard procedure in its implementation. With the rising of political Islam, the conflict mitigation attitudes and decisions of the headmen, be they governors, mayors, or regents, in certain areas can be categorized into, at least, four types. First, many regional headmen, prioritize the will of dominant religious and/or ethnic groups whenever there are conflicts with minority groups, in order to win the support and secure the votes of the majority groups. They may be silent and ignorant to the violence (Nathaniel 2019) or launch repressive regulations towards the victims, as what happened in the persecution of *Ahmadiyah*, *Syiah* and the forced closure of several churches (Briantika, 2021; Sihite, 2013; Komnas HAM, 2021). This practice is certainly contradicting with liberal multiculturalism, which acknowledges and guarantees minority rights mutually. In Indonesia, the minority groups should limit themselves and place the rights of the majority above their own for the sake of unity (*kesatuan*) and harmony (*kerukunan*). The blame is put on the minority groups whenever they incite the anger of the majority and supposedly destroy social cohesion. In the religious sphere, the implementation of the Blasphemy Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 has created greater vulnerability for religious minorities and non-mainstream groups, whose religious interpretations and practices are different from those of the majority. Instead of guaranteeing religious freedom, the Blasphemy Law categorizes the non-mainstream interpretations and practices as heresy and justifies the limitation of its promotion in the public sphere. The government possesses the authority to ban and dismiss the groups who violate the law.

Second, the government demonstrates efforts in mitigating, negotiating, and/or solving conflicts, even though in several cases the government tends to simplify the problem than to solve the root of the problems. For example, in the case of the rejection of the *Cap Go Meh* Festival in the Great Mosque of Semarang in 2017, Hendrar Prihadi, the mayor of Semarang (2016 – 2026), decided to move the celebration to the municipal hall (Sinuko, 2017). While Prihadi appreciated the *Cap Go Meh* Festival organizers’ good intention in conducting interreligious dialogue, there had been no effort to initiate a dialogue with the group, who rejected the festival. Prihadi’s attitude and commitment for conflict resolution was inconsistent since he demonstrated no effort in mitigating conflict regarding the controversy of the Pork Festival. The City Police of Semarang adopted the first attitude, in which they required Firdaus Adinegoro as the initiator of the Pork Festival to change the title into the Chinese New Year Culinary Festival, in line with the demand of the FUIS and other Islamic organizations.

Third, even though the number is relatively small, there are governments who accommodate the rights of the minority groups. In the case of *LUIS*’ protest against the *lampions* in Solo, FX Hadi Rudyatmo, the mayor of Solo (2012-2021) and his successor, Gibran Rakabuming Raka (2021-2026), decided to ignore the protest and support the Chinese-Indonesians to continue the celebration (Romadhoni, 2022). However, they did not facilitate any dialogue between the organizer and the protesters. Without understanding and agreement from both sides, the problem will have the tendency to recur. Rudyatmo and Raka posed themselves as the guardians of multiculturalism in their city. While their attitude and position are important and brought peace and satisfaction from the minority groups, tolerance tends to be dependent on their leadership. There are limited efforts to educate and cultivate it as public attitude.

Lastly, several leaders demonstrate ambivalent attitudes in governing multiculturalism. For example, Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X endorsed the *PBTY* 2021 and 2022 in his speeches with a bold message that Yogyakarta should be a multicultural and tolerant city. However, Yogyakarta is the only province in Indonesia, where Chinese-Indonesians are discriminated from the land property rights (Pamungkas et al, 2021). Under the Law No. 13/2012 on the Special Autonomy of Yogyakarta Province (*UU Keistimewaan DIY*), Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X enjoys several special rights, such as ensuring a long-life position as the governor and maintaining the land as his property (*Sultan Ground*). Under the special autonomy, Sri Sultan

Hamengkubuwono X maintains the discrimination against the Chinese-Indonesians, even though he violated the Agrarian National Law. His appreciation and support towards the Chinese-Indonesian culture are closer to political performativity and his interests in restoring economics in Yogyakarta as he mentioned in his opening speeches of the Chinese New Year Festivals in 2022 and 2023 (PBTY Official Channel, 2022 and 2023).

This article has discussed the history of Chinese folk festival in the Dutch colonial and Soekarno's periods and its revival in the post-Reformation period, which has opened meeting points and collaborations between Chinese-Indonesians and local people. While these festivals celebrate *Imlek*, none of them solely and exclusively exposes Chinese culture. Instead, they offer multiculturalism and acculturation by inviting local culture, people, and traditions to collaborate. These festivals demonstrate the hybrid identity expressions of the Chinese-Indonesians which are manifested through localized rituals and gastronomic diplomacy. Regardless the efforts to embrace Indonesian local identities, there were local Islamic groups who were feeling threatened by the dominance of the Chinese culture in their towns. These groups also consider hybridity between the Chinese and religious identities, such as salat *Imlek* and *Cap Go Meh* celebration in the mosque, potentially jeopardize Islamic faith.

CONCLUSION

While there are no certain limits for the Chinese to express their identities and culture, these resistance and protests reflect a larger problem in multiculturalism and the integration of the Chinese-Indonesians into the Indonesian nation. In the conceptual level, this paper agrees that the minority cultural expression should not be limited in compliance to the majority groups' rebuttal, as long as these expressions aim to promote diversity, provide benefits for wider communities and do not contain any violence. As a minority group with a long history of political discrimination, it is difficult for the Chinese-Indonesians to negotiate with the protesters in an equal deliberative setting as the non-liberal multiculturalist approach suggests. The liberal approach, which expects the government's endorsement for the minority rights, is needed until the minority groups have enough agency to negotiate their rights.

While *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* becomes the main value for multicultural governance in Indonesia, the governments in Semarang, Solo and Yogyakarta took different strategies in dealing with the conflicts and

resentment of the Islamic groups against the Chinese-Indonesians. In Semarang, the mayor mitigated the conflicts by accommodating the concerns of Islamic groups and requested the minority groups to comply. The mayor of Solo strongly supported the Chinese festivals, regardless of the protests. The governor of Yogyakarta endorsed the festival for economic benefits for local people, but he maintains the discrimination against the Chinese-Indonesians for land property rights. In reviewing the leaders of the three cities, it can be concluded the leaderships matters in guaranteeing multiculturalism and minority identity expressions since the central government has not yet imposed a standard procedure in governing multiculturalism in Indonesia. However, the governance of multiculturalism in the three cities demonstrates pragmatism for conflict resolution since there were no substantial and programmatic efforts to educate the public and to create meeting points, especially for the resenting groups, to be more tolerant and moderate towards other groups. The education in history potentially reduces and corrects the historical burden of segregation and conflicts, which were initiated by the Dutch colonial politics and continued by Soeharto.

ENDNOTES

- 1) *Peranakan* means mixed-blood Chinese who has lived in the archipelago for many generations. Their culture and language are mixed and hybrid with local cultures.
- 2) While several studies, such as Lombard and Salmon (2001), Pigeaud and de Graaf (1976), Tan (2009), discuss a close relationship between Chinese and Islam during its early spread in Java, there is still no consensus on the exact number of the *Wali Sanga*, who were of Chinese descent. However, there is a claim that Sunan Ampel, Sunan Drajad, Sunan Muria and Sunan Bonang were Chinese Muslims (Hew, 2017, pp. 12, 38).
- 3) *Tjap Go Mek* or *Cap Go Meh* is a Hokkien term for the 15th evening or the first full moon after the Chinese New Year. It is a closing celebration of the New Year, which is also known as the Lantern Festival. The Chinese-Indonesians in Java popularly celebrated the first full moon by eating *lontong Cap Go Meh*, which consists of rice cake, chicken, peanuts, coconut milk and vegetables. Interestingly, *lontong Cap Go Meh* contains no pork in it.
- 4) While Sultan Hamengkubuwono X endorsed the PBTY as an expression of tolerance in Yogyakarta, he maintains a notorious and controversial discriminative policy in the land ownership prohibition, which was initiated by the vice governor of Yogyakarta, Sultan Pakualaman IX, in 1975 (Pamungkas et al. 2021). Under his reign, Sultan Hamengkubuwono X keeps the discriminative

policy under the Law No. 13/2012 on the Special Autonomy of Yogyakarta Province (*UU Keistimewaan DIY*), even though it contradicts with the national law on land property rights, UUPA No. 12/2016, which acknowledges the equality in the property rights among the Indonesian citizens, regardless their ethnicities and racial background.

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