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Ethnicity as a "regularity in dispersion": Discourses on comedy and identity among Chinese Indonesian youth

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how young Chinese Indonesians interpret and engage with representations in comedy performed by Chinese Indonesian comedians. Using a poststructuralist framework, the article argues that ethnic identity is contingent, shaped by shared relational experiences with the majority, rather than by fixed essential traits, reflecting what Laclau and Mouffe have termed a "regularity in dispersion". Data was collected through a focus group discussion with twelve participants, where they were presented with a preselected set of six video clips containing comedic performances. Two intertwining themes based on the participants' responses to the videos were developed using reflexive thematic analysis: 1) diverging perspectives from the comedians' reductive, stereotypical and homogenizing representations of Chinese Indonesians and 2) converging perspectives on the jokes centered on boundary-maintaining social dynamics between the majority and themselves, such as discrimination and practices of endogamy. These themes present the contingent nature of ethnic identity as primarily shaped by relational social factors instead of determined by inherent traits. This research brings to the forefront the importance of examining the contextual and relational construction of ethnicity.

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Introduction

Indonesians of Chinese descent comprise about 1.5% of the total Indonesian population (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020). The ancestors arrived from mainland China in waves spanning many centuries, primarily through maritime expeditions and colonial-era migrations. Colonial government policies, such as the categorization of people of Chinese descent as 'Foreign Orientals,' created ethnic boundaries and hindered integration in the society (Van Der Meer & Eickhoff, 2017). Additionally, Dutch policies pushed Chinese Indonesians into business ventures by restricting land ownership and civil service opportunities (C. Y. Hoon, 2014). These policies significantly prevented the Chinese from integrating with the larger society.

After independence, the postcolonial government continued to frame the Chinese Indonesians as outsiders and not truly Indonesians. In the 1960s, they were prohibited from retailing in rural areas, forcing many to relocate to larger cities. The New Order, ruling from 1966 to 1988, employed an assimilationist stance that required the Chinese to repress identity markers such as names, language, and traditional celebrations. Hoon (2006) noted that the New Order continued to label them as "foreign," the "Other," and "a problem" in Indonesian nation-building discourses. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese Indonesians were often scapegoated during multiple socio-political crises, including during the last days of the New Order in May 1998, when widespread violence disproportionately targeted the Chinese Indonesians. Mobs pillaged, looted, and burnt Chinese-owned properties, while some of the women became targets of vicious sexual assaults. Until the writing of this article, more than twenty-five years later, no party has been held responsible.

However, the end of the New Order in Indonesia in 1998 led to the relative democratization of society. The subsequent administrations gradually repealed policies and practices that had repressed freedom of expression. One of the most significant changes was arguably experienced by the Chinese Indonesian community. The post-authoritarian administrations gradually lifted numerous prohibitions related to the expression of their culture. They were again permitted to conduct traditional and religious rituals, and Confucianism is now included as one of the nationally recognized religions. Various social actors of Chinese descent started to become more visible on the public stage, whether as politicians, artists, or comedians, the latter of which leads to the focus of this study.

Encouraged by the growing inclusivity of the post-authoritarian period, in the past decade, Chinese Indonesian comedians have drawn attention to their experiences of being a minority. Their routines include jokes that center on the everyday habits and practices of Chinese Indonesians, as well as the prejudices and discrimination that they encounter, both as individuals and as a community. These types of jokes could be considered employing what Weaver called "reverse discourse," that, "employ the sign-systems of embodied and cultural racism, but develop a reverse semantic effect (Weaver, 2016, p. 6)."

Their choice to use comedy and humor to discuss sensitive issues is unsurprising. Humor has long been considered one of the safer avenues to advocate for social justice on sensitive matters. Chattoo outlined four functions of humor in this regard: raising awareness about specific issues, disarming audiences' defenses against challenging ideas, breaking down social barriers, and stimulating discussions (Chattoo & Feldman, 2020). Furthermore, comedy brings into the open racial stereotypes and so disarms them

from the appeal of illicitness. As Pauwels states, "allowing the audience to 'laugh out 'their racial prejudices might then be a vital, first step to disinvesting them of their obscure, affective power (Pauwels, 2021 p. 90)." Therefore, individuals from marginalized and oppressed communities have frequently utilized humor as a form of resistance, whether as professional comedians (Pauwels, 2021; Weaver, 2016), ordinary members of minority groups in their daily interactions (Dobai & Hopkins, 2020; Hylton, 2018) or as part of political resistance movements (Sorensen, 2008). This willingness to talk about sensitive issues in public is a marked departure from prior generations of Chinese Indonesians, who preferred to avoid attracting attention to their ethnic identity out of concern that it might lead to racial harassment or even violence (Nugroho & Wibawa, 2022).

However, the path towards inclusivity remains challenging. The imprisonment of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known by his Hakkan name, Ahok, attests to this. In 2016, the only Chinese Christian governor in the history of Jakarta, Purnama, had to cut short his bid for a second term of governorship after he was controversially imprisoned for alleged blasphemy in 2016 (Lamb, 2017). Despite notable progress towards inclusion at the state level, prevailing research underscores persistent stereotypes and discrimination faced by Chinese Indonesians in their daily interactions, highlighting ongoing challenges to genuine inclusivity. The majority label Chinese Indonesians as exclusive, focused on business, affluent, and lacking in nationalist sentiment (Fossati et al., 2017; Setijadi, 2017). In a similar vein, Puspitasari (2018) found that the Chinese are associated with notions like "perpetrators," "non-Muslims," "government ally," "affluent," "strong," "privileged access," and "agents of Chinese development." In short, despite the changes brought by the reform, the Chinese Indonesians continue to be positioned as an" Other," that is not truly part of Indonesia.

This article situates itself in the juncture between the increasing societal acceptance and persistent Othering, specifically by looking at how these complex dynamics reverberate in the lives of ordinary young Chinese Indonesians. The article examines how "ordinary" Chinese Indonesian youth interpret the aforementioned routines by Chinese Indonesian comedians that center on their ethnic identity. This is essential because comedy diverges from real-life scenarios for two primary reasons. Firstly, comedy possesses the unique ability to humorously address taboo subjects, often navigating sensitive topics with a degree of levity not typically found in everyday discourse. While the comedians might be comfortable with this straightforwardness, the "ordinary" young Chinese Indonesians might find themselves in more nuanced positions. Secondly, comedic presentations frequently use stereotypes as comedic devices, employing exaggerated or oversimplified portrayals to elicit laughter and engage audiences. Understanding whether the group feels adequately represented by these portrayals is imperative.

Through a focus group discussion with 12 individuals, this article explores how young Chinese Indonesians interpret and engage with the humor presented by comedians who incorporate their experiences of being Chinese into their performances. Ultimately, this article contributes to the discussion on the complexities of cultural representation of minority groups and how these dynamics contribute to the construction of ethnic identity.

The results support the argument that ethnicity is not an essential and inherent attribute, but a "regularity in dispersion" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). This refers to "…an ensemble of differential positions. This ensemble is not the expression of any

underlying principle external of itself…. but it constitutes a configuration, which in certain context of exteriority can be signified as a totality". Ethnicity, in this case, Chinese Indonesianness, is not an entity based on underlying principles like inherent traits or physical characteristics. The "regularity" to the identity -meaning the sense of coherence as an identifiable ethnic group- is generated through various navigational practices and strategies as a minority.

Method

In terms of data and analysis, magazines i.e. Data collection was done through focus group discussion (FGD), an extended way of doing interviews (Gundumogula, 2020) involving several participants simultaneously. Unlike individual interviews, in focus group discussion, the participants are free to discuss the topic with each other, making "piggybacking" one of the most important advantages of the method (Leung et al., 2009). The possibility for discussion in this research is valuable because ethnicity is not primarily experienced at the individual level but at a collective or group level.

The FGD was done with a homogeneous set of participants to obtain the intended goal. It involved 12 university students from a private university in Jakarta with a sizeable number of Chinese Indonesians in their student body. The participants responded to an e-flyer wherein I and a research assistant announced that we were looking for young people who identify as Chinese Indonesians and are interested in participating in a focus group discussion on comedy and identity. The following table provides an overview of the composition of the 12 participants.

We conducted the focus group discussion offline. An audio recording was made from the discussion. The recording was subsequently transcribed to be further analyzed. In the focus group discussion, the facilitators played a set of six preselected clips of comedic performances. Following each clip, participants were encouraged to share and discuss their thoughts, reactions, and personal connections to the content with each other, focusing on how well they felt represented by it.

Table 1. *Composition of the focus group discussion participants*

Category	Subcategory	Number of participants
Gender	Male	5
	Female	7
Religion	Catholics	6
	Christians	2
	Buddhist	2
	Agnostic	1
	No reply	1
Parents' Religion	Christians	2
	Catholics	5
	Buddhist	4
	Confucianism	1
Parents' ethnic composition	Both parents identify as Chinese	11
	One parent identifies as Chinese	1
Faculty	Psychology	9
	Economy	1
	Engineering	2

The six clips were preselected based on how collectively the jokes represent the range of experiences of being a Chinese Indonesian. Examining the comedy performances available on social media, I identified four recurring themes in the representations of Chinese Indonesians. The first theme is the use of widespread stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians in the jokes. This is a common strategy in any reverse humor, causing some scholars to highlight the elusive difference between "laughing with" or "laughing at" the minority group. The second theme highlights non-stereotypical characteristics, habits, and traits of the Chinese that are less well-known to the broader public. Jokes that draw from this second theme hold the potential to counter existing stereotypes by showing that they cannot sufficiently reflect the diversity of the group. The third theme is the discrimination and race-based harassment that they experience. This also includes instances where the jokes are used to speak up against discrimination. The fourth theme reflects reverse stereotyping and social distancing, which the Chinese Indonesians also practice. While it is possible to identify four distinct themes, they can co-exist and intertwine in any joke. Furthermore, although the videos do not exhaustively represent the range of experiences, they sufficiently serve as starting points to elicit further discussions. Other than the thematical considerations, the videos were also selected based on more technical aspects, such as length and the conciseness of the jokes (i.e., the jokes are not interspersed with too many unrelated stories).

The following table provides the videos used.

No	Video title	Comedian	Short description
1	*Tipikal Chinese Indonesian* (Typical Chinese Indonesian)	LastDay Production (a comic group)	The group presents some stereotypical and non-stereotypical characteristics of the Chinese Indonesians and offers a third shared identity between the majority and the Chinese Indonesians.
2	*Murid Gua Ada yang Rasis - AUDISI SUCI IX* (I have a racist student -SUCI IX Audition)	Ben Dhanio	The comedian jokes about the racial insults that he received.
3	*Yahh Kirain Bebas* (Too bad, I thought I'd have the freedom…)	Steven Wongso	The joke talks about the endogamic preference of the Chinese Indonesians.
4	Illucinati bit Ahok	Ernest Prakasa	The joke centers on Ahok coming to power due to an underground organization, the "Illucinati," a wordplay on the elusive organization, the "Illuminati."
5	Teacher scandal 3gp	Josua Bertus	The joke reapplies widespread stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians
6	Stand Up Comedy Ben Dhanio: Ultimate Show 4	Ben Dhanio	The joke is ambivalent. The individual comedian criticizes certain habits and characteristics of the Chinese and portrays himself as being different from them.

We showed the clips in the sequence depicted in the table and invited the participants to discuss them after each viewing. The main question to stimulate the discussion of each clip is whether they feel relatable to what the jokes portray. This question is sufficient to generate a rich tapestry of responses. An assistant subsequently transcribed the entire discussion, and I analyzed it with the aid of the qualitative data analysis program, Taguette (Rampin et al., 2021).

Data analysis proceeded according to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) principles. RTA is an easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis that facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns or themes in a given data set (Braun and Clarke, 2012 in Byrne, 2022).The analysis process involved six recursive phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, generating initial themes, reviewing and developing themes, refining, defining and naming themes, and writing up the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). RTA sets itself apart from other pattern-based analyses by firmly positioning the researcher as an active and present agent in the analysis and interpretation process. This affirmation of the researcher's subjectivity as opposed to its denial differentiates reflexive thematic analysis from more post-positivistic strands of thematic analysis that aim to obtain "objectivity" through intercoder reliability or codebook method (Braun & Clarke, 2021). As Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 3) argue, the themes do not "emerge" from the data but from the researcher's engagement with the data, "mediated by all that (the researcher) brings to this process (e.g., their research values, skills, experience and training)." In the current article, the longstanding interest and familiarity with poststructuralist literature on discourses of identity obtained during the years of training in psychology, anthropology and sociology influenced the analysis and interpretation. The following section elaborates on the themes that were developed in the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Analysis and interpretation of the data indicates three major themes that together support the idea that ethnic identity is a regularity in dispersion. The first theme is the diverging notions of Chineseness among the participants, suggesting that there are no inherent traits that determine membership in an ethnic group. The second theme is the convergence of participants' perspectives on boundary maintaining practices between the ethnic Chinese Indonesians and the majority, namely the experiences of discrimination and endogamy. The third theme refers to the internal response common to people occupying a marginalized space, that is to constantly employ a "double consciousness" wherein they can see themselves through the lens of the majority group while simultaneously maintaining their own perspective. The presence of boundary maintaining practices together with the double consciousness suggests that coherence of the group is obtained through shared experiences and interactions with external forces and the social context.

Diverging notions of "Chineseness"

Participants have different opinions regarding the extent to which the various representations of Chineseness "truly" reflect their experiences of being a Chinese Indonesian. There is no single video where all the participants unanimously agree that the portrayed traits, attributes, and physical characteristics fully correspond to how they see themselves. On the contrary, the participants often noted that these representations cannot and should not be

applied to all Chinese Indonesians. Many jokes draw from dominant discourses of the Chinese, like owning a store, being stingy, being money-oriented, as well as from lesser-known characteristics or habits, like wrapping things in plastic and not swinging one's legs while sitting. While going through the videos, participants pointed out that they do not have stores, do not shop in Glodok (Jakarta's Chinatown) anymore, or do not understand the reasoning behind the plastic wrap or prohibition of swinging one's legs. Responding to a clip by Jobe that contains many common stereotypes, such as being stingy and owning a store (Bertus, 2018), Grace noted that

> *"It seems that all performances mention that Chinese are stingy…I think they should explore new materials" (Grace, 21F).*

Endra, one of the participants, pointed out the following in response to the video by LastDay Production titled "Typical Chinese Indonesians"(LASTDAY Production, 2015)

> *"Even within the Chinese, there are differences. You can see differences based on class, for instance. I understand that the stereotype is that we all own stores, but certain classes are not like that. So sometimes, even I cannot relate... If we go to Glodok, for instance, there seems to be a sub-culture of Chinese who like karaoke, especially those of the older generation. However, the younger generation has left Glodok. Take "Petak Enam" and its surroundings; for instance, it's an old neighborhood with old people. The young people who can relate to this are those living in Glodok. Again, not all Chinese are good at selling goods. These are sub-cultures or sub-classes". (Endra, 31M)*

The participants frequently touch on the intricate intersection of Chineseness with various other identities. In addition to differences due to variations of socioeconomic status that Endra mentioned, other participants highlighted differences stemming from generational cohorts and places of origin, e.g., whether they live in urban environments like Jakarta or more rural areas. In their lived experiences, unlike the piecemeal representations in the comedy performances, in-group heterogeneity substantially engendered by the intersectionality with other social categorizations (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2011) is very real. At one point, Easley (20F) expressed her confusion about who can be considered "Chinese."

> *Easley: Honestly, sometimes I don't even know who can be called a Chinese.*
>
> *Mike: What do you mean?*
>
> *Arla: But you're right. Sometimes, you have people with small eyes, but they're not Chinese.*
>
> *Easley: Sometimes, I think my parents are not Chinese because they don't look like one. Esther (another participant) also does not look like a Chinese. So, I don't know who is or who is not a Chinese. "*

This discussion highlights an important takeaway, that is the lack of consensus on Chinese identity. Here, Chineseness could be considered as an "empty signifier" (Laclau, 2007), that is a signifier without a fixed signified and can refer to various aspects depending on the actual context. This "emptiness" is evident in the short conversation between Easley, Arla, and Mike, expressing their confusion about who can be considered Chinese. The participants had different perspectives of what "makes" them a Chinese. Many disagreed with the portrayals in the comedic performances as they were considered reductive and might encourage further stereotyping. Critically, a participant highlighted the lack of intersectionality in the jokes and how Chineseness is treated as a singular identity, devoid of its relationships to other identities like gender and social class.

These responses resonate with the constructivist view of ethnicity and other similar groups, such as nations, as primarily dependent on shared discourse or in Anderson's term, a shared imagination (cf. Anderson, 2006). Constructivism, as opposed to the essentialist or the primordialist perspectives (cf. Smith, 2010; Van Den Berghe, 1995), asserts that ethnicity is not inherent, fixed, and predetermined but emerges through social practices as individuals and groups navigate and respond to social dynamics. As Fredrik Barth noted, it is the boundaries of the ethnic groups that "define the groups, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth, 1982., p. 15). Similarly, Anthony Cohen (1985) proposed that belonging to a community is substantiated by the symbolic boundaries constructed. Ethnicity is thus not based on an "underlying principle" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) such as biological traits, culture or habits.

It is important to note that the lack of diversity in the representation of Chinese Indonesians indicates the hegemonic nature of the discourse on Chineseness. Research has repeatedly shown that variations within a group are more visible for its members than for outsiders (cf. Lee & Ottati, 1993). Being members of the in-group, these comedians occupy a vantage point from which the heterogeneity of the group is clearly perceivable. Their comedy, therefore, holds the potential to provide non-stereotypical counter-discourses of the Chinese. However, this potential has been left unfulfilled, as many jokes tend to reproduce dominant discourses by erasing the complexities and nuances inherent within the community. In other words, while it is laudable that democratization has led to a widening opportunity to discuss race and ethnicity openly, it is crucial to recognize that merely engaging in these ethnic-based jokes does not automatically dismantle longstanding stereotypes. Despite the myriad representations depicted, there appears to be a notable absence of recognition of the multifaceted nature of Chinese Indonesian identity.

This paradoxical phenomenon could be due to several interrelated structural reasons. One is the rhetorical strategy of humor which always lends itself to multiple interpretations (cf. Cooper et al., 2020; Weaver & Bradley, 2016). Although the comedians might not have meant to reproduce the stereotypes, the participants are aware of this counter-effect. Weaver (2016) argued that reverse humor is ambiguous because "paradoxically, reverse discourses also contain a polysemic element that can, at times, reproduce racism" (2016, p.119).

Another reason is related to the sociopolitical forces at work. Michael (2013, p. 149) stated that" Public humor is an opportunity for learning that can lead to social change, yet there are competing forces at work in these social interactions." An instance of the competing force might be the need for majority acceptance. It is easier for individuals from minority groups to gain acceptance from the majority and become public figures –essentially what the comedians are- when they are willing to be an "' internal critic' of one's own community (Midtbøen, 2018, p. 352)." Closely aligned with this is the market logic as a force that drives the entertainment industry. Minorities in the entertainment industry carve their brand and unique selling points by inadvertently reproducing the stereotypes, as these are the symbolism that the majority are most familiar with. In a study on a South Asian theatre company in the UK, Saha noted that "the politics of representation" is "mediated by commercial forces" (Saha, 2013, p. 832), and subsequently, greater participation from racial minorities does not automatically lead to increased diversity (Saha, 2017, p. 2).

Strategies of boundary maintenance

While all participants agreed that the qualities portrayed in the comedies do not adequately represent the heterogeneity of Chinese Indonesians, the jokes that center on manifestations of ethnic boundaries through interactions with the majority were more relatable to all participants. This provides some coherence in their sense of being a Chinese (that is not directly based on inherent traits), and so indicates the "regularity" identified by Laclau and Mouffe. Two subthemes indicate the bidirectional forces that make up ethnic boundaries. The first is the discrimination and harassment experienced by the minority, and the second is the pressure for endogamy and maintenance of social distance by the minority group.

Discrimination and racial harassment

Numerous comedic performances delve into the realities of racial harassment and discrimination. In "*Murid Gue Ada yang Rasis*" (My Student is a Racist), Dhanio (2021a) jokes about how one of his online students made racial slurs at him. The participants' responses to depictions of discrimination and harassment are notably clear-cut; they all can relate to the experiences and have been the targets of racial harassment. As Nathan noted,

> *"I'd like to comment on this second video. Well, these racist things... It is quite common. I'm used to being the target of racism" (Nathan, 19M)*

As the participants brought their experiences to the table, it was possible to see the various forms harassment can take. One of the most frequently used fodder for harassment is the perceived physical characteristics.

> *"It had happened to me. I was walking, and somebody said I have slanted eyes, they said that I am 'Cina' I just ignored them, let them. I don't want to feel hurt. (Grace, 21F)*

Another participant pointed out that what is more offensive than verbal harassment like these are acts of behavioral discrimination, where they are treated differently due to their ethnicity.

> *"Sometimes it happens that they harass us not by using words, not by saying we're Cina or something.... They harass us through how they treat us. Like for instance, I once bought mobile data over the counter with my mom. The seller saw us. With the buyer right in front of us, they were very friendly, smiling and laughing. But when they served us, they treated us differently and charged us higher." (Mike, 21M)*

For members of a minority group, discrimination and harassment are part of everyday experiences. This is a social reality that the participants must navigate daily. However, the maintenance of ethnic boundaries is rarely one-directional. While often overlooked in academic discourse, social distancing is also employed by minority groups towards majority group members. The following section explores one of the most prominent social distancing strategies: endogamy.

Reproduction of ethnic boundaries through endogamy

Parental pressure for same-ethnic marriages is often brought up in comedic performances, indicating that this is an issue that young Chinese Indonesians are grappling with. One of the performances that brings this up is Steven Wongso's TikTok reel, wherein he asked his mother how she would like his future wife to be. Although his mother initially said he was free to be with whomever he wanted, she subsequently provided a set of conditions indicating that

she wanted his future wife also to be Chinese Indonesian (Wongso, 2022).

The reel was relatable to the experiences of most participants.

> *Moderator: So, have you been asked to find somebody who is also Chinese?*
>
> *Brown: We have to, to be more precise*
>
> *Several female participants: Yes, you can say that; we have to*

The participants generally agree that older family members, whether their parents or grandparents, expect them to find a Chinese Indonesian spouse, or at the 'very least' a spouse of the same religion. The reasons range from concerns about the challenges of intercultural marriage and beauty standards favoring fair skin to unfavorable stereotypes associated with the majority.

> *"Maybe, let me just respond to this. Maybe it all goes back to the differences in the ways of thinking and of living between the Chinese and the non-Chinese. So, our parents want us to be with someone already on the same wavelength. It would make things easier, compared to if we are with someone from a different background... we would have to make considerable adjustments" (Brown, 23F)*

Other participants discussed the subtle negative reactions they received when they brought non-Chinese dates to meet their family and how the treatment differs when the prospective partners are of Chinese Indonesian descent. Some recounted stories of family members who married a non-Chinese individual and subsequently became outcasts during large family gatherings. Even in instances where the participants are born from a mixed marriage, their grandparents would want to see them with a Chinese to 'reverse' their parents' mixed marriage.

Inter-religious marriage is generally frowned upon by Indonesian youth (Parker et al., 2014) and endogamy is prevalent across all ethnic groups throughout the country (Utomo & McDonald, 2016). This boundary-maintaining practice is certainly not exclusively found among the Chinese Indonesians -as studies in West Kalimantan and Lombok have shown- but it is also important to note that Jakarta has the lowest endogamy rate of all the provinces (Utomo & McDonald, 2016). Nevertheless, at least among the participants of the study and of our previous study (Nugroho & Wibawa, 2022), the Chinese Indonesian youth in Jakarta receive familial pressure to maintain endogamic practices.

Double consciousness

This section describes the national Waisak celebrations of the 1960s, in which the main players changed from educated laypeople to Theravada monks. The third theme is double consciousness, a term coined by Du Bois (1897) referring to "a sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others (Du Bois, 1897)." As members of a marginalized group, the participants are constantly gauging how the comedic performances might be perceived and interpreted by the non-Chinese majority. In other words, they simultaneously perceive the world through the point of view of the minority group and the dominant group.

This double consciousness is manifested, for instance, in the abovementioned concern that the performances that are based on common stereotypes will merely lead to more stereotyping and overgeneralizations of the Chinese Indonesians by the dominant group. Many worried that non-Chinese viewers might overgeneralize the jokes and see the features representing the entire Chinese Indonesian community.

Responding to the video by LastDay Production that features a list of attributes and habits presented as typical of Chinese Indonesians, Endra said,

> *"It's just that the jokes are over-generalizing. Even though these are jokes, it can be considered serious by people who are not Chinese, and they will generalize these." (Endra, 31M)*

Others worry that the representation of Chinese Indonesians in the jokes will eventually cause a backlash, from which the entire community will suffer. This is, for instance, the case with the political jokes performed by Ernest Prakasa in his tour, Illucinati, wherein Prakasa joked that the next governor would be Chinese Indonesian due to the works of an Iluminati-like (hence the wordplay) secret underground organization that aimed to advance Chinese Indonesian causes (Prakasa, 2014). Commenting on his performance, Arla said,

> *"That part that touches on politics is quite risky, I think. I looked that this is in front of a general audience…. I'm worried that not all of them are supporters of Ahok. Sure, this is a joke; everyone knows Ernest is joking. But still, there might be people who do not like the Chinese or do not like Ahok and who will feel threatened by the jokes, 'What do you mean Ahok will rule over Jakarta?' So, I think once the jokes touch on politics, it becomes dangerous, especially if the general audience watches the show" (Arla, 20F)*

A similar concern about how the dominant majority will view them also results from jokes that put the Chinese Indonesians in a negative light. An example of such a joke is the one performed by Ben Dhanio. In this joke, he describes how he had to sit through a traditional Chinese banquet and was served shark fin soup that tasted awful, and where he was seated to an elderly Chinese who annoyed him with his questions about his un-stereotypical profession (Dhanio, 2021). The participants generally responded negatively to the performance, finding Dhanio too critical of his own culture. One of the responses, however, highlighted the risk that Dhanio's joke might cause Chinese restaurants to be the target of mob anger.

> *"I think it's unnecessary to talk like that and mention the illegal aspect of the soup. It would be very stupid if, due to his joke, we would become the target of mob attacks when we go out to dine (Brown, 23F)"*

Although the central question posed during the discussion was the extent to which they find the jokes and representations to be relatable to their own experiences, all participants automatically consider how the non-Chinese majority would perceive the jokes. This is an instance of the double consciousness that has long been identified as a way of seeing and perceiving the world from the vantage point of view of minority groups. While they can perceive the world from the minority's perspective, they are always concerned about how the dominant group perceives them.

Conclusion

In examining the reception of humor, two significant points emerge that are presented as the central themes of the discussion and that support the argument that ethnicity is a regularity in dispersion, a term coined by Laclau and Mouffe.

Firstly, the depictions of attributes, characteristics, or traits representing the 'essential' qualities of the Chinese Indonesian community fail to acknowledge its inherent diversity. Participants uniformly express dissatisfaction with these portrayals, perceiving them as overly simplistic and tending towards stereotyping. While it is impossible to capture the 'essence' of any ethnic group, acknowledging this

impossibility by highlighting the group's heterogeneity and diversity can underscore the absurdity of stereotypes that reduce Chinese Indonesians to a set of attributes.

Secondly, and importantly, in contrast to the participants' disagreement with portrayals of Chinese Indonesians 'essential' characteristics, they agree with the representations of the relational aspects, that is, the representations that center on their position as a minority group and their relationship with the dominant group. The participants and the comedians share the same experiences regarding ethnic-based harassment as well as the pressure to practice endogamy. In the case of our participants, they also employed double consciousness, a mode of being the world that is typical to marginalized people where they can imagine how the majority perceives them and their own perspectives.

Although the findings and interpretations are coherent, this study is based on small-scale research. More insights could undoubtedly be obtained in a larger study.

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Declaration of Ownership

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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