

**Remembering or Forgiveness: Aftermath of May 1998 Riots in
Indonesia**

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Prologue:

--I don't think it's a big problem.

--But a million people were killed.

--If you keep making an issue of the past.

--It will definitely happen again.

---The Look of Silence

The religious atmosphere fills every corner of Solo¹, the city located in central Java. At 4:30 am every morning, Muslims begin to worship. Songs are heard throughout the city. Quietly, there is a Chinese community still living here. In this traditional Muslim city, Chinese religious symbols still seem notable and conspicuous.

MAKIN (Supreme Council for Confucianism in Indonesia) in Solo is located in a Confucian temple named Litang. This is a typical Chinese-style building. With yellow walls and a red tiled roof, the temple became prominent. Compared with other small houses on the street, the yard is big; the fence is new and trees in the yard are tall. A statue of Confucius stands at the front of the hall. Apparently, the owner takes care of this temple carefully. Unlike other Chinese temples in Java, Litang only worships Confucius; whereas Most Chinese temples in Java worship gods from different religions. It is common that Confucius, Avalokitesvara, and Guan Yu have been worshiped in a same temple. I asked many people about the reasons.

“Suharto banned the Chinese from expressing their identity. So, mixing Confucianism

¹ Also named Surakarta

with Buddhism is a good technique for them to keep their religion. After all, Buddhism is not as sensitive as Confucianism because it's not just for the Chinese.”

This is the most frequent answer I have heard. After all, Confucius is from China, but Sakyamuni is from India. Buddhism heavily affects Chinese people in different countries, but Chinese people created Confucianism. Confucianism, a typical Chinese symbol, became the target of criticism during Suharto's regime. Liem, a head of LPKB (Institute for the Promotion of National Unity), suggested that all Chinese temples should have any “foreign culture” removed from them and that worship in them should be restricted to Buddhism alone.

1998 was the last year for Suharto, the second president of Indonesia, after the development of his New Order regime (1967-1998). The 1998 anti-Chinese violence became the “last straw” of his downfall and also concluded his New Order national model. Ironically, it was the massacres of the Chinese during 1965-1966 and the bloody political struggle within the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) that brought Suharto to power. As soon as he became the Indonesian President, he introduced the New Order national model in 1967. During the New Order period, to keep society in harmony, people were banned from discussing any SARA issues, the Indonesian abbreviation of ethnicity, religion, race, and class in society. The government also attempted to control all civic organizations in Indonesia, including Chinese-Indonesian ones.

However, social context and many policies were unfriendly to Chinese Indonesians. Chinese Indonesians were prohibited from expressing their identity. Chinese-language publications were restricted. Chinese were urged to change their names to Indonesian types.

The government also issued a decree banning Chinese religious observances or cultural forms in public areas. (Bertrand, 2004). In East Java, there was a ban on the celebration of the Chinese New Year and the lantern festival. Like Litang and other Chinese temples, any Chinese cultural symbols were sensitive and vulnerable at this time.

The 1998 riots are a dividing line. After this conflict, there was no large anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia. Their living environment had also changed.

Introduction

Before I arrived in Solo and interacted with Chinese Indonesians, I planned to look for some resentment of the Chinese towards the Javanese, who motivated many times anti-Chinese conflicts in Indonesia. So, I went to Solo, the conservative Islamic city with anti-Chinese riots history a large Chinese community. I want to explore how Chinese Indonesians here can live with Javanese and their attitudes and emotions toward the people, city, and surroundings. I was worried that people were unwilling to talk about their traumatic experiences, and I did not want to open people's old wounds. I assumed that anti-Chinese conflicts, including the 1998, must have had a profound impact on the Chinese, the sensitivity of the topic can be seen in the collective silence of the literature.

However, the reality is far more complicated. Most Chinese Indonesians I have met in Solo, they never been to China, they were born and grew up in Indonesia. They identify themselves as an Indonesian ethnic minority, distinguished from Chinese people of Chinese. Some young people smiled and talked about anti-Chinese conflicts to me as if they were recounting someone else's stories. Many old people still can speak some Chinese, including

Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hokkien. In the Suharto period, people were banned from speaking Chinese, so even these old people, who were native Chinese speakers, most of them could not speak Chinese fluently now. Some old people complained about the discrimination they have experienced, but I have never seen as much resentment on any people's face as I expected.

Where is the resentment?

Chinese Indonesians have lived in Indonesia for many years. They are immersed in Indonesian culture, but also, they have also experienced discrimination and violence, so they treat the land and people with complicated emotions and feelings, not just resentment. In this paper, I not only explored the resentments of Chinese Indonesians, I interviewed them and listened to the life stories of Chinese Indonesians of different ages, and from these narratives, I gradually understood how they identify themselves and their attitudes towards Chinese culture and Indonesian culture.

In this paper, I argue that Different generations of Chinese Indonesians have different attitudes and sentiments towards Indonesian society. Resentment still exists among the older generation who experienced the anti-Chinese conflict. Born before the Suharto period, they speak Chinese as their first language and have strong Chinese cultural roots, while subsequently experiencing Suharto's discrimination and suppression of the Chinese and therefore having to integrate into Indonesian culture. They have retained much of their Chinese culture and have had a harder time integrating into Indonesian culture.

The younger generation who was born during or after the New Order period, speak Bahasa Indonesian and different dialects. They learned about the anti-Chinese conflict in

Indonesia from their parents. Apparently, resentment is hard to find among them. They still retain a part of their Chinese culture but are better integrated into Indonesian society than the older generation of Chinese. Compared to Sukarno's more relaxed policy on discourse, the suppression of Chinese during the Suharto period also deeply affected the young Chinese Indonesians, who had few opportunities to get in touch with Chinese culture and learn the Chinese language as the older generation did in Sukarno period.

I did research in Solo and met most Chinese Indonesians and my interviewees in the Confucian temple, Litang. On the one hand, unlike other religions, Confucianism is a Chinese religion, which can be seen as a Chinese cultural symbol. According to census data of MAKIN in 2009, 95 percent of Confucians are ethnic Chinese; most of the remaining 5 percent are ethnic Javanese, who are mainly Chinese-Javanese marriage converts. On the other hand, Litang usually holds events for Chinese festivals which can gather people not only Confucians. According to the census data of 2010, about half of Chinese Indonesians were Buddhists and more than 40 percent of Chinese Indonesians are Christian. Only three percent of Chinese believe in Confucianism. The low percentage of people who believe in Confucianism can be attributed to historical reasons. During the New Order Period, Chinese religion and culture were forbidden, forcing many Chinese to convert to Christianity (Tim Lindsey & Helen Pausacker, 2006). Today, the Indonesian government has restored Confucianism as a recognized religion, but many local governments still refuse to allow the Chinese to list it as a religion on their identity card (Ananta, Aris; Arifin, Evi Nurvidya; Hasbullah, M. Sairi; Handayani, Nur Budi; Pramono, Agus, 2015).

Who are Chinese Indonesians?

George Skinner (1960) defined Chinese Indonesians as:

In Indonesia, a person of Chinese ancestry is Chinese when he functions as a member of, and identifies with, Chinese society. The only reliable cultural sign of this self-identification as Chinese and of alignment with a Chinese social system is the use--at least in some form and under some circumstances--of a Chinese surname.

According to Coppel (1983), "Indonesian Chinese are defined as persons of Chinese ancestry who either function as members of, and identify with Chinese society or are regarded as Chinese by indigenous Indonesians and given special treatment as a consequence" (p. 5).

There is a long history of Chinese living in Indonesia. "Small Chinese settlements already existed in Indonesia before the coming of the Europeans, especially in the trading ports along the north coast of Java" (p. 1). Chinese have always been a small ethnic minority in Indonesia. By 1860 there was an estimated Chinese population of 222,000 in Indonesia, and the rapid increase occurred in the following 70 years. In the early 1930s, the wave of immigration began to recede. A 1930 census conducted by the Dutch colonial government showed that there were 1,233,214 Chinese living in the East Indies (Zhou, 2019).

There are two subgroups of Chinese Indonesians: the *peranakan* and the *totok*. *Peranakan* refers to Indonesian-born ethnic Chinese who speak Indonesian; this group also includes mixed-race unions. *Totok* refers to foreign-born immigrants and their descendants who speak Chinese (Zhou, 2019). In my research, all my interviewees are pure Chinese. Although they speak Indonesian, they still identify as *peranakan*.

Stories Behind Xiaozhe and the 1998 Riots

This was a sunny Sunday. I was waiting for the weekly worship at 9 a.m. in the Litang temple on a bench in the yard. This was also the first time I participated in the event.

“In the New Order period, we couldn’t participate in politics, but we can run our business well.”

After learning why I was there doing research, Xiaozhe, a Chinese man who came here to join in the worship, told me this as he slipped me a big cup of ginger soup with ice and then sat down next to me. He was the only Chinese Indonesian I met in Solo who could speak some Mandarin.

Xiaozhe Wu is my Chinese name. My parents gave it to me when I was born. I used it when I was in primary school. I bet you can’t tell; I’m actually in my 70s. At a very young age, I could still study in Chinese school². So, I can speak some Mandarin now. During the New Order period, Chinese schools were banned. No matter their citizenship and ethnicity, all students in Indonesia were required to go to Indonesian national schools. Then, I was forced to change my name to the Indonesian form. I don't dare speak Chinese in public. I might get yelled at. This temple (Litang) was closed at that time. I considered how to support myself after I graduated from high school. Like other Chinese Indonesians, I started to run my own business. I opened a print store, which was then developed into a factory. Depending on this factory, I brought up my three children.

Xiaozhe is so proud of his business. As he said, he looks young. His whole body was

² Schools with Chinese as the medium of instruction

full of energy when he talked about his business.

Like Xiaozhe, so many Chinese Indonesians took advantage of the economy at that time. Although Suharto excluded the Chinese from politics, he did not limit their economic development. In fact, the economic prowess of Chinese Indonesians was significantly extended as they succeeded in forging symbiotic business ties with the power holders of the Suharto government (Park, 2020). Liem Sioe Liong was the Chinese boss of Indonesia's biggest conglomerate during Suharto's period. In the mid-1990s, more than 200,000 people worked in his companies, Salim Group. In 1996, the year before the Asian financial crisis, revenue from group operations was estimated at US\$22 billion, nearly three times as large as the second-ranked group (Borsuk, 2014).

In stark contrast, life before the 1998 riots was not easy for most ordinary Indonesians. The economic crisis of 1997 and 1998 affected Indonesian society. The steep rises in food prices, combined with massive food shortages and increasing unemployment, placed many people in a dire situation (Hill, 1999). With indignation for the government's corruption, combined with resentment for large Chinese conglomerates, ethnic conflict erupted, and the New Order regime that had lasted for 30 years collapsed. The events took place mainly in Jakarta and also in the provinces of Central Java. It was estimated that more than a thousand people died in the riots. "Over the course of a few days from May 12 to 15, houses, shops, and vehicles in Jakarta, Solo, Surabaya, Lampung, and Palembang were burnt, individuals were beaten and sometimes killed, and many women were raped" (Coppel & Cribb, 2009).

I tried to learn more from Xiaozhe about his experiences during the riots, but I failed.

"The Javanese are as cruel as they were in 1965. They look down on us." I got a very

brief answer and a long silence. It would not be polite of me to pursue it any further. However, that didn't stop me from asking some other questions.

“What's your secret to staying young?” I asked him with a big smile. This question seemed unrelated to my topic, but that's what I was most curious about. Soon, he would prove to me the importance of this question.

“I practice *qigong*³ every day.”

“What?” I was shocked. I agree that qigong can strengthen the body, but I don't think it has any supernatural effects. It is just slow aerobics. However, many Chinese think qigong has magical effects, especially the old generation.

“Oh, how can you not know *qigong*? This is the essence of Chinese culture.”

I wanted to explain that I knew this, but he did not give me any opportunity.

I practice Qigong every morning. I invited my Chinese friends to practice with me, but they all refused. Actually, doing Qigong is a good way for me to connect myself with some Chinese things. I forgot to tell you that when I was very young, I taught people Chinese in the temple (Litang). In the beginning, Suharto had started to restrict Chinese cultural symbols but did not take them very seriously. So, I taught Chinese in Litang secretly. For the preservation of Chinese culture, I also taught them Chinese calligraphy. Later, the discrimination against the Chinese became severe, and the temple was closed. I have to concentrate on my business, and sometimes, I feel just like a mouse. Fortunately, I lived in a mixed community (Chinese and Javanese) during the 1998 riots. My house and factory were

³ With roots in Chinese medicine, philosophy, and martial arts, *qigong* is traditionally viewed by the Chinese and throughout Asia as a practice to cultivate and balance *qi* (pronounced approximately as "chee"), translated as "life energy." Qigong practice typically involves moving meditation, coordinating slow-flowing movement, deep rhythmic breathing, and a calm, meditative state of mind.

not burned, but I was scared and stayed at home for about a week. They (rioters) burned and robbed many Chinese houses and stores. Rioters in Solo were not completely devoid of conscience. Unlike those in Jakarta, their targets were Chinese Indonesians' properties. In Jakarta, they were very cruel. They killed many people and raped many Chinese women.

In Indonesia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998 made by the U.S.

Serious charges emerged in the early summer that 168 ethnic Chinese women and girls were targeted systematically for rape and sexual abuse during the civil disturbances of May 12-14. The allegations were given credence by the National Human Rights Commission, a government-sponsored body, which issued a preliminary report in July charging that rape of ethnic Chinese women and girls was carried out in an organized and coordinated manner over 3 days in Jakarta and several other major cities.

“So, in Solo, they are better, right?” I asked

“They are better than those in Jakarta, but that doesn’t mean they are good. They are still scoundrels! Don’t wear shorts, and it is very dangerous for Chinese girls.” He suddenly changed the topic on me and also looked at me. I looked at my shorts and did not know how to reply.

After a brief silence, I said, “Okey, I will not. I did not ask him about the reason, but I guessed it was connected to the rape aimed at Chinese women during the 1998 riots. I felt awkward, but I also did not want to contradict the amiable older man.

“Is this the first time you visit Litang? If so, I can introduce you to the staff here.” He asked.

“I was here last Saturday (July 8th) for the evening event, but you were not here.”

“How was it going?”

“It was amazing! Hundreds of Chinese Indonesians came.”

Events in Litang

It's Saturday night, July 8th, 2023, and there is a special worship service going on in Litang.

This worship is more ceremonious than previous Sunday worship meetings. Hundreds of The



special worship

Chinese Indonesians gathered in this Confucian temple, regardless of their religion. At this time, the meaning of this temple is not just about religion but also about the Chinese identity. This temple warmly welcomes everyone who arrives, even Javanese. For me, the small temple is more like a sanctuary for Chinese culture in Solo. Confucianism is a religion from China, a religion that belongs only to the Chinese in Indonesia. Confucius is a Chinese saint, a real person who once lived in Chinese history. Chinese people honor Confucius. He is a great educator and philosopher, but Confucianism is not a religion in China. This temple, therefore, is not only of religious significance but also of great cultural significance.

When I got there, the lobby was filled, so I sat in the yard. After a while, the yard was also filled. Everyone here greets each other like old friends who have known each other for a long time. In the beginning, like all previous weekly Sunday worship, the temple staff offered incense⁴ and prayed to Confucius. They gave out three sticks of incense to each person. People took the incense and began to bow their heads in prayer. After the prayers were finished, the staff collected the incense again and inserted it into a huge incense burner in front of them. After that, people began to sing religious songs. The temple has a special songbook. Typically, three songs are randomly selected from this book to be sung together at each weekly worship. The lyrics of these songs are from Confucius' quotes. However, the three songs are different in the special worship on that day. In addition to some religious songs, they also sang other songs where the lyrics were more emotional. Most lyrics are about country and identity, past and future.

This are the lyrics of one of the songs :

...Hari hari berjalan tahun-tahun telahlalu

Memacu semangat hidup kita

Banyaklah yang sudah dialui bersama

Hasilkan buah karya nyata...

Meaning: As time goes by, our life is getting better and better. We have suffered a lot together, but these will become precious treasures.

...Indonesia beraneka

Suku bangsa dan agama

⁴ Around 2000 BCE, Ancient China began using incense in the religious sense, namely for worship.

Jangan dibedakan atau diceraikan

Kita satu dalam kebangsaan

Persamaan dikuatkan...

Meaning: Indonesia is diverse. There should be no conflicts and exclusion between different ethnic groups and religions. We belong to one nation and should be united

According to those lyrics, while expressing their Chinese identity, they also hope to integrate into Indonesian society actively, even though they have suffered many tragedies, including the 1998 riots. However, for most Chinese Indonesians, integration is not easy. Chinese Indonesians, as non-*pribumi*(native), and are always faced with exclusion in Indonesian society. “Violence against Chinese Indonesians has its roots in the recurring institutionalization of exclusion” (Bertrand, 2005, p. 59).

After singing these songs, a leader of the temple gave a speech. During the weekly worship, a speech is also given by a staff member or a volunteer. These speeches revolve around topics related to Confucius or Chinese culture. For instance, at one of the events I attended, the speech focused on the use of incense in Chinese religious activities.

The topics of the Saturday speech include religion and Chinese identity by a leader of the temple. The language is Javanese, not Chinese, and not Indonesian, which is the official language of Indonesia. “...*As Chinese Indonesians, we have experienced many tragedies together, from the 1965 killing to the 1998 riots. However, those tragedies did not bring us down...During the New Order period, we couldn't speak Chinese and we were forced to change our name. But we are Chinese, what should we do? Should we surrender? Some people change their names to Kasnowa Diponegoro, the abbreviation of Bekas Cino dadi*

Jawo mergo dipelso negoro (an ex-Chinese becomes a Javanese because of the state's oppression) ...”

Some Indonesian or Indonesian-style Chinese foods were also provided during this worship for dinner. After the worship, there was a performance. The performers were picked very randomly from the guests. They danced and also sang old Chinese songs. The words written on the backdrop board were “*Mengubah nasib (change fate)*”

On Sunday, one day after the special worship, some staff of Litang and Confucian believers visited the grave of Tjhie Tjay Ing and Tjiong Giok Hwa in the mountain of Northern Solo. Two names and some memorial words on a tombstone are in Chinese annotated with Cantonese pronunciations.

“How do you pronounce their names?” a leader of the temple asked me. Then everyone looked at me.

“Zaiying Xu and Yuhua Dong.” I answered in Mandarin.

Obviously, these two people are important to them. They visit this tomb monthly and take care of the grave well. The plants around the tomb are well-trimmed.

They are Confucian religious leaders in Indonesia. Both of them made important contributions to protect Chinese culture. Both of



them passed away in Solo. This is the only information I learned about them from Litang's leaders.

After arriving, everyone stood facing the tomb and held three incense sticks. They recited Confucian quotations translated into Indonesian. They did so together, loudly. They ate *serabi*, a kind of Indonesian food made of sticky rice and coconut, as the snack during this event. I was surprised by what I witnessed. I had not imagined that Confucianism had such power, that it could bring together a community of Chinese Indonesians who were born in Indonesia and speak Indonesian. They have never been to China. In Solo, the small city that was once hostile to Chinese culture, they strive to retain their Chinese identity, even if the medium for doing so is Indonesian. Languages play important roles in people's identity expression. However, Anderson (1983) also comments that "In a world in which the national state is the overwhelming norm, all of this means that nations can now be imagined without linguistic commonality" (p.135). Chinese Indonesians enact this idea with their attitudes. They keep seeking to pass on their traditions and cultures using the Indonesian language, and sometimes even in Indonesian dialects.

Longxiao Qiu and Perkumpulan Masyarakat Surakarta

Chinese communities have been distributed in different areas, which distinguishes them from indigenous Indonesians. Many people, outsiders, and Indonesians, picture the Chinese as a predominantly urban group. According to Coppel (1983), "Indigenous Indonesians have been so heavily concentrated in rural areas that the Chinese have seemed more urban than they really were" (p. 6). Many Chinese organizations in Indonesia bring Chinese people

together to engage in business activities or cultural activities. There are also promote Chinese culture while maintaining the Chinese identity

It was Thursday afternoon, July 20th, 2023, when Xiaozhe sent me a message, “Do you want to meet Longxiao Qiu? I think he would be helpful for your research.”

“Sure!” I replied although I did not know who is Longxiao.

“OK, I can pick you up at 4 pm today.”

At about 4:20, we arrived at the *Perkumpulan Masyarakat Surakarta (PMS)*, which is near the Litang. Compared to other nearby small houses, this four-floor building is luxurious. PMS is the largest NGO organized by Chinese Indonesians in Solo.

“This is Longxiao, my friend, the president of PMS.” Xiaozhe introduced Longxiao, an amiable middle-aged man who was in a *batik*⁵ shirt and was looking at me with a smile.

“Have you tasted Indonesian food?” Longxiao asked me as he took a large plate of fried food from a cupboard to the table we were sitting around. “This is *makanan (food) rumah (home)*, which means you can cook it at home by yourself simply.”

Tofu, sweet potatoes, zucchini, and bananas were fried to golden brown and lay on the plate together.

"I am free after 4 pm today once all the classes have ended." He explained.

"Classes?" I asked.

You see, you don't know much about PMS. This organization was built in 1932. One of our missions is to promote Chinese culture in Indonesia and help Chinese Indonesians integrate into Indonesian society. So, we offer many courses related to Chinese culture,

⁵ Batik is an Indonesian technique of wax-resist dyeing applied to the whole cloth.

including Mandarin, Chinese Calligraphy, Tai Chi, and more. Our students come from different ethnic groups. Moreover, we provide badminton and basketball courses, which can provide more opportunities for communication between children from different backgrounds. Most staff of Litang also work here.

“Sounds great!” I said.

“So, how can I help you with your research?” he asked.

Xiaozhe, Longxiao, and I were sitting in a meeting room with a round table and thirty chairs. Xiaozhe was next to Longxiao, and both of them were facing me. I felt nervous since the atmosphere became formal. In particular, Longxiao wore a batik shirt, a kind of formal clothing in Indonesia.

“I want to learn something about the 1998 riots and your life in Indonesia.”

“A journalist just interviewed me about this topic last month. Maybe you can read his article. I have already told this story hundreds of times to different people.”

“I am the special one”, I replied. I will write this in English or Chinese, and more people will know.” I assumed that because Longxiao just speaks Indonesian, he must have hoped a person could tell the story in other languages one day, especially in Chinese.

My assumption was right. He told me his story carefully.

I witnessed this tragedy in 1998. Until today, I still remember it vividly. I have told this story many times, and each time I tell it, I need to recall it again, and it strengthens my memory. At that time, I was active in the PMS, so my house rightfully became their target. At first, I heard from my friend that many students were demonstrating on university campuses in Solo and Jakarta. They were resentful of the Suharto government. Then, many people

joined in this demonstration. I could not imagine this demonstration would become the 1998 riots at that time. A few days later, I got information that some rioters were coming to Solo. I was worried about my friends. So, I called them and asked them to close their stores and companies.

I saw some stones dropped on my roof and windows while talking with a friend. I realized they had already arrived. The staff of the neighborhood committee called me and told me my house was already surrounded. The rioters outside yelled that they would burn my house. Then the neighborhood committee director called me and told me I could go out from the back of my house. He dug a hole in the wall with a stick, and my wife, daughter, and I crawled out of my house from the small hole. Luckily, the house was made of mud, which was easy to be broken. We lived in my friend's house for a while and didn't dare to go out.

After this, I had an anxiety attack and needed to take medication to survive. I couldn't sleep at night because I was afraid of rioters surrounding my house and robbing my belongings at night, and I couldn't go out. I spent about two years trying to get out of the trauma and beginning to forgive.

Today, this hole is still in my wall. I fitted a small door for this hole as a commemoration.

“I am so sorry. Are you still resentful of them today?” I asked.

“Definitely no; the tragedy is related to political competition. Some politicians could benefit from anti-Chinese conflicts. People are easily incited, but it is not their fault. Additionally, my life is good now. I have a factory producing building materials and a bunch of Javanese friends.”

Do you think anti-Chinese conflicts will happen again?" I asked.

"Maybe, if there are political competitions again. However, I think the situation will be better if we (Javanese and Chinese) can respect each other. I think discrimination still exists in society, but the situation is better now."

I started to write some notes about Longxiao's story, while Xiaozhe started to introduce *qigong* to Longxiao. He invited Longxiao to practice *qigong* with him, but Longxiao just smiled and said nothing.

Longxiao is different from Xuiaozhe. Wearing Indonesian traditional clothes and speaking Indonesian, but with a Chinese face, cultural integration was presented clearly in his appearance. He is willing to accept international students from China living in his house, which provides him and his family with more opportunities to learn Chinese culture, and he is also willing to help these Chinese students who are studying alone in Indonesia.

"As an Indonesian public figure, I think harmony of the Indonesian society is important to everyone. So, as Indonesians, we (Chinese Indonesians) shouldn't always hold resentment toward natives. Most of them are innocent. Moreover, if we can build good relationships with natives, the possibility of anti-Chinese conflict will become low."

After this interview, *Xiaozhe* took me back to the house I was staying in. I told him I could go back by myself. He disagreed and said, "It is 9 pm. It is unsafe for a Chinese girl wearing shorts to walk alone. I have told you not to wear shorts before." In Solo, nearly no women wear shorts and tank tops except for foreign tourists. Islamic culture affects every aspect of people's lives. Also, Chinese women suffer mass sexual assault.

Stories Behind Fongfong and Her Family

There was a girl taking pictures of every Litang event.

“You are different, so I want to take a picture of you and this temple.” The girl spoke to me in English when I visited the temple for the special event on Saturday.

“Ok, but can I know the reason? Just because I am different?”

“Few foreigners come here. Your face makes this temple look more diverse and international,” she said and smiled with two little dimples on her face.

She is Fongfong, a young Chinese Indonesian girl who can speak English and is very active in different events in Litang. After the Saturday event, I started a brief communication with her in Litang while we ate some colorful Chinese rice balls and ginger soup.

“Why do you always take pictures for events in Litang?”

“I am the chief of Youth Confucian Organization Indonesia. I should do what I can for Confucianism. I just have a good camera.”

“How old are you? You look as young as me.”

“I am already 32. I think I am older than you.”

“Oh yeah, I am 23,” I replied.

“Can we have dinner together when you have time? I am wondering about your stories about the 1998 riots and your life here,” I continued to ask.

“Of course.”

It was July 20th, 2023, and Fongfong told me she had time to meet me that day, and she would pick me up at 6 pm at from the house I was living in. We live in the same community. This is a mixed community of Chinese and Javanese. She asked me what kind of food I

wanted to eat, and I told her I didn't know. Finally, we ate at a *wedangan*, an Indonesian type of café, with some drinks and some sate (Indonesian type of BBQ). This kind of café only opens at night and provides people with dinner and supper.

I am pure Chinese, a peranakan as they said. I grew up in Solo, and I cannot speak any Chinese. My parents also cannot speak Chinese. I know my mother is the third generation from Fujian. I don't know which generation my father is. His family has been in Indonesia such a long time. I experienced the 1998 riots when I was very young and in primary school. I can remember that day very well.

I went to school as usual in the morning. At about 10 a.m., my mother picked me up at school but did not tell me anything. I was so happy because I could go home early, but my mother seemed very nervous. My family had a factory in a mixed community of Solo, and we lived in the factory. Most of our workers were Javanese natives, so after I got home, I saw the words 'native' everywhere on the factory wall. Those Javanese rioters usually left different marks on native and Chinese houses so that they could rob and burn Chinese houses with precision. They did not know the owner of this factory was Chinese. There was nobody to tell them.

After we entered our house, my parents closed all the doors and windows right away. Then we went up to the top floor because there was a terrace and we could observe the situation outside from there. I remember that soon after we arrived, a large group of Javanese came. They threw stones at surrounding houses and shouted abuses and threats. I was still young, and my parents told me to get off the terrace quickly, so I don't know what they did to the Chinese in our community.

“So, they didn’t impact you,” I said.

“They didn’t assault us, but it doesn’t mean they didn’t have an impact on my life.”

Thanks to our Javanese workers, they did not inform the rioters that the owner’s family was Chinese. As a result, our house and factory were not burnt down. Our neighbors and workers locked down our house, and we could not go out for about one week. Nobody knew there were Chinese here. Although it was true that our workers helped us because they did not want to lose their jobs. Our neighborhood helped us because they did not want their business to be affected by the rioters.

“Are you resentful of the Javanese?” I asked.

“No, I am grateful for my Javanese neighborhood and workers. Not all Javanese are ruthless and bad. Although the starting point of why they help us is not necessarily about their kindness.”

“Do you have some good Javanese friends? I heard Chinese Indonesians are still discriminated against by Javanese,” I asked

“Of course. I have many Javanese friends, and most of the workers in our factory are also Javanese. I have many opportunities to communicate with Javanese. I know that there is a small group of Muslim extremists that discriminate against the Chinese, but they are not the mainstream of Indonesian society today. My Javanese friends also dislike them.”

I was afraid there might be some very orthodox Muslims in the restaurant who would be dissatisfied with our conversation. However, I soon realized that we were speaking English.

. I have never forgotten that day I talked about the Indonesian Communist Party and the massacre in 1965 at a train station with another Indonesian friend. He felt very awkward and

told me not to discuss this sensitive topic publicly.

“How about your life now?”

“I help my father manage his factory now. I haven’t married, so I still live with my parents. We believe in Confucianism, so, you see, my parents help me do what I can do for the temple.”

“You haven’t met the right person?” I asked

“It’s up to my parents. They think the right person hasn’t shown up yet.”

“Why?” I couldn’t believe what he said.

“I am a believer of Confucianism. I should obey and respect my parents. In Chinese, it’s *xiao*(孝).”

I was shocked that this traditional Chinese or East Asian value could affect Fongfong, an Indonesian Chinese who cannot speak Chinese. “*Xiao*” is originally from the Confucian philosophy, but this concept has affected Chinese society for thousands of years, which was already a kind of value in Chinese culture. Today, Chinese young people keep trying to break out of these old values but Fongfong gets herself into these values. However, I was not sure if these values affected them through religion or their Chinese personality and identity. “*Xiao*” also existed in Xiaozhe and Longxiao’s Chinese names.

Compared to Xiaozhe and Longxiao, Fongfong has more opportunities to communicate with natives and participate in their circles. She is young and was born in Solo; she speaks Indonesian but still holds onto Chinese values.

Story of Yoyo and Chinese Indonesians in the Post-Suharto Period

I knew Yoyo through Wiwin, a staff in Litang, who leads the weekly worship at the temple. Wiwin is the person I met and got to know at this temple. A week after arriving at the temple, I asked her if I could interview her.

“I did not experience the 1998 riots. I was 18 years old at that time and my community is very safe. I lived in a mixed (Chinese and Javanese) community and no rioters came. However, I think the anti-Chinese conflict is important, so I hope you can find something useful. I can introduce you to Yoyo, I think he experienced the riots” she said.

Before I came to Solo, I always reminded myself repeatedly to ask questions euphemistically and not to put the interviewee through secondary trauma. However, I realized that I was indeed overly concerned. The Chinese Indonesians I met were not only very happy to share their stories with me but also happy to introduce me to interviewees.

“You are Chinese, we are willing to talk about our experiences, and we hope more people know about our experiences.” She told me.

Yoyo was invited by Wiwin to the small library of Litang, and I interviewed him there. Wiwin is very supportive of my interview. She provided us with some Indonesian bread and iced tea.

“Are you a Confucianist? Because Wiwin and you are very good friends.” I asked.

“No, I'm a Christian, but I like to come here for some of the events. Because many Chinese will come here, and I can communicate with them.”

Yoyo is not the first non-Confucian I've seen here.

Then he told his story to me.

When the riots happened, I was playing video with my friend in his home. Many rioters

came here. They were in Solo for about two days. So, So I went home immediately.. My family lived in a Javanese community at that time, so we are nervous but safe. However, my friend, who lived in a Chinese community, was abused. So many houses were burned. However, rioters in Solo didn't kill people. They just burn houses. Many people in Jakarta were killed, and many women were raped. I believe that political campaigns fueled the riots, but many people didn't realize this. At that time, many Chinese in Solo were very rich. So, I think the resentment of ordinary Chinese Javanese is just from envy.

“Are you resentful of the Javanese?” I asked him.

“I don't resent them because they didn't hurt me and my family, although it's a bit selfish to say that. I have a lot of friends here whose houses burned down, especially the well-to-do ones. I think they might be resentful of the Javanese because a lot of them moved to Bali or Kalimantan, places where the dominant ethnicity is not Javanese.”

“How is your life now? Have you been discriminated against in Indonesia?”

Yes, in the 1990s, I was always discriminated against when I was in secondary school. In those days, Chinese people were always discriminated against. Although things are better now, I am still discriminated against. One experience has impressed me deeply. Last year, I attended a New Year's event in Solo. It was very crowded, and I rode a motorcycle on the road. However, a Javanese man on a motorcycle always hit me from behind, and later I realized that only my friend and I were Chinese there. The Javanese man not only hit us but also insulted us. When I went back, my back hurt for days.

“Did you fight back?”

“No, all the people there were Javanese. We are too weak to fight with them.”

“Why didn’t you call the police for help?”

“Most of the police are Javanese and even if they wanted to help us it would be difficult, they don't want to offend the Javanese. Just like in 1998, the police were also powerless to stop a lot of cruelty.”

Although he kept smiling, I thought his narrative was rather passive.

“Do you have any Javanese friends?” I asked.

“Yes, I have many Javanese and Muslim friends, I’m sure most Javanese are very nice.”

“What’s your job now?”

“I own a Chinese medicine store. I am very interested in Chinese culture, and I have been to Beijing. I hope I can promote Chinese culture here.”

Like other Chinese Indonesians, he also has a strong sense of Chinese identity and wants to keep it and carry it forward.

When I asked the Chinese Indonesians about their lives now, “discrimination” is usually the keyword in their answers.

After the fall of Suharto, “although in Indonesia’s new democracy, there has been an opening up of a more democratic and liberal political space”, “In this democratic space, the Chinese are free to participate in electoral politics”, “but very few of them have been elected because the Chinese are still perceived as an alien minority by the pribumi (indigenous Indonesians)” (Chong, 2018, p. 2).

In the post-Suharto period, Chinese Indonesians could make their cultural and ethnic identities visible, but they also worried about what this visibility might mean for attitudes towards the Chinese (Chong, 2018). Like Yoyo, Many Chinese Indonesians would not fight

back when they were bullied.

Since the end of the New Order regime, the central government has become stricter in collecting taxes from business enterprises. If tax officers find that business owners have under-reported their revenues, instead of penalizing the business owners, they usually ask for bribes to cover up the tax fraud. tax officers often demand higher bribes from businesspeople who are ethnic Chinese as they are deemed by others to be doing better in business (Chong, 2018).

In the post-Suharto era, Chinese Indonesians continue to suffer inequality in all aspects of their lives. Although, the central government does not have a discriminatory policy, the Chinese community is still excluded from mainstream Indonesian society. The tragedy of the Chinese Indonesians has brought about an appearance of peace, but not full acceptance by the native Indonesians. The crisis has always existed.

Discussion:

As a Chinese person living in China, I rarely have the opportunity or need to think about issues of my Chinese identity. For me, they seem to be established and unquestionable. I don't need to spend time exploring this issue at all. However, in Indonesia, the Chinese have to pay a certain price to maintain their identity. As a minority group, whether to remain oneself or integrate is a difficult question to answer.

From ancient times, the Chinese have always been an ethnic minority in Indonesia. According to Bertrand (2004) "Violence against the Chinese Indonesians has its roots in the

recurring institutionalization of exclusion” (p. 59). “Socio-economic differences between the Chinese and non-Chinese Indonesians have been blamed as a primary source of grievance” (p. 59). “Yet, the Chinese community itself was divided”, “They had often shed any of their Chinese cultural characteristics and tended to speak local languages or a Chinese-Malay dialect” (p. 60).

In history, there have been two large-scale anti-Chinese violent outbreaks in Indonesia, the 1965 massacre and the 1998 riots. Although many studies consider that the former was a political competition between the army and the PKI instead of an ethnic conflict (Roosa, 2020), it is clear that most victims were Chinese Indonesians, and some of them were just ordinary Chinese Indonesians, not communist party members. During the New Order regime, Chinese identity was suppressed, while the anti-Chinese sentiment was also suppressed by the SARA policy. In 1998, the anti-Chinese sentiment was vented, and after this, there was no large-scale anti-Chinese violence. So, the riots become a dividing line, and the aftermath of 1998 also can reflect Chinese Indonesians’ living situation now.

The stories of Xiaozhe, Longxiao, Fongfong, and Yoyo represent three generations who have experienced the 1998 riots. Their memories and the impact of the 1998 riots on them are very different. Xiaozhe expressed his resentment toward the Javanese. Meanwhile, Longxiao attributed the violence to the political campaign, and Fongfong believes that many Javanese are still kind because they protected her family during the riots. As time goes by, resentment could be healed, but their Chinese identity still affects their lives.

While change is very much a feature of Chinese people living in a range of diasporas, there is also much cultural continuity, as the migrants in Indonesia showed in trying to

reterritorialize the Chinese ways of life that they were familiar with (Beng, 2012).

The struggle between remembering and forgiveness, integration and exclusion still persists in Chinese Indonesians' daily lives. They wear traditional Indonesian clothing and eat Indonesian or Indonesian-type Chinese food. Due to Suharto's discriminatory policies and Indonesia's social-cultural environment, all of them speak Bahasa Indonesian. However, they still hold on to their Chinese identity. They have tried hard to hold on to traces of Chinese culture in Indonesia, where anti-Chinese sentiments have threatened their identity. And yet Confucianism has been preserved, much more strongly than would have seemed imaginable.

Abbreviations:

PKI: *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Communist Party of Indonesia

MAKIN: *Majelis Tinggi Agama Khonghucu Indonesia*, Supreme Council for Confucianism
in Indonesia

LPKB: *Lembaga Pembina Kesatuan Bangsa*, Institute for the Promotion of National Unity

SARA: *Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar-golongan*, Ethnicity, Religion, Race and Intergroup

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