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Politics of multicultural education in post-Suharto Indonesia: a study of the Chinese minority

Tracey Yani Harjatanaya\textsuperscript{a} and Chang-Yau Hoon\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Department of Education, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK; \textsuperscript{b}Centre for Advanced Research, University of Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei

\textbf{ABSTRACT}

This article explores the role of schools in responding to the ambivalent relationships between the Chinese and non-Chinese in Indonesia. It examines the multicultural position that Indonesian teachers adopt and the pedagogical strategies they employ in promoting positive inter-ethnic relations. Through interviews with teachers in three schools with different student ethno-religious compositions in Medan, the article argues that the multiculturalism paradigm embraced by the majority of teachers leans towards a liberal multicultural outlook, employing mostly content integration and prejudice reduction. The heterogenous school in the study has more potential to empower a multicultural school culture due to the school demography compared to the homogenous school. However, such efforts still focus heavily on maximising intergroup contact and less on engaging students critically. This article considers theories of multiculturalism in tandem with Indonesian’s concept of nationalism and national identity, including the vision of diversity enshrined in the national motto \textit{Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika} (Unity-in-Diversity).

\textbf{KEYWORDS}

multiculturalism; multicultural education; Indonesia; Chinese Indonesians

\textbf{Introduction}

Over the past decade or so, scholars have been discussing the usefulness of multiculturalism in the Indonesian context, referring particularly to the urgency of putting in place multicultural education (e.g. Tilaar 2004; Raihani 2014; Hoon 2017). While one could not claim that Indonesia is consistently implementing policies of multiculturalism, some efforts have been made by the Ministry of Education and Culture to promote multiculturalism in the school curriculum. In the Education Act No 20/2003 on the National Education System, one can find that the terms ‘equality’, ‘democracy’, and ‘diversity’ form salient features in the reformed education system. As stated in the Act No.20/2003, Chapter 3, article 4, verse 1: ‘Education is conducted democratically, equally and non-discriminatorily based on human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national pluralism’ (emphasis added). Similarly, the notion of multiculturalism can also be located in the second chapter of the Ministerial Decree No 22/2006 outlining the principles of framework and structure of curriculum. One of the principles states that ‘the curriculum is developed with respect to
the diverse characteristics of students, local features, and the levels and types of education, without discriminating against religion, ethnicity, culture and traditions, also social and economic status, and gender’ (emphasis added). In 2007, the Ministry also released a document entitled ‘The application of the multicultural education model for the secondary level’, which served as a guide to schools on the teaching of multicultural education to promote cultural understanding, tolerance and harmonious coexistence. Unfortunately, this document does not elaborate on how multicultural education can be applied in practice at school and classroom level – what strategies to be used, and the goals of such educational concept. Neither was the document widely disseminated to schools and teachers. So, how do schools implement multicultural education? What makes one school more successful than another in implementing effective multicultural education? Are heterogeneous schools more likely to succeed than homogenous schools? If so, in what way?

Research across different disciplines in the field of education and diversity has tried to address those questions, and the trend suggests heterogeneous schools are more likely to succeed. From a psychological perspective, Allport’s (1954) intergroup contact theory has influenced significantly the development of social psychology studies, especially on prejudice reduction and building intergroup relations. According to this theory, providing contact opportunities between members of the opposing groups can ameliorate intergroup conflict by meeting four key conditions: (1) equal group status within the situation; (2) working towards common goals and recognising a common humanity; (3) intergroup cooperation; and (4) the support of authorities, law or custom (such as school and teachers creating norms for positive interactions). Despite some criticisms in the early days, after decades of extensive research, in general, studies have provided converging evidence that intergroup contact has positive effects (e.g. Hayes and McAllister 2009; Hayes, McAllister, and Dowds 2007; McGlynn 2003). A study by Hayes and McAllister (2009) for instance, investigating the long-term impact of segregated and integrated education on attitudes towards Protestant-Catholic relations in Northern Ireland, suggests that integrated schools, as opposed to segregated schools, are more effective in bridging interactions between individuals from across the religious divide, and friendship networks are more likely to develop into positive future community. There is also evidence to show that students attending integrated schools maintain the level of contact with members of the ‘other’ group even after the school experience (see McGlynn 2003).

While many studies highlight the positive influence of integrated schools in promoting intergroup relations in conflict areas, regular contact between different communities in a formal educational setting may also reinforce division. In a society where conflicts and segregation are deeply rooted in the history such as in South Africa, for example, Harber (1998) asserts that bringing students from African, White, Indian and mixed-race backgrounds together may not automatically lead to integration. Hayes, McAllister and Dowds (2007), in their study of integrated schools in Northern Ireland, emphasise that intergroup contact via integrated schooling should be seen an important element within a wider strategy for addressing the ethno-political conflict. They note that often the working agenda of such schools are dominated by concerns on building superficial contacts focusing on frequency instead of creating activities that engage the different groups to discuss and address the contentious issues.
Similar concern is also found in the study by Hoon (2013), which examines the role of schools in teaching about citizenship education in Chinese Christian schools in Jakarta. As the schools’ environment is religiously and ethnically exclusive, the schools introduced a cultural immersion programme called ‘Live in’ in an attempt to provide opportunities for the students to interact with non-Chinese citizens and experience different lifestyles. The study finds that such orchestrated interactions, which only lasted for one week, were at best superficial. Not only did it create a by-product that reinforced class differences, it emphasised the mutual sense of otherness between the host communities and the students. Using sociological concepts of *habitus* and cultural reproduction of two influential sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron (1977), the study demonstrates how schools act as a site for constructing and perpetuating religious, ethnic and class identities.

Even though findings from psychological and sociological research above are in favour of heterogeneous schools in providing an ideal environment for students to learn about the meaning of living with difference in tolerance and respect, some scholars have contended that homogeneous schools are also capable of promoting multiculturalism. Raihani’s (2012) work on the implementation of multicultural education in Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) offers an insight of possible delivery of multicultural education in segregated schools such as Islamic educational institutions. He argues that through well-planned and developed school programmes to promote multiculturalism and development of critical thinking, children will grow up having a proper understanding of different cultures. Baidhawy (2007) also proposes the concept of multiculturalist theology-based education as an educational paradigm that fits Indonesian multicultural society to build harmony and peace in diversity.

The discussion above does not lead to a conclusive answer as to whether one type of school is better than the other in implementing multicultural education. All the aforementioned studies, however, agree on the pivotal role teachers play in nurturing multicultural values among students. They also reveal the multitude of approaches teachers employed in teaching multicultural education, corresponding to the school cultural demography. The different educational strategies are also found to be directly correlated to teachers’ perspectives about diversity (Alviar-Martin and Ho 2011). Adding to the discourse on development of multicultural education in Indonesia, this study aims to focus on how multicultural education is taught and applied in schools, in light of the long-standing ambivalent Chinese and non-Chinese relations in Indonesia. The study contributes to the understanding of the multicultural position that teachers adopt and the pedagogical strategies and provisions (or lack thereof) that they employ in promoting peaceful coexistence between Chinese and non-Chinese students in Indonesia. It also critically examines whether there are differences in the strategies utilised by teachers in homogenous and heterogenous schools.

To meet these objectives, the article begins with a brief overview of the political and social contexts surrounding the Chinese Indonesians against the backdrop of the ongoing endeavour to achieve the Indonesian national vision of *Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika* (Unity-in-Diversity). It explains how their identity as a group and status within the society continues to be ambivalent, even after the reform era. We then discuss the two core concepts that serve as the theoretical frameworks for the study: the five multiculturalism positions by Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) to represent the
distinctive teachers’ views and interpretations of multiculturalism, and the five dimensions of multicultural education by Banks and Banks (2010) to illustrate the educational strategies to multicultural education. Following the contextual and theoretical frameworks, the article critically discusses the findings of research conducted in three culturally different schools in Medan. It demonstrates how the majority of teachers tend to embrace more liberal multiculturalism positions and apply content integration and prejudice reduction approaches as their strategies to multicultural education. In particular, it explains how some aspects of assimilation policy implemented during President Suharto’s era continue to haunt the current schooling system. As multicultural education is still largely defined in superficial and tokenistic terms, efforts made by schools, especially heterogenous schools, are limited to teaching about peaceful coexistence, maximising intergroup contact, and less on engaging students to critically think about the systematic inequalities and cultural tensions. Although a critical model of multicultural education is emerging in contemporary Indonesia, this article argues that teaching about and for diversity in a highly diverse, geographically vast country like Indonesia has many challenges – the main ones include teachers’ lack of proficiency in the implementation of multicultural education beyond mere political rhetoric.

Setting the scene: the Chinese in Indonesia

The collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime under President Suharto in 1998 marked the beginning of a new, reformed democratic era in Indonesia. For the historically marginalised Chinese minority who made up 1.2% of Indonesia’s population of 250 million people, this reformation opened up opportunities to access equal rights as citizens and to revive their previously oppressed cultural identity. The ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have suffered a long history of persecution since the first ethnic cleansing carried out by the Dutch in Java in 1740. Ever since, they have been rendered convenient targets for social hostility, culminating in the anti-Chinese violence of May 1998 where Chinese women were raped, and their properties were damaged, torched, ransacked and looted (Purdey 2006). Despite the fact that Chinese have lived in the archipelago for many generations, some with lineages extending back to the 1600s, many Indonesians view and treat them as outsiders (Hoon 2008).

During the New Order regime from 1966 to 1988, Chinese identity was subject to suppression as the state perceived it to be a security threat associated with Communism. The People’s Republic of China and, by association, the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, were both allegedly involved in the September 1965 abortive coup. After the coup, a surge of anti-Communist and anti-Chinese sentiment swept through the country. The ethnic Chinese – their culture, their religion, their role in the nation’s economy and their very existence – were labelled by New Order politicians as the ‘Chinese Problem’ or Masalah Cina (Allen 2003, 387). To manage this ‘problematic’ minority, the state implemented a military-backed assimilation policy to prohibit all expressions of Chineseness in the public sphere, including Chinese names, schools, organisations, media and cultural practices. Under this assimilation policy, the Chinese were forced to leave their culture and traditions and to adopt what the government perceived as the ‘Indonesian’ identity.
The post-Suharto era is characterised by substantial legal reforms including revocation of various discriminatory laws on citizenship and religious and cultural expressions concerning the ethnic Chinese. These include the annulation of compulsory submission of additional documents as proof of citizenship in official applications, which was only applicable to the Chinese Indonesians; the end of the official use of the dichotomous terms ‘pribumi’ (native) and ‘non-pribumi’ (non-native) where the Chinese were categorised under the latter; the repeal of laws prohibiting the study of the Chinese language; and the proclaiming of Chinese New Year as a national holiday (see Hoon 2008). However, despite these positive developments, Indonesia today still faces many challenges in achieving equality-in-diversity in practice. In particular, the Chinese minority is still experiencing latent prejudices and discrimination in various aspects of their lives.

In politics, the ongoing anti-Chinese sentiment could be seen in the recently concluded gubernatorial elections in Jakarta. Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (popularly known as Ahok), the former governor of Jakarta who ran for the 2017 gubernatorial elections, had been a target of smear campaigns for his ethnic and religious identities for being a Chinese Christian. Nonetheless, the ‘official’ reason for the rejection of Ahok has been made on the basis of his boorish and unsympathetic communication style and controversial policies such as the Relocation Program, which evicted slum residents from flood-prone areas rather than on the grounds of religion and ethnicity. Shortly before the elections in 2016, Ahok was embroiled in a blasphemy case that cost his political career and landed him with a two-year jail term. The case sparks controversy and offers an interesting insight into the politics of diversity and democracy in Indonesia.

In the social sphere, 12 Buddhist and Confucian temples in Tanjung Balai, North Sumatra were reportedly damaged in July 2016 as a result of uncontrolled anger of a group of people who believed a Chinese woman has insulted Islam after she lodged an official request to lower down the volume of adzan (call for prayer) from the neighbourhood mosque (Gunawan 2016). A few months later, a Buddha statue originally placed at the top of a temple in the same city was asked to be removed and relocated to the temple’s terrace following demands from numerous Islamic mass organisations.

Large scale mass mobilised events like the anti-Ahok rallies that took place in 2016, and the violence involved in the Tanjung Balai’s cases have unwittingly re-awakened fear and traumatic past experiences among the ethnic Chinese, reminding them of the anti-Chinese riots in 1998. After the temple attacks, numerous Chinese residents of Tanjung Balai were reported to have fled the country, fearing the reoccurrence of the 1998 riots (Gunawan 2016). The occasional violent and racially discriminatory anti-Chinese undertones found in the rally’s pamphlets and minor disturbances that took place on the various areas with a substantial Chinese population across Indonesia have suggested their ambivalent citizenship status in the nation, even after almost decades of progress. These incidents also point to the ongoing precarious position of the ethnic Chinese and the fragility of multiculturalism in Indonesia.

Types of multiculturalism and approaches to multicultural education

The research questions above generally seek to examine two aspects of multicultural education. The first one deals with the understanding of approaches to multiculturalism that teachers adopt. The second aspect of the research explores educational strategies
applied by individual educators in different schools in promoting peaceful coexistence (or the lack thereof).

Determining the teachers’ positionality in multiculturalism is crucial as such a position can influence their decisions and views when it comes to managing, teaching and fostering the value of diversity (e.g. Alviar-Martin and Ho 2011; Zembylas and Iasonos 2010). Even though in principle multiculturalism alludes to the issue of ethnicity, race or gender, in practice it carries different meanings in different political and social contexts. By understanding the participants’ interpretations of this term, the study can thus offer an insight into the complexity of the concept of multiculturalism and hence the intricacy of teaching about diversity in Indonesia.

To demonstrate the participants’ interpretations of multiculturalism, this paper refers to Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), who place the multicultural positions into five categories:

(1) Conservative multiculturalism (assimilation of diversity into the normative culture),
(2) Liberal multiculturalism (emphasising similarities and the notions of equality and humanity),
(3) Pluralist multiculturalism (emphasising differences without challenging power relations and inequalities),
(4) Left-essentialist multiculturalism (emphasising differences where the perspective of the marginalised group is claimed closer to truth than that of the mainstream),
(5) Critical multiculturalism (focusing on differences linked to social injustice and challenging power relations). (3–26)

This categorisation is relevant and significant to this study considering the ongoing shift of social and political situations in Indonesia. It is hoped that this categorisation would help illuminate a more nuanced portrait of a spectrum of multiculturalism positions adopted by the diverse Indonesian society.

To analyse the educational strategies applied by individual educators in promoting positive relations between Chinese and non-Chinese in Indonesia, we refer to James Banks’ conceptualisation of multicultural education as our theoretical framework. He identified five interrelated dimensions of multicultural education (Banks and Banks 2010) required to achieve a successful school reform. They are:

(1) Content integration: use examples from various cultures in teaching,
(2) Knowledge construction: teaching activities helping students make sense of the ways in which cultural assumptions influence the construction of knowledge,
(3) Prejudice reduction: helping students develop democratic racial attitudes,
(4) Equity pedagogy: modifying teaching strategies to facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse groups,
(5) Empowering school culture: restructuring school culture to empower students.

Banks and Banks’ (2010) theory is useful for our analysis as it broadens the interpretation of multicultural education practice, which is often limited to integrating superficial content related to various ethnic, cultural and racial group into learning. Banks and Banks’
model moves beyond the softer, and somewhat ‘cosmetic’ cultural approach of multicultural education and offers a more critical take on teaching about diversity in schools.

We recognise that the two concepts were developed within the Western context and hence might not be universally applicable. Hong (2010), who studied multicultural education in Korea, has warned about the potential incompatibility of Western-derived multicultural education theories and practices in Asia. In fact, a notable Indonesian education scholar, Tilaar (2004), has called for a unique multicultural education model to be developed for Indonesia because, according to him, none of the approaches in the West fit perfectly into the Indonesian context. To address this issue of contextual incompatibility, this article considers theories of multiculturalism in tandem with the concept of Indonesian nationalism and national identity, which includes the vision of diversity enshrined in the national motto, *Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika*.

**Methodology**

The present study deploys a qualitative approach in exploring the strategies to promote multicultural values in three private schools in Medan, Indonesia. This study examines private schools for two reasons. First, not many Chinese children attend state schools because of their parents’ mistrust of the quality of education (Hoon 2011). The discrimination that many Chinese experienced in the admission process to state schools after the closure of Chinese schools in 1965 also forced many Chinese parents to send their children to private, mostly Christian schools, a trend that has been maintained until today (Hoon 2011). Second, private schools have played an equally significant role as state schools in educating young Indonesians. Based on the statistics for the academic year 2011/2012, private schools have dominated the general secondary education service sector, accounting for 52% of the total general secondary schools, although in terms of the number of students, the state schools accommodate more students, with 53% of the total general secondary education students (Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture 2012).

As the third largest city in Indonesia, located in North Sumatra, Medan is chosen as the research site for this study because of the multicultural make-up of the society. Medan has often been considered by the locals as a ‘mini Indonesia’ because each cultural group in the city, including the Chinese, is given space to freely practice their culture and tradition. Compared to Chinese Indonesians in other cities who have lost their cultural identity, *Chineseness* is still strongly preserved in Medan, exemplified by the use of a Chinese dialect language (Hokkien) (Tsai 2008). However, relations among different ethnic and cultural groups in Medan are not as ideal as aspired to in the national vision of *Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika*. As this study demonstrates, inter-group dynamics has not always been positive, and schools have played a role in both perpetuating and alleviating the inter-group tension.

The three schools of choice have different ethnic composition of students: a majority of ethnic Chinese school (C), a majority of non-Chinese school (NC) and a mixed ethnicity school (M), with details below.

**Overview of the three private schools**

It is not a practice for schools in Indonesia to record ethnicity in their student profile. To estimate the percentage of Chinese and non-Chinese students in each school, we
have used students’ declaration of religious affiliation in the records as a benchmark. This is done with the assumption that most Chinese are either Buddhists or Christians, and the majority of non-Chinese are Muslims or, to a lesser extent, Christians. Without making any simplification and generalisation, the demographic data used to describe each school in a later section have been used with caution. Different types of schools were selected to provide a wider picture of possible initiatives implemented to promote Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika. Below is a brief description of the schools chosen for this study.

School C
Demography: 66% Buddhist, 7% Muslim, 27% Christian. Although the statistics do not show a direct ratio of Chinese to non-Chinese students due to the high percentages of Buddhist and Christian students, this school is generally regarded by the locals as a Chinese-exclusive school. It is also one of the Chinese parents’ favourite educational destinations. In an interview, the principal said that although this school was predominantly Chinese, it is not a Chinese school but a sekolah pembauran (assimilation school). A state initiative during the New Order, sekolah pembauran was established to enable the development of effective and quality interactions between the Chinese and non-Chinese. However, in practice, the standard was often reduced to a more quantifiable measure – that is, a balanced composition between Chinese and non-Chinese students. The assimilation school policy targeted mainly managing the Chinese-non-Chinese relations. Under this policy, schools with predominantly Chinese students were required to assimilate into the national culture (Pelly 2003). In the present day, despite the revocation of the school assimilation policy post-Suharto, the term sekolah pembauran is still used to refer to a school privately owned by Chinese that accommodates both the Chinese and non-Chinese students.

The school offers kindergarten until secondary education, guided by the national curriculum. Nationally, it is considered a high-achieving school as many of its students have won national and international competitions. Despite utilising the national curriculum and Indonesian language as the medium of instruction, this school also offers learning materials from O-level or A-level qualifications for its acceleration class or high-achiever class since annually a large number of its graduates pursue their higher education abroad; many of whom attend world-class universities in the USA, Singapore, Australia and the UK.

School NC
Demography: 100% Muslim. In an interview with the principal, he mentioned that this school used to admit students from other religions. However, since 2004 it has organically turned into a Muslim school affiliated to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The principal emphasised the eligibility of Chinese students to study in this school as long as they fulfil the academic and non-academic requirements, which include the ability to cite Islamic prays and read the Qur’an. Female students are also required to wear a hijab in school. This school is considered as a favourite education institution for middle-upper class Muslim parents because of its academic and religious reputation. The school operates under the auspices of a foundation that offers education from kindergarten until higher education (including vocational). Although the school admitted that there were no
Chinese students, the university from the same foundation, located next to the school, was a popular choice among many Chinese students because it was one of the few established private universities that offer courses with evening classes. However, in recent years, there has been a rapid decline of number of Chinese students enrolling in this university, which may be contributed by the increase of vocational institutions (mostly set up by the ethnic Chinese) that offer practical courses including business, IT and entrepreneurship programmes, which appeal to many young Chinese.

School M
Demography: 52% Buddhist, 36% Muslim, 12% Christian. Although established and owned by Chinese, this school proudly identifies itself as a sekolah pembauran (assimilation school) because it is associated with nationalist project of nation building and due to the relatively well-balanced ethnic composition of the school. The school caters for students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, although it is located in a predominantly middle-class Chinese residential area.

The participants
Head teachers and teachers are the main participants in this study. The former have great responsibilities in schools’ operational activities, while the latter have the pivotal role of imparting multicultural values (Banks and Banks 2010; Tilaar 2004). In all, 18 teachers who taught citizenship education, sociology, history and Indonesian language subjects were invited to participate. Semi-structured, face-to-face, one-to-one interviews and focus-group interviews were conducted in May 2011. One-to-one interviews were done with head teachers, while focus-group discussions were used to create a discussion platform for the teachers.

At the end of all interviews, the teachers were asked to provide a written summary of their views on the role of education in promoting positive relations between the Chinese and non-Chinese in Medan and to provide examples of school-level initiatives that they thought had facilitated, or could potentially be implemented to promote, harmonious co-existence in their institutions. This written summary was used to ensure that every teacher had a space to express their views should they have felt uncomfortable or un-accommodated during the focus-group discussions.

The making of an Indonesian: multiculturalism and nationalism
Throughout the interviews with the teachers in the three schools, nationalism became a recurring theme in the discussion. Most teachers see nationalism as a shield against disintegration in multi-ethnic, multi-religious Indonesia, and they view themselves responsible to inculcate this sense of nationalism. This responsibility is specifically pronounced in School C, where they see fostering nationalism would benefit the Chinese students in order for them to shed racial stereotypes of being ‘asocial and unpatriotic’, and of ‘pursuing selfish interests and . . . remaining aloof from much of national life’ (Heryanto 1998, 103). A history teacher from School C for example said:
For me personally, my role is to make them more nationalistic. I remember the first time I came here, I was interviewed by a member of the Board of Director, who said to me, “you are a history teacher. Your task in this school is immense . . . how to make students in this school to not feel that they are Chinese, but feel Indonesian. But it is tough for history teachers to make those students feel that it is my Indonesia, and this is my home; so that they do not feel that they are outsiders. (History teacher, School C, 14 May, 2011)

While inculcating nationalism is key to make the Chinese students appear more nationalistic, some teachers in schools with Chinese students (such as School C and School M) feel that they also share a responsibility to help the Chinese students develop a sense of security living in the country:

As the majority population of this school is Chinese and some of them asked ‘Sir, why do we sometimes become the target of hostility of other ethnic groups?’ So we as history teachers have to help them understand . . . but because we are in a monoethnic [school], this ethnic group needs to be given understanding so that they do not resent [the non-Chinese] in the future. (History teacher, School C, 14 May, 2011)

Moreover, in the discussions with the teachers, most agreed that one of the problems relating to intergroup conflicts is due to the exclusivist character that is associated with the Chinese. Unique to Medan, the Chinese are seen less nationalistic compared to Chinese in Jakarta or other parts of Indonesia because of their frequent use of Hokkien in their daily lives. Their distinct Chinese-accented Indonesian language often make Chinese in Medan a target of ridicule by not only non-Chinese Indonesians but also by Chinese Indonesians from other cities (Hoon 2008). This use of Chinese dialect as a form of communication is often translated into having a low sense of nationalism and greater pride of being a Chinese. The teachers of the national language across the three schools consider the use of Indonesian a significant factor in determining the level of nationalism of a citizen.

Indonesian language teachers in this case become bastions of national identity because they are responsible for the teaching of the Indonesian language, which is widely seen as one of the pillars for uniting the diverse population in Indonesia (Foulcher 1990). In Schools C and M, Indonesian language teachers have recognised their professional responsibility in ensuring Chinese students use the proper Indonesian language on a daily basis, especially in public spaces, to promote a sense of nationalism in them and to minimise the latent inter-personal sentiment with the pribumi due to potential language misunderstanding. The teacher in School C, however, admitted that she sometimes struggled to make her students follow her ‘Indonesian-only’ policy in the school as most of the students are Chinese who are more comfortable and used to talking to each other in Hokkien. This challenge is also shared by the Indonesian language teacher in school M:

In my view, the most real obstacle related to pembauran [integration/assimilation] is often that we find the use of primordial languages in the classroom. So often we see that our children using primordial language for example, the Tionghoa language [a Chinese dialect]. I think, education should emphasise the nationalist aspect. So we use a united language. But we cannot blame them because Hokkien is their mother tongue. In education setting, it would be better if we use the national language. (Indonesian language teacher, School M, 9 May, 2011)
While Indonesian language teachers attempt to help the Chinese students develop a stronger sense of national identity through the use of proper Indonesian language, citizenship education teachers often use the citizenship arguments in framing their teaching about nationalism. The latter often refer to the four national pillars, namely the Pancasila (the Five Principles which include: belief in one God; humanitarianism: Indonesian unity: representative democracy: and social justice), the 1945 Constitution Act, Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika, and the Unitary State of Republic Indonesia as their golden rules when discussing citizenship. During the New Orders, both Pancasila and Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika were heavily used as political tools and remained merely rhetoric. Instead of ‘exploring or understanding that difference’, Suharto’s political agenda at the time was ‘on maintaining order – stabilitas [stability] and aman [security]’ (Parker 2003, 246).

Pancasila was used as a political means to force assimilation into the mostly Javanese culture (Freedman 2003). Diversity and freedom of expression were considered a threat to the state and social integration, thus Bhinneka-Tunggal-Ika was interpreted in such a way that it paradoxically undermined the practices of diversity instead. Instead of Unity-in-Diversity, in reality, it ‘was translated into “unity above diversity”’ (Raihani 2014, 30; emphasis added), where bhinneka (diversity) was sacrificed in the name of ika (unity) (Hoon 2008) through a draconian enforcement of Pancasila in all levels of society. In education, Pancasila was introduced as a compulsory subject taught throughout schools and universities as part of citizenship education. It was used as a ‘merely indoctrination by the government to create loyal, nationalist citizens’ (Raihani 2014, 30). Citizenship education therefore was used as the government’s educational vehicle to disseminate this idea of monocultural ‘national identity’ instead of a multicultural one.

Indeed, Conroy (2009) in his study warns of the risks citizenship education in school may carry; that it are often taught based on the construction of the self and the other – creating strategies for making the ‘other’ familiar with the majority culture. This kind of construction can be problematic, especially when the process of familiarisation privileges the culture of the majority insofar that it undermines the identity of the minority, as well as neglecting the cultural contribution of the minority to the overall national cultural identity, similar to what happened during the New Order. The construction of identity to fit into the dominant culture continues to be maintained in schools to the present day.

From conservative multiculturalism to critical multiculturalism

A closer analysis on the discourse of nationalism shows it can be interpreted in two completely disparate directions. At one end of the spectrum, when nationalism is practised in an authoritarian way at the expense of diversity, as that applied under the New Order, the latitude of the national vision of Unity-in-Diversity became restricted and narrow. The assimilation policy was an explicit embodiment of Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1997) idea of conservative multiculturalism. At the other end of the spectrum, a broader sense of nationalism that fully embraces the idea of recognising rights and presence of all individuals who have multiple identities, when inculcated critically, can be a powerful uniting platform to achieve critical multiculturalism.
Of course, between these two ends, there exists a continuum of perspectives where nationalism and multiculturalism interact in various degrees. For instance, in a conversation with the following teacher, different types of multiculturalism exist, and they are discussed within the national identity context:

We are rectifying that the 1998 incident was only an effect [of political provocation] but generally there is no intention to reject, to hate whoever wanting to enter the Indonesian territory as long as the incomers do not challenge the locals. This is what we need to tell the students so that they understand that it [the violence towards Chinese] cannot be generalised, that Indonesian people or the pribumi are anti-other ethnics. (History teacher, School C, non-Chinese, 14 May 2011, emphasis added)

At a glance, while the overall message calls to refrain from generalisation and stereotyping, suggesting a sign of more critical multicultural stand, the statements in italic demonstrates a more conservative tone. The first statement, for instance, indicates that the Chinese were incomers who needed to adapt to the 'local' culture, and this is problematic since those regarded as 'local' or 'true Indonesians' are highly contested, as previously discussed. The second statement builds up the former statement on the hierarchical identity, where the use of phrase 'Indonesian people' to refer to 'native Indonesians' vis-à-vis Chinese Indonesians could give an impression that ethnic Chinese are not an integral part of Indonesia, implying the 'them' and 'us' undertone. The official use of the New Order official pribumi and non-pribumi dichotomy has been ceased based on Presidential Instruction No. 26/1998, and it is possible that the teacher was not aware of this legal change and the cultural sensitivity of such usage or that it was used out of habit. Regardless the intention, this continuous use of reference terms by many educators during the interviews points to a significant implication. When such labels are used during their interactions with students, this teacher has unwittingly socialised and preserved the New Order’s practice of ethnic differentiation. This makes the teachers agents who perpetuate inequalities instead of being agents of change.

On the other hand, some teachers demonstrate some evidence of thinking about multiculturalism in a more critical way, although the number is slim. Among the five citizenship education teachers interviewed, only one teacher, teaching in School C, used a pedagogical strategy that indicates such attempt; the rest employed the typically tell-and-explain how Indonesia acknowledges diversity and treats their citizens equally. This teacher said he tends to challenge his students, who were mostly Chinese, by making controversial statements like ‘All Chinese do not have a sense of nationalism’ with the aim of encouraging Chinese students to critically debunk the stereotype. He said that at first students would normally be offended by his statement and misunderstand his intention. He was often reported to the head teacher for being accused of making discriminatory statements. He insisted on his method, nonetheless, because he wanted students to learn to stand up for themselves and develop ways to respond to prejudice, especially when they faced similar remarks in the society. He also said that through this slightly extreme take on teaching, he at least managed to engage his students and gather their attention towards a subject regarded by many as ‘boring and insignificant to their future studies’ (Interview, Citizenship Education teacher, School C, 14 May, 2011).
Among all subject teachers, Sociology teachers have an influential role in critically engaging students on social issues. A module on multiculturalism and multicultural education, discussing the characteristics of and the challenges faced by a multicultural society, as well as possible solutions to address those problems, is part of the second year’s learning materials. Looking across the curriculum, students also learn about various kinds of conflict, the causes and proposed solution to respective conflicts, suggesting that there are plenty of opportunities to dig deep, challenge stereotypes or hold critical discussion surrounding sensitive and controversial present-day topics. However, during the interviews, although teachers in the three schools made efforts to reduce prejudices, the narratives used to frame the reasoning tended to be about the beauty of diversity and the encouragement from teachers to accept differences. There is little evidence that teachers had moved beyond teaching theories related to pluralism and multiculturalism or explored controversial topics through multi-perspectives. Moreover, even though sociology teachers have high relevance in being a promoter of multicultural education, the subject is only taught in the social science stream in upper-secondary school. Hence, such knowledge is not equally distributed to all students.

**Strategies to teach multicultural education**

Reviewing the conversations with the teacher participants, regardless the multicultural position, all teachers have mentioned their use of at least one of the five strategies to multicultural education proposed by Banks and Banks (2010). The most popular ones are prejudice reduction and content integration applied across subjects, but are heavily present in sociology due to the nature of the subject and curricular design. In history lessons, teachers in schools with Chinese students mentioned that they applied these strategies by explaining how the Chinese also took part actively in the independence movement to liberate Indonesia from colonialism and how some Chinese were valued by the postcolonial administration and were recruited as ministers in the early cabinets.

Some history teachers also employed the knowledge construction strategy, by clarifying the history behind ethnic and class stratification between the Chinese and non-Chinese, which is often utilised as a basis for discrimination in the present day:

Now we are looking for the solution … for instance there is such mockery [towards certain ethnic group] we find out why they are being mocked. We tell them that *divide et impera* [divide and rule] strategy was employed by the Dutch … we explore in the history why the stereotypes were created … (History teacher, School NC, 9 May, 2011)

The least popular of the five dimensions is the Equity pedagogy. The absence of such a strategy in this study does not mean that it is not used in teaching, but it might be because of how multicultural education has been interpreted in Indonesia. Different from the USA and the UK, where the discussion of the aim of multicultural education moves beyond social cohesion and democratic citizenship and includes the issue of unequal academic achievement, the scope of discussion of multicultural education in Indonesia has been largely dominated by the political discourse of cultural diversity. The minority groups in the former countries are often associated with economically-disadvantaged groups and low achievers, but when multicultural education is discussed in respect to Chinese and non-Chinese relations, the Chinese minority are generally
perceived to be the more affluent and higher achievers. The general social and political discourse on multiculturalism has revolved around creating peaceful coexistence in democratic Indonesia, emphasising the multimodal diversity that Indonesia possesses. This is reflected in the interviews, exemplified below, where the understanding of diversity of the majority of teachers were still very much trapped within the narrower view of multicultural education – which is superficially defined in terms of tokenistic cultural celebration and a fusion of different cultures in music, arts or languages.

Multiculturalism … can be applied to cultural arts. For example we have a dance club, where students learn to perform traditional dances …. Then at the vocal club we have a mixture of Mandarin and traditional songs. And from here we can see children starting to learn Mandarin. So yesterday I went to an open house of a university, the MC [host] is a non-Chinese, but the Mandarin language is really good. That demonstrates that non-Chinese have started learning Mandarin … (Head Teacher, School C, 11 May, 2011)

When it comes to exploring the fifth dimension of Banks’ multicultural education strategies, Empowering school culture, this study finds that a heterogeneous school is more likely to employ this strategy than a homogenous school. An interview with the head teacher of School M reveals that conscious efforts have been made to maintain this multicultural environment, in which achieving balanced ratios of Chinese to non-Chinese students and the teaching staff is one of the priorities, and is regarded as both an indicator of, and an empowering environment to teach, successful multicultural education. He added that conscious affirmative action or positive discrimination was taken to create a culturally representative board of teachers:

Because we lack Chinese teachers, we call every Chinese applicant first, but that is not discrimination okay. It is to balance [the teacher ratio], because the interest of Chinese teachers is low until now. Whatever the reason is … (11 May, 2011)

The participation of students across different extracurricular activities was also explicitly designed to ensure equal opportunities for student participation. Not only does this allow every ethnic group to be represented, but the head teacher also claimed that this maximises intergroup interactions, which is key to building inter-ethnic friendships:

… all activities have to involve all students whatever the event might be. For example, in a marching band, there should be some Chinese even though they might not like it, in basketball team there should be some [native] Indonesian people, although the majority is Chinese. Then in cultural arts, there is a combination of races …. And then charity events for example, we take students to Islamic orphanage. The Chinese have to participate. When we go to a Chinese retirement home in Labuan, the [native] Indonesian also joined in. (11 May 2011)

Despite the presence of different strategies to promote multicultural education in the three schools, the heterogenous school appeared to show more deliberate efforts to build a supportive culture beyond classroom learning, where multicultural education can thrive in a more holistic manner. This could be because multiculturalism is not a natural experience in schools with a homogeneous student population, making teaching multiculturalism in these schools an insurmountable task (Hoon 2013).

Of the three schools, educators in the heterogeneous School M were also found to be more able to give practical examples of school activities that facilitate inter-group
interactions. They were able to encourage cooperation to achieve a common goal, which is a prerequisite to build positive intergroup relations as Allport’s theory suggest. An example of such activities is explained below:

One of the things that [we do to] make them understand more about the existing differences is through the activities. Through these school activities they can undergo the natural integration. For example, events such as bazaar where they can mingle, then religious celebration, in which students attend a religious event that is different from their own religion. In fact, one day prior to that event, usually there are students from different religions who are not hesitant to help out. These are the things we do, including school competition. This, we sometimes do naturally too. So if the school team is competing, they all support each other. Without them realising they are no longer discriminating each other. (Sociology teacher School M, Chinese, 9 May, 2011)

The example above also highlights the potential that school M has in providing an ideal environment for what Bourdieu calls ‘habitus’ to develop naturally. More specifically, the multicultural school environment allows dispositions and values crucial to building positive intergroup relations such as mutual respect and tolerance to be internalised and practised unconsciously over an extended time – something that cannot be offered in the same extent by homogenous schools such as Schools C and NC.

**Challenges in the promotion of multicultural education**

Besides the inherent problems with limited understanding and practices of multicultural education in Indonesia, issues faced by schools in the increasingly complex age of globalisation have also influenced the implementation of multicultural education. Contrary to the idealistic assumption that schools are neutral learning institutions that readily accept students of diverse backgrounds, many schools, especially privately-owned ones, are driven by the market and are largely determined by parental choice. As parental choice often pivots around academic excellence to prepare students for a competitive international and globalised labour market, multicultural education often becomes a marketing gimmick, a good-to-have, rather than an essential character for the school. Such market influence is reflected in the content subjects that the schools choose to include in their curriculum. For instance, School C implements an adapted curriculum that combines the then national 2006 School-Based Curriculum (KTSP Curriculum) with the Cambridge A-Level curriculum; School M offers Mandarin so that students can be equipped with the language ability to conduct business internationally; while School NC offer Japanese and Arabic for students to access scholarships from those countries.

This research finds that multicultural education is not a priority in a market-driven curriculum. In this regard, the government can play an important role in enacting policies and give clear guidance on how multicultural education can be implemented at school and classroom levels. However, at present observers note that policy makers themselves lack understanding of multicultural education (Raihani 2014). Despite citing notions of diversity and equality, the 2003 Education Law and other relevant policies so far only ‘vaguely provide a foundation for the development and implementation of education for multiculturalism’ (Raihani 2014, 215).
On the other hand, teachers play an important role in effectively inculcating multicultural values in their students. To do that, they must be ready to forgo their ethnocentrism and act as multicultural role models (Tilaar 2004). However, after a long period of centralised and assimilationist education policies, many teachers are not pedagogically prepared to do this. Research on 23 citizenship education teachers conducted by the Institute of Education Reform at Paramadina University in Indonesia revealed that teachers’ understanding of multiculturalism and diversity is still limited; they have not critically discussed the problems faced by the multicultural society in classrooms (Napitupulu and Soebijoto 2011).

In fact, one of the objectives of the decentralisation policy is to put teachers at the forefront of change in the education world, by allowing them to determine local content curriculum. Unfortunately, as Bjork (2006) found in his study, many teachers have different interpretations from those outlined in the national guidelines of what local content curriculum should entail. As a consequence, many teachers continue to practice their old teaching styles and habits. Given the gulf between policy objectives and actual practice, under the current decentralised system, local governments and schools sometimes misuse their authority by imposing religious dogma and cultural chauvinism for their own ends (Mahfud 2009), showing that the journey towards a comprehensive multicultural education in Indonesia is still elusive.

Conclusion

Under the new reform era, democratised Indonesia has allowed opportunities for the development of multicultural education. While the 2003 Education Act has set out a foundation for its implementation, this study demonstrates that participants possess varied and limited understanding (and sometimes misconception) on the notion of multicultural education.

Our findings show that the multiculturalism paradigm embraced by the majority of teachers is still substantially leaning towards a combination of conservative and liberal outlook. Some legacy of the New Order’s assimilation policy appears to still be preserved, exemplified by the continuous use of dichotomous ‘them’ and ‘us’, a majority-minority discourse as well as the attempts to make the Chinese minority adapt to the ‘local’ culture, to be more ‘Indonesian’. On the other hand, the building of a sense of nationalism to create equal, shared citizenship on the basis of similarity, instead of recognising differences, suggests the liberal approach to multiculturalism.

Concerning strategies to multicultural education, the teachers tend to employ different approaches to promote inter-ethnic relations based on the subject they teach, which include content integration, prejudice reduction, knowledge construction and empowering culture – to use Banks’ terms. Between homogenous and heterogeneous schools, our data points out that the heterogenous schools exhibit more conscious efforts in promoting multicultural education beyond content integration in classroom learning and have more potential to empower a multicultural school culture due to the school’s cultural demography. However, such efforts still mostly centre around maximising intergroup contact and setting a multicultural ‘habitus’, and less on engaging students in activities that challenge the existing power relations and address systematic inequalities that take place in society.
Even though an emergent model of multicultural education has been developed in Indonesia, given the unevenness of discourse and practice, and the unsettled relation between multiculturalism and nationalism, it is not easy to move forward. Further research thus could explore the ways education can foster peaceful co-existence, not only between the ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese, but also between other ethnic groups in Indonesia. The government, especially local authorities, should deploy more training for teachers and head teachers on how to develop a critical multicultural education model that suits their own school’s context. The training must, foremost, include practical examples on how to incorporate different strategies to fully reform the school approach teaching about, in and for multicultural Indonesia, both at the classroom and school level.

Notes
2. This assumption is based on the 2010 Census, which indicates that almost 50% of Chinese are Buddhist and 43% are Christian (Indonesia Statistical Bureau, 2012).
3. A similar attitude of indifference towards Citizenship Education classes among students is also found in Hoon’s (2013) study in a Chinese Christian school in Jakarta.
4. Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’ refers to a broad set of dispositions, practices and values that the students have unconsciously internalised and naturalised (Bourdieu, 1977).

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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