

Dynamics of Chineseness on TikTok: Chinese Indonesian Identity through Surabayan TikTokers

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ABSTRACT

The exploration of Chinese Indonesian identity holds crucial importance given the complexities of cultural, ethnic, and political intersections that have historically characterized this demographic group. The ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have navigated a multifaceted identity landscape marked by assimilation, discrimination, and resistance. Amidst globalization and the rise of digital media, these identity constructs are undergoing continuous transformation, necessitating in-depth examination. This study specifically investigates the representation of Chineseness in the digital space, as exemplified in the TikTok content of two influential Surabayan personalities, Steven Wongso (@stevenwongso_) and Stanley Hao (@stanleyhao). "Chineseness" refers to a construct encompassing various cultural, linguistic, and social aspects that are identified with being Chinese, often nuanced by local contexts and individual interpretations. Through an analysis of Chineseness-related posts and associated comments, a unique rendition of Chinese Indonesian identity is discerned. This version harmoniously intertwines with Javanese culture and does not necessarily entail proficiency in the Chinese language. In contrast to the 'pure' or 'essential' Chineseness often portrayed, this variant unveils the intricacy and potential discord within Chinese Indonesian identity. The representation, while resonating with certain audience segments who identify with the showcased experiences, also runs the risk of inadvertently fortifying stereotypical imagery associated with Chinese Indonesians. In tracing the digital articulations of Chinese Indonesian identity, this study provides an enlightening perspective on the socio-cultural dynamics at play in identity formation and the influential role of digital media in shaping these narratives. The analysis underscores the need to recognize the pluralistic and evolving nature of Chineseness within the Indonesian context.

Keywords: *Chinese Indonesian identity; Chineseness; TikTok*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Chineseness is a multifaceted construct, shaped by personal experiences, historical contexts, and geographical locations (Li, 2021). Chineseness, while ostensibly denoting the quality or condition of being Chinese, presents a definition that is insufficiently nuanced (Wong, Su, & Hiramoto, 2021). This simplification overlooks the complex interplay between national identity and ethnic origin, particularly in the context of the Chinese residing in peripheral regions or forming part of the diaspora. The intricate relationship between these elements demands a more comprehensive understanding that transcends mere affiliation with Chinese nationality or race. It is not a monolithic or static concept, but rather a dynamic and context-dependent construct (Ang, 1998). This complexity is evident in the experiences of Chinese communities worldwide, including in Indonesia (Hoon, 2019). The ethnic Chinese in Indonesia have navigated a multifaceted identity landscape marked by assimilation, discrimination, and resistance.

One of the ways to understand the multifaceted concept of Chineseness is through a dual lens of primordial and situational perspectives (Tong, 2010). This approach acknowledges the complex and layered nature of Chinese ethnic identities, as demonstrated by the diverse expressions of Chineseness across different regional contexts such as Singapore, Indonesia, and Thailand. The notion of 'multiple Chineseness' encapsulates this complexity, suggesting that Chinese ethnicity transcends singular identity markers or ethnic boundaries, and instead manifests through a dynamic interplay of identities that are both inherent and context-dependent.

At the core of this identity model, Chinese ethnic identity is viewed as primordial, deeply rooted, and largely unchangeable, serving expressive personal and social needs and fostering group cohesion. Conversely, at the periphery, ethnic identity becomes more instrumental and situationally sensitive, adapting to public spaces and interactions with other ethnic groups. Here, the concept of 'multiple Chineseness' emerges, with ethnic identity becoming a strategic, context-dependent choice, underscoring the fluidity and adaptability of Chinese ethnic identity.

In the historical context, the Chinese population in Indonesia was bifurcated into two distinct groups: the "*totok*", who maintained their pure-blood lineage and China-centric

orientation, and the "*peranakan*", who had intermingled with the local populace and had established their presence in the Malay Archipelago over centuries. The *peranakan* cultivated a unique cultural heritage, encompassing language, religious practices, customs, and culinary traditions. However, the New Order regime witnessed a contraction of the cultural divide between the *totok* and the *peranakan*, as Chineseness was suppressed due to its perceived association with Communism and potential security risks. This suppression led to an enforced assimilation policy that curtailed all public expressions of Chineseness. It is worth noting that the Chinese community in Java has experienced a higher degree of assimilation compared to their counterparts in other islands or provinces, which has significantly shaped their cultural identity and their interactions within the wider Indonesian society (Setijadi, 2023; Tong, 2010).

Following the collapse of the Suharto regime in 1998, the restrictive assimilation policy was supplanted by a policy of multiculturalism, sparking a revival of Chinese culture and identity in Indonesia. This revival was marked by a resurgence of "primordial Chineseness", an essentialized concept rooted in tradition, language, lineage, physical characteristics, and culture. (Hoon, 2021).

In contrast to this primordial Chineseness is a more fluid, localized, and hybrid form of Chineseness, which mirrors the everyday experiences of the majority of Chinese Indonesians. This hybrid identity is not a simple amalgamation of Chinese and Indonesian cultures, but a complex process of negotiation and identification that intersects with the forces of globalization, modernization, primordialism, and localization. Despite its prevalence, this hybrid identity is often overshadowed in the public sphere, which tends to privilege primordial Chineseness due to its perceived authenticity, universality, and economic significance. As a result, hybrid Chinese individuals often engage in "resinicization", such as learning Mandarin, to access the economic opportunities presented by China's ascendancy.

This multifaceted cultural landscape was also shaped by the rise of ethnic media post-Suharto, providing a platform for Chinese Indonesians to express, counter stereotypes, and reconstruct their identities through shared symbols and affiliations. Despite these successful efforts to rejuvenate Chinese Indonesian identity, Suprajitno (2020) observes that the rich diversity within the Chinese community in Indonesia continues to challenge efforts to construct a definitive and uniform Chinese identity, reflecting the intricate and evolving nature of Chineseness in the modern Indonesian context.

The advent of globalization, coupled with the exponential growth of digital media, has instigated a significant metamorphosis in identity constructs (Gündüz, 2017; Lu, 2017). These interconnected global phenomena have become catalysts for the sharing, dissemination, and continuous transformation of cultural practices, ideas, and identities. Within the specific context of Chinese Indonesians, the work of Susilo & Sugihartati (2021) sheds light on the innovative role of Last Day Production (LDP), a collaborative venture of Chinese-Indonesian YouTube content creators. These creators deftly utilize the platform to reshape domestic perceptions of Chinese Indonesians, countering historical racial tensions and the emergent wave of Islamic populism. By leveraging YouTube, LDP accentuates the full Indonesian identity of the Chinese community, fostering a sense of nationalism among young and millennial generations. Their content transcends mere visual demonstration, reflecting the congruity of daily life between Chinese Indonesians and native Indonesians, while actively dispelling entrenched stereotypes. LDP's resonating success on YouTube underscores the efficacy of alternative media channels in unifying ethnic divides and cultivating an understanding of Chinese Indonesians as a vital component of Indonesia's composite identity.

In a parallel vein, the exploration by Dyahapsari & Nugraha (2020) of Chinese Indonesian identity delves into the intricate dichotomy within this community. Their findings juxtapose the instrumentalization of anti-Chinese sentiment for political maneuvering against the proactive engagement of young Chinese Indonesians with social media. This newer generation is forging a distinctive and alternative conceptualization of Chineseness that challenges traditional state-imposed constructs, presenting a sophisticated response to Indonesia's multifaceted political landscape.

This phenomenon of global forces shaping cultural identity is further epitomized by the ascendancy of TikTok, a contemporary social media platform that has emerged as a substantial arena for identity expression and negotiation (Stahl & Literat, 2022). TikTok's format allows users to manifest, share, and engage with content that mirrors their individual identities and experiences, illustrating yet another facet of the complex interplay between technology and identity in our interconnected world.

In the realm of TikTok in Indonesia, two personalities stand out: Steven Wongso (@stevenwongso_) and Stanley Hao (@stanleyhao). Both are based in Surabaya, one of Indonesia's largest cities, and have amassed substantial followings on the platform. As of July

8, 2023, Steven Wongso has attracted a following of 5.5 million and his content has received 89.9 million likes. Stanley Hao, on the other hand, has 7.7 million followers and a staggering 489.2 million likes on his content. While not all of their content is specifically related to the Chinese Indonesian experience, they often deliver content related to "Chindo", a term popular among Chinese Indonesian youths to refer to their ethnicity.

The existing literature on the representation of Chineseness on social media platforms and its influence on Chinese Indonesian identity is limited. There is a need for more in-depth studies that explore how Chineseness is portrayed on popular platforms like TikTok. Additionally, it's crucial to deepen our understanding of the Chineseness among Indonesian ethnic Chinese youth. They often find themselves at the intersection where primordial and situational or hybrid Chinese identities continuously interact and conflict (Agato, 2021). In addressing this, this study will focus on the research question: How is Chineseness represented in the TikTok content of Steven Wongso and Stanley Hao?

METHOD

At the moment, TikTok does not offer an official Application Programming Interface (API) that can be utilized to investigate the activities of individual users or for data gathering purposes (Miltsov, 2022). Furthermore, there are currently no research tools specifically created for TikTok studies. This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach, concentrating on the TikTok content generated by Steven Wongso and Stanley Hao, both of whom identify as Chinese Indonesians. Their videos often present narratives and visual representations pertinent to Chinese Indonesians. Data collection was executed through a sampling technique. Ten random videos from each account, which encompassed themes associated with Chinese Indonesians (as indicated by the usage of terms such as "Chindo" or "Cina" and related themes like Mandarin), that garnered a minimum of 1 million views, and were published in a similar timeframe (approximately August 2022), were selected for comprehensive analysis.

The selected videos were analyzed through a process of careful observation and interpretation. Each video was viewed multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content, including both visual and auditory elements, as well as any text or captions included in the video. The analysis focused on identifying and understanding the ways in which

Chineseness is represented in the content produced by Steven Wongso and Stanley Hao. This involved looking for patterns or themes in the representation of Chineseness and Chinese Indonesian identity across the different videos.

The analysis also considered the audience's response to these representations, as indicated by the number of views and comments on each video. This provided insights into how these representations resonate with viewers and their potential impact on perceptions of Chinese Indonesian identity. The findings from this analysis were then discussed in relation to the existing literature on Chineseness, Chinese Indonesian identity, and the use of social media for identity construction and expression.

The videos under consideration are as follows:

Table 1. List of Selected TikTok Videos for Analysis

Steven Wongso			
Date Posted	Video Title	Number of Views	Number of Comments
August 5, 2022	ya beginilah saya...	4.2M	2352
August 13, 2022	ketika jual bensin...	25M	1855
August 14, 2022	ketika jadi tukang becak...	1.8M	499
August 19, 2022	ketika jual gado-gado...	4.4M	465
August 20, 2022	ketika jual indomie...	8M	476
August 21, 2022	ketika jual buah...	1.2M	64
August 22, 2022	pembuktian sebagai cina part 2...	1.2M	277
August 22, 2022	ketika jadi guru les...	3.5M	180
August 24, 2022	ketika jualan sate	1.1M	54
August 25, 2022	ketika jual bubur...	25.5M	4343
Stanley Hao			
Date Posted	Video Title	Number of Views	Number of comments
August 3, 2022	uwes poo... uwessss	33M	48.2K
August 4, 2022	Replying to @samar_bayangan wes mari yo ngelu	6.5M	13.3K
August 6, 2022	b p m f d t n l ndas ku ate mbledosss	2.2M	5548
August 7, 2022	Replying to @ci2223 ga valid iki	7.8M	1111
August 8, 2022	Replying to @lurd066	3M	5304
August 11, 2022	Gblg	2.2M	997
August 17, 2022	chindo privilage wkwkwk	1M	888
September 1, 2022	aku dimana... aku siapa...	2.1M	908
September 2, 2022	koyok ketemu anak e konco e	1.4M	672
October 25, 2022	koko bagi chindo = kakak laki2, koko bagi non chindo = panggilan buat chindo laki2	1.7M	259

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the selected time frame, Steven Wongso's videos primarily revolved around hypothetical scenarios or examples of Chinese Indonesians in specific professions. On the other hand, Stanley Hao's content during this period largely highlighted Chinese Indonesians and the Mandarin language.

Chineseness in Surabaya: A Hybrid Identity Emphasizing Javanese Culture

Both Steven Wongso and Stanley Hao present a version of Chineseness that harmoniously intertwines with Javanese culture, exemplifying a situational form of Chineseness. However, as Tong (2010) pointed out, they continue to describe the personification of their identity as '*Chindo*' or '*Cina*' or '*Cino*' (Javanese for Chinese), whereas the term '*Tionghoa*' is scarcely used. Hence, even though the situational or hybrid Chineseness is more prevalent, the old adage 'once Chinese, always Chinese' still rings true, especially given that their physical appearance generally reflects that of Chinese Indonesians.

Stanley Hao's content predominantly features dialogues or monologues, where he employs casual Javanese (*Jawa ngoko*) with a distinct, authentic Surabayan accent. While he does not interact directly with non-Chinese in his videos, some content, in the form of replies to viewer comments, implies interaction with possibly non-Tionghoa viewers, as Stanley addresses their 'ignorance' about Chinese Indonesians. Conversely, Steven Wongso's videos have minimal dialogue and more interaction with non-Chinese, using more Indonesian language. It is probable that the lack of subtitles in Stanley's videos can be attributed to the substantial dialogue content, and the predominance of 'unpalatable' Surabayan Javanese dialect, which might not translate well in written form.

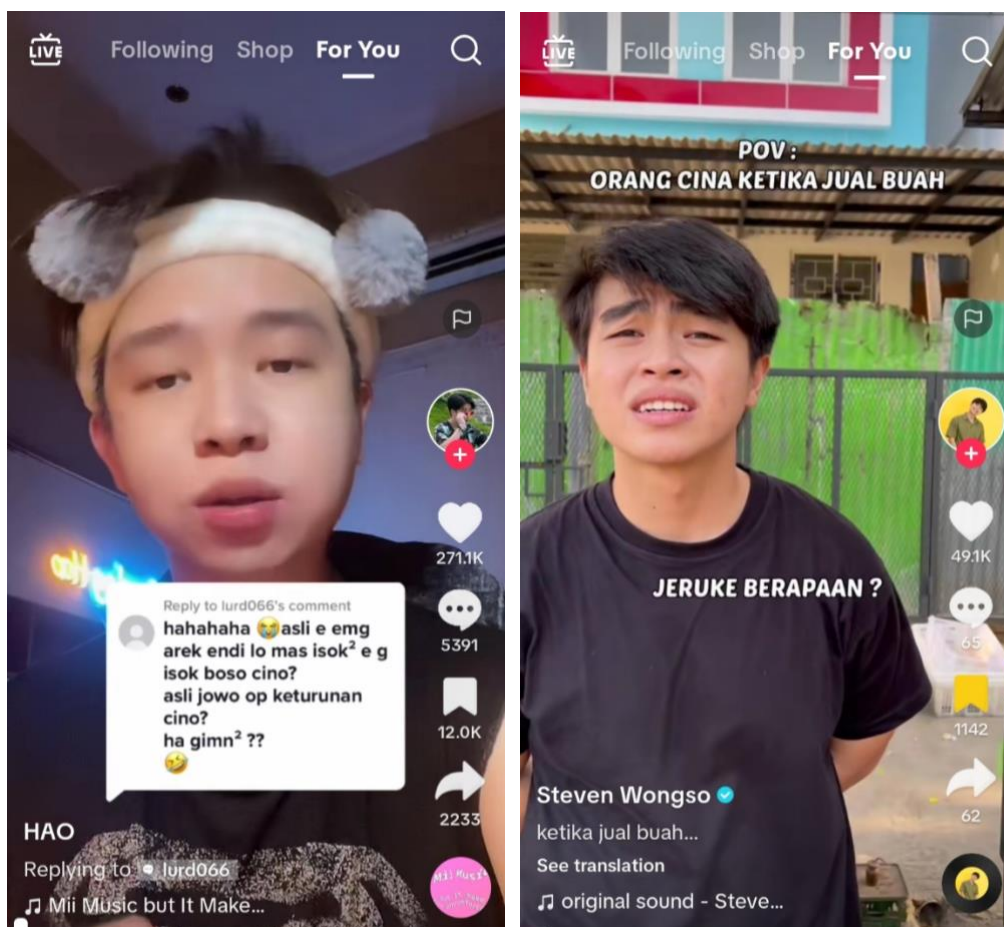


Figure 1. Sample TikTok contents of @stanleyhao (left) and @stevenwongso_ (right)

Despite Stanley's content being primarily monologues or interactions with fellow Chinese Indonesians, similar to Steven's videos, both their themes focus on everyday life, manifesting grassroots content. This characteristic is typical of new media, where anyone can be a content producer (Gilmor, 2006). It is likely one of the factors contributing to their substantial viewer count, as viewers probably relate more with the themes reflecting their daily life.

We observe here that their content showcases a version of Chineseness highly assimilated with Surabayan Javanese culture, which appears to be well-received by their audience. Although we do not know the precise identities and backgrounds of the viewers, especially those who comment on their videos, it's highly likely that most are non-Chinese, representing the majority. This 'Javanese' Chineseness is readily accepted because it blurs ethnic boundaries, easily blending with the local culture and illustrating the potency of hybridity.

The utilization of TikTok as a platform for expression has created an open avenue for personalized portrayals of Chineseness, reflecting the nuanced complexities and shifting paradigms of ethnic identity. TikTok's accessibility and participatory nature allow creators like Stanley Hao and Steven Wongso to communicate an embodied version of Chineseness that merges traditional cultural aspects with modern Indonesian life. It facilitates a more democratic form of expression, where traditional media's stereotypes and rigid constructs are challenged, reshaped, or even parodied. The interactive nature of TikTok further allows audience engagement, creating a dialogue between creators and viewers, reflecting and shaping the collective consciousness regarding Chineseness. This represents a transformative potential within digital spaces to foster a more inclusive and multifaceted understanding of Chinese Indonesian identity.

These are examples of how the audience positively receives the 'Javanese' portrayal:

suka bgt denger bahasa Jawa dia 😊 (I really love hearing his Javanese language 😊)
(@xyz0__)

Koko kok fuuasihh banget boso Jowo Suroboyoan??? (Why is this guy so fluent in Surabayan Javanese???) (@28oktober_1)

jowo ne medok 😊 (His Javanese is so thick 😊) (@meryzhanty)

The explicit use of historically pejorative terms like "Cina" or even "Cino" by both individuals further underscores the shifting attitudes of the younger Chinese Indonesian generation. For them, the term "Cina" no longer carries pejorative connotations. However, it should be noted that they also use the term "Chindo", a contemporary slang frequently employed by younger Chinese Indonesians. This term, presumably an English abbreviation of 'Chinese Indonesian', has an appealingly modern and hip connotation. This again illustrates a variant of 'Chineseness' distinctive from the older generation or those more firmly rooted in Chinese tradition ('*totok* Chinese'), who generally prefer the term '*Tionghoa*' to '*Cina*'. This change in nomenclature is reflective of the evolving identity discourse among Chinese Indonesian youth, signaling a departure from the older generation's experiences and attitudes.

Challenging or Reinforcing Stereotypes? The 'Mocking' of Chineseness

Chinese Indonesians have been historically portrayed as an exclusive group, marked by hardworking yet frugal characteristics, and demonstrating a notable lack of political or nationalist commitment to their 'host country,' Indonesia. This depiction highlights longstanding biases and stereotypes associated with this community (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020). The TikTok content produced by Stanley and Steven encapsulates several stereotypes linked to the Chinese ethnic group. From the sample analyzed in this research, Steven's content appears more 'stereotypical.' During the observed time frame, Steven's posts frequently highlighted themes of frugality, calculation, adeptness in trading, or in harsher terms, the 'economic animal' persona often accentuated during the New Order era.

It is important to acknowledge that the TikTok content of these creators primarily consists of humor, jokes, or comedy, designed to invoke laughter from the audience. As a result, the 'stereotypical' content can be interpreted as a form of satire, deliberately mocking the ethnic Chinese by drawing upon negative stereotypes. This comedic and exaggerated nature of the portrayal may, in turn, invoke a counter-stereotype. The young viewers, conscious of the intention for comedic effect, can discern the exaggerated or unrepresentative elements when compared to their actual experiences. Thus, the 'stereotypical' portrayals of Chinese Indonesians, owing to their exaggerated and humorous nature, are less likely to be perceived as genuinely stereotypical.

For instance, in a piece of content titled "Selling Gado-Gado (a typical Surabaya food)," Steven embodies a Chinese gado-gado vendor. When a customer requests an increase in lontong (rice cake), Steven obliges. However, when the gado-gado is served, it turns out the amount of lontong remains the same. Steven merely sliced it into smaller pieces, arguing that there are now more pieces, thus fulfilling the customer's request. He then lays down a 'principle' that if a customer requests an additional item, the price must increase. However, if the customer asks for something to be reduced from their food, the price remains the same, without any decrease. This performance amplifies the stereotype of Chinese being calculating and frugal.

On the other hand, the professions depicted by Steven in several videos during this time frame are generally uncommonly associated with ethnic Chinese in Surabaya. This portrayal

can also be seen as a form of counter-stereotype. Moreover, comments from viewers reflect how they do not readily accept this stereotype. Instead, they counter it by suggesting that non-Chinese vendors are also calculating and frugal. Thus, these interactions reflect a nuanced dance between reinforcing stereotypes and actively countering them, indicating the complex dynamics of identity representation within the realm of social media. This is the example of conversation in the comments:

tp non Chinese di tempatku malah yg gini. nambah 2rb pdhl gw gk minta tambahin apa2
(But the non-Chinese in my area are actually like this. They add 2,000 rupiah even though I didn't ask for anything extra.) (@mynamed.ata)

wkwk bener 😂 (True, lol) (@gennnnsiuuuuu)

lah skarang chinese gak chinese sama 😂 (Now, Chinese or non-Chinese are the same.)
(@apelowko)

However, for older generations of the *totok* Chinese audience, or those who fail to understand that these videos are actually challenging stereotypes, these contents might provoke different perceptions due to the usage of contentious terms such as "*Cina*". They may interpret these videos as purely mocking Chineseness, potentially exacerbating, rather than mitigating, these entrenched stereotypes. This highlights the interpretive diversity and generational divide that permeates the audience's reception of such content, underlining the complexities of Chineseness as portrayed in these digital media narratives.

In the data from Stanley's videos within this timeframe, stereotypes are also presented, albeit differently from the economic or professional themes shown in Steven's videos. In Stanley's content, there is a stereotypical comparison between non-Chinese and Chinese, as represented by middle-aged female fans who are enamored with him. Non-Chinese women are depicted as polite, while the Chinese women are stereotypically portrayed as overly friendly because they are fellow Chinese, seemingly exploiting the opportunity to take photos with Stanley to the fullest extent in order to achieve the best picture. At the end of the video, the depiction of Chinese women, upon discovering Stanley is from Sidoarjo, spontaneously asking "Do you know Meifang?" reflects the general interaction of middle-aged Chinese in smaller cities, who typically are familiar with their fellow Chinese residents. This portrayal provides a nuanced, though somewhat exaggerated, depiction of the contrasting cultural dynamics between non-Chinese and Chinese communities within Indonesia.

It's also worth noting a thematic shift in Steven's professional-themed videos, specifically regarding the title text within the video. In the initial content, the term "*Cina*" is used, as in "when *Cina* becomes a gado-gado seller." However, this later transitions in subsequent videos to using the term "*aku* (I)," such as "when I sell porridge." Although the effect remains the same, as all these professions are enacted by Steven, who physically appears Chinese, and the buyers refer to him as "*ko* (older brother, a salutation for male ethnic Chinese)," the visible appearance of this title text suggests a shift from emphasizing these as stereotypical traits of the entire Chinese ethnic group to personal attributes of an individual Chinese person.

Linguistic Incompetence

Stanley's content during this time frame brings attention to his typical Chinese-Indonesian youth predicament, attributed to the New Order policy, of being unable to and disliking Mandarin usage. One of his highly viral videos (garnering 33 million views) outlines three reasons for his aversion towards learning Mandarin. The first reason is the commonly perceived difficulty of Mandarin as a language. However, beyond this, he presents two compelling and more personal reasons that offer us an in-depth understanding of the Chinese youth identity in this context.

The first of these two compelling reasons is social pressure. In this context, social pressure means that the older Chinese generation, whose sense of Chineseness is often gauged by their proficiency in Mandarin, generally anticipates their children or grandchildren to acquire the language. This expectation translates into criticism when younger members fail to demonstrate proficiency as their linguistically successful counterparts do. Interestingly, these expectations become more than mere familial demands; they add an extra layer of pressure on the younger generation, like Stanley and his peers in their twenties. This pressure combines with the inherent challenge of learning the language itself, intensifying the difficulty and often resulting in resentment or aversion towards Mandarin.

The second reason highlights the outdated teaching methods. Although Stanley's depiction might be seen as an exaggeration for comedic effect, his characterization of the elderly Mandarin teacher symbolizes the archaic Mandarin teaching methods in Indonesia, especially as applied by older generation teachers. This portrayal brings to light a unique challenge in the modern context. Students might lose interest in learning due to this approach,

which often emphasizes rote memorization and repetition rather than engagement and understanding. This disconnect between teaching methods and the learning preferences of younger individuals can contribute to the resistance or failure to grasp the language.

The extensive viewership of this video indicates that Stanley's experience resonates with many. The comment section reveals a multitude of similar shared experiences. This space reveals the relationship between the Mandarin language as a marker of Chineseness and Mandarin language education. For ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, the categorization of Mandarin does not seem to be easily classified as a foreign language based on the extent of assimilation. Given the significant influence of the older generation, Mandarin may not be entirely a foreign language. Instead, it requires a fusion of foreign and heritage language classification, necessitating the development of an appropriate teaching methodology.

Within Steven's content, there is one video where he articulates five reasons why he should not be categorized as '*Cina*'. One reason is his inability to speak Mandarin. This again underscores the persisting perception of Mandarin as a determinant of Chineseness.

Despite Stanley's highly viral video giving a strong impression that he lacks any Mandarin language skills, subsequent content reveals that he, in fact, possesses a sufficient grasp of the language. Subtly refuting his own complaint of having learned Mandarin for years without progress, it becomes evident that this is not entirely accurate. Some of his content attempts to explain the characteristics of Mandarin, which, albeit imperfect, is reasonably accurate and valid. He also collaborates with Steven in another video, showcasing a significantly better command of Mandarin compared to Steven.

One of Stanley's intriguing content pieces is a video titled "aku dimana... aku siapa..." ("where am I... who am I...") where he records a daily life scene in what is likely his home. In this scene, an older Chinese individual is seen teaching a young woman how to read in Mandarin. This relatively unedited video does not feature Stanley speaking, but his facial expressions convey a sense of resignation, illustrating that listening to the older Chinese generation emphasize the importance of learning Mandarin has become a daily occurrence for him. This further underscores the moral responsibility felt by the older generation to pass on the Mandarin language to the younger generation.

Simultaneously, this reveals a generational gap where not all young individuals are willing to learn the language. Interestingly, this video also portrays a young woman eager to

learn, signifying the diversity of Chineseness among Chinese youth in Indonesia. This aligns with Stanley's previous video discussing social pressure, where he mentions that his cousins attending trilingual schools have a good command of Mandarin.

CONCLUSION

The construct of 'Chineseness' is an evolving and intricate phenomenon, revealing itself as a multifaceted and layered identity as this study on TikTok representations by ethnic Chinese youth in Surabaya exemplifies. Their conceptualization of 'Chineseness' is predominantly characterized by its hybrid and situational nature, with no imperative ties to essential Chinese cultural elements. These elements refer to core values, traditions, philosophies, and artifacts that are intrinsic to Chinese culture and heritage, often encompassing Confucian principles, familial obligations, and historical symbols and rituals. It is particularly noteworthy that this community displays a limited command of the Chinese language. However, despite being divested of this social and cultural capital linked with essential 'Chineseness', their identification as 'Chinese' remains steadfast. This persistence in identifying as Chinese, despite the absence of certain traditional markers, illustrates a flexible and adaptive sense of ethnic identity. This aspect is unique to the contemporary Chinese-Indonesian youth demographic. Their more localized Javanese cultural perspective receives greater acceptance among non-Chinese compatriots, reflecting a merging of cultural influences and an integration of multiple identities.

However, this dynamic and complex understanding of 'Chineseness' is not universally accepted or recognized. For the older Chinese generation, particularly the 'totok' Chinese who hold more traditional views, the occasionally depicted mockery of 'Chineseness' might not be interpreted as a subversion of stereotypes. Instead, it may be construed as reinforcing negative stereotypes about the Chinese-Indonesian community. This disjunction between the perceptions of different generations reveals deeper tensions and challenges in defining what it means to be Chinese in contemporary Indonesia. It emphasizes the need for a more empathetic and contextual understanding that respects the diversity and fluidity of identity. These diverse perspectives and interpretations underscore the complexity of 'Chineseness' and its dynamic

nature within the societal and cultural context of Indonesia. The ways in which 'Chineseness' is constructed, contested, and negotiated within various social spaces, especially among the younger generation leveraging digital platforms, underscore the ongoing transformation of this ethnic identity. The pluralism within this ethnic identity, manifested in the digital age, calls for more nuanced discussions and scholarly examinations in future studies, demanding an interdisciplinary approach that engages with cultural studies, linguistics, sociology, and digital media. Such inquiries are vital in enriching our comprehension of ethnic identity in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world.

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