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**CHINESE-NESS AS A SPACE OF CONTESTATION:
REREADING TWO INDONESIAN *PERANAKAN* MUSEUMS
IN TANGERANG**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses two museums that deliberately adopt the concept of “Peranakan” as part of their identities, namely the Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa, or the Peranakan Chinese Literature Museum (2012), and the Museum Benteng Heritage (November 11, 2011). Both are located in South Tangerang (ca.10 km from Jakarta). The term “Peranakan” indicates a *mélange* of identities for the Indonesian and Chinese. A closer examination of the Chinese in Indonesia reveals that during the New Order regime, the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese underwent a “repression” taking the form of various political policies and laws limiting their public roles, even attaching negative stigmas to the Chinese identity. The void space in state museums could be filled by these museums, which would demonstrate the endeavor to develop a fairer concept of nationhood. This paper is not intended to provide any solution to the current problem underlying the establishment of the museums. Rather, it is meant to explain the process that takes place when the identity of an ethnic group is questioned and politicized.

KEYWORDS: Chinese diaspora, Indonesian Peranakan Chinese, space of contestation, Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa, Museum Benteng Heritage

INTRODUCTION

In terms of the Chinese diaspora in Indonesia, identity politics has become very important to me because it directly relates to my daily life. Given the condition and situation of the Indonesian archipelago as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), identity politics is not only critical for the Chinese Peranakan but also for all Indonesians because the unitary state of Indonesia operates by mutual consensus. How this unity is preserved and sustained for all citizens so that everyone is entitled to equal rights and responsibilities should be a concern for all of us.

I have lived during most of the Suharto era, when Chinese Peranakan were prohibited from exercising their cultural inheritance, and one result was that most of the Peranakans could not speak Chinese anymore (Anderson’s printed capitalist). Out of fear, we also left behind any type

of cultural identity and exposed our heritage to the Indonesian people. Some even erased anything that could attach us to the notion of being Chinese and our ‘Chinese-ness.’ This massive abuse by state politics towards the Chinese Peranakan resulted in a sort of cultural ‘amnesia’ for the Chinese Peranakan, whereby the Peranakan Culture was forgotten and dismissed from everyday life. The young Chinese Peranakan of today are not aware of our hybrid Peranakan culture. Instead, they have considered Chinese-ness as an emulation of the culture of mainland China. Our heritage of Indonesian Chinese Peranakan culture has been somewhat lost during the 35 years of repression. The Chinese Peranakan never expected that the Indonesian political situation could change in a fortnight, but it was a historical moment for the entirety of the people when the students marched to the parliament building to protest against Suharto’s regime. The process of democracy has not been smooth, and a lot of Chinese casualties resulted, but 1998 was the year that would have a deep impact on Indonesia and its people.

The political situation of the Republic of Indonesia changed drastically in 1998, and the volatile circumstances triggered by the oppressive government at the time were pacified by force. Ever since then, much efforts have been made to restore history to its normal course, especially with the urgent problem of nationhood, which seemingly required redefinition. Meanwhile, efforts to neutralize the power and influence of the New Order regime did not seem to achieve much success. In the middle of the political turbulence that characterized the 2017 Regional Election in DKI Jakarta, issues of race and ethnicity came to the forefront and triggered various reactions from both the nationalist and sectarian groups. The latter group has violently utilized ethnicity, religion, and race-related issues, which culminated with the electoral loss of the incumbent candidate pair.¹ This problem of nationhood still seems to involve the Chinese ethnic group, despite them having lived in Indonesia for centuries. This is ironic considering the fact that as pointed out by Rovando Lie (2017): “... the interaction and assimilation of both races have been taking place for a very long time” (p. 24). Denys Lombard, in Rovando Lie, also observed that “there is no place on earth—except perhaps Central Asia—other than the Indonesian archipelago in which almost all great civilizations of the world are present, coexist, or even fuse into one.” Thus, the identity of the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese should no longer be a sort of political commodity that can be conveniently corrupted and deployed to defeat a political opponent.

The main objects of analysis in this paper are two museums that explore the theme of the Peranakan Chinese and that are located in South Tangerang City, an area that has been well known as a prominent hub of Chinese immigrants since the 15th century, even before the Dutch colonial era. This is an important point because the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese culture represents a *mélange* of different cultures whose constituent parts are no longer easily identifiable. This culture, however, has often been forgotten, or even marginalized, in the national history of Indonesia. This is reflected by the lack of record of such culture in many Indonesian national history books and museums. For that reason, this paper will try to discuss the two museums by using the framework of the existence of Chinese Peranakan in the discussion of nationalism in Indonesia. The two museums, in fact, try to reveal the contribution of Chinese Peranakan in Indonesian history in almost every field through their collections of books and artefacts and in doing so they have created a kind of third space of identity where everybody included and could access it.

¹ When this paper was written, the 2017 Regional Election in DKI Jakarta began to show a tendency which many people had been concerned about, which was the exploitation of ethnicity, religion, and race-related issues for tarnishing the reputation of those who have been given the double labels of “Chinese” and “infidel”.

Indonesian Chinese Peranakan

In twenty years after 1998 or the post – Suharto Reform, the young generation of Chinese Indonesians no longer face the forced assimilation and legislative discrimination their parent endured under Suharto’s New Order regime. A renaissance of Chinese Indonesian identity politics and culture, and Chinese organizations, media and Mandarin language education are once again back in the public domain. The presence of the Chinese in Indonesia has been analyzed and discussed by many scholars since the Reformation of 1998. A study by Setijadi (2015) discusses the acceptance towards Chinese culture that can be seen mostly from the interest to revisit the relationship between Chinese Peranakan and the People’s Republic of China, referred to as sinification. Such phenomenon is marked, among others, by the publications of some new media written in Chinese language, the freedom of Chinese community to practice various Chinese traditions in public space, and the teaching of Mandarin in some schools. Furthermore, the members of Indonesian-Chinese community also have done fairly well in the political field. The Chinese culture revival is seen in a positive light since it may establish beneficial ties, particularly in the field of business. Nonetheless, Setijadi (2015) also reminds us that potential conflicts still persist as long as the latent prejudice of Chinese Peranakan being communists is still around in the society. Despite the deep discussion on sinification in Setijadi’s study, it is detrimental to say that the Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia can bridge the bilateral economy ties between the two countries, as this is only applicable to the Chinese Peranakan² who are engaged in international-scaled businesses. In addition, such statement will only position Chinese Peranakan as mere traders who prioritize profits above anything else.

Meanwhile, the rigorous efforts to recall and put back the position and the role of Chinese Peranakan in the national history of Indonesia can be seen in a number of books published in Indonesia. Among of them are the books by the Nabil Foundation, which provide some illustrations on Chinese Peranakan’s contributions in the forms of physical force, thoughts and idea. The foundation compiled 129 papers on 6 topics, written by 73 people.³ On one hand, the Indonesian Chinese Peranakan feel that they have been granted freedom to a certain extent. On the other hand, they remain easy victims of past prejudice. Therefore, one of the most widely debated topics of discussion about the Indonesian Chinese is the assimilation policy that was imposed by the New Order regime (Hoon, 2008; Suryadinata, 2004). In Indonesia, the same subject has also been examined in a comprehensive manner by Benny G. Setiono (2003) in his book *Tionghoa dalam Pusaran Politik*. This book provides a strong illustration of the history of the Indonesian Chinese, especially how the politics of assimilation imposed during Soeharto’s regime marginalized the Indonesian Chinese and allowed a stigma to develop against the ethnic group. Soeharto even succeed in establishing the dichotomy of ‘pribumi’ and ‘non-pribumi’, which has permeated the country for decades, coopting Chinese Peranakan and injecting the regime’s politics of identity into their minds. Consequently, a discussion held at an alternative space on the topic of nationalism, in this case the two museums, will contribute to the national consciousness.

In brief, in the scholarly discussions on Chinese Peranakan, one can see that at least two opinions about identity politics exist that have been implemented in the past. The first opinion, of course, comes from the political assimilationists of the Soeharto era, who argued that the problem

² According to Setijadi (2015) international-scaled businessmen who have good relationships with China are the ‘totok’ businessmen. Setijadi defines ‘totok’ as those culturally affiliated with China and are fluent in Mandarin.

³ The Nabil (Nation Building) Foundation was established in 2006 and has since published many books concerning the roles and contributions of the Straits-born Chinese in Indonesia, the most current ones being the three volumes of *Peran Etnik Tionghoa di Indonesia: Dulu dan Kini* (2016).

could be solved through the assimilation of the Chinese Peranakans with the so-called Pribumi.⁴ They expected no difference to exist between the two due to the mixture of the two groups. This perspective was regulated by the government during the era of Soeharto, and manifested into three books of regulations entitled *Pedoman Penyelesaian Masalah Cina di Indonesia* (the Guidelines of Chinese(-related) Issues Resolution) published in 1970s.⁵ This is partly true because, of course, the process of assimilation must run naturally and cannot be imposed through a number of regulations that basically simply create injustices on the part of the Indonesian-Chinese Peranakan. The second opinion, which was in line with the previous perspective, was expressed earlier by the Tionghoa Hwee Koan, a Chinese society founded in the 19th century during the Dutch occupation of Indonesia and was active in education field through its THHK schools, and aims to bring the Chinese people back to the Chinese Peranakan hybrid culture by collecting and promoting all sorts of works that were created by the Peranakan Chinese in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the issue of Indonesian Chinese identity has been discussed more widely and thoroughly by many experts from different fields. Mely G. Tan (2005), an expert in sociology, discussed such issue by analyzing the articles written by various scholars, where she found that many writings published before the Reform of 1998 focused more on the dichotomy of ‘pribumi’ and ‘non pribumi (Tionghoa)’. The ‘non pribumi’ were also frequently referred to as overseas Chinese or immigrants. This created a widespread effect towards the perspective on the Chinese living in Indonesia, where they were seen as profit-driven people without any desire to contribute to the national interest. The identity issue of Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia was discussed further by Aimee Dawis (2009), who supported the opinion of Leo Surjadinata (2004), namely to observe the cultural affinity rather than their national origin in discussing Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia. Heidhues (2003), who studied the Chinese Peranakan living outside Java island in 1970s, also discussed similar topic. The study found that the members of the groups identified themselves with the regions where they were born, as explained by Siew (2013). Siew (2013) also further explained that other experts, such as Budianta (2007), Sai (2008) and Dawis (2009), also discussed the identification of Chinese Peranakan in cross-generational perspectives. These studies prove that Chinese Peranakan constitutes a crucial concept in the discussion of identity issues in Indonesia. They show how the Chinese Peranakan identity interacts and how such interactions produce varieties of culture and ideas that are still relevant to this day.

This direction is largely what the two museums are attempting to achieve. That is, to preserve the Indonesia Chinese Peranakan culture as a hybrid culture and as one of the founders of nationhood in Indonesia. Perhaps it is interesting to note that after analyzing the historical data,

⁴ “Pribumi” is a word that actually contains the colonial identity politics, it shows the hierarchy which built in the archipelago of Nusantara and Pribumi or indigenous was intended for the people who lived there for centuries but placed at the bottom. This word has degrading meaning and should not be used anymore.

⁵ There were eight New Order laws which forbade the display of all forms of Chinese culture:

1. Instruction of the Cabinet Presidium of the Republic of Indonesia Number 37/U/IN/6/1967 on Basic Policy for the Solution to the Chinese Problem.
2. Circular of the Cabinet Presidium of the Republic of Indonesia Number SE-36/Pres/Kab/6/1967 on Chinese Problems.
3. Presidential Instruction Number 14 of 1967 on Chinese Religion, Beliefs, and Traditional Customs.
4. Presidential Instruction Number 15 of 1967 on Special Staff for *Chinese Affairs*.
5. Instruction of the Ministry of Home Affairs Number 455.2-360 on Regulation of Temples.
6. Decision of the Head of the Indonesian State Intelligence Agency Number 031 of 1973 on the Coordination Body for the *Chinese Problem*.
7. Decision Letter of the Minister of Trade and Cooperatives Number 286 of 1978 on the Prohibition to Import, Trade, and Circulate All Kinds of Printed Matter in the Chinese Language and Characters.
8. Circular of the Minister of Information Number 02/SE/Di on the Prohibition of the Publication and Printing of Texts or Advertisements in Chinese Characters and Language.

for various reasons the Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia have found it challenging to represent themselves as ethnic Chinese. The main reason for this lies in the fact that the Peranakan see themselves as Indonesian, and everything else is less important. This notion can be seen in the efforts of the Chinese Peranakan that accumulated after 1998 to rebuild and relive their Peranakan culture as part of the widespread diversity of Indonesia. They make their best effort to create a space in the nation building of Indonesia, and exploring the two museums is one of the many efforts seen recently.

One interesting result of the 1998 reform is the application of the word in the names of both museums. The application of the concept of *Tionghoa* (literally meaning “the Chinese people” in the Hokkianese dialect) as the main theme explored by both museums reveals the dynamics of Indonesian Chinese identity, while implicitly demonstrating how the Indonesian Chinese were marginalized by means of policies designed to restrict the Chinese identity. From this perspective, the process of identity elimination can be viewed as a means of eliminating the very presence of the Chinese. On the one hand, the Indonesian Chinese accepted their status as a minority ethnic group; on the other hand, Soeharto’s regime continued to impose the politics of identity, which perpetuated the image of the Chinese as capitalists because they were always associated with abundant wealth and thought to live in Indonesia only for the purpose of reaping profit. The use of the term *Tjina*, or *Tjiena*, to refer to the Indonesian Chinese was likely intended to aggravate the negative stigmas because it refers directly to the People’s Republic of China. This unfortunate association created another layer of stigma implying that the Chinese are unpatriotic and disloyal to Indonesia, which has actually become their motherland, but this sentiment is ignited every now and then. The choice of the term *Tionghoa* is not incidental because it is based on historical considerations. *Tionghoa* was deliberately used in this case because the term *Tjina* was considered derogatory for the Peranakan Chinese during the 19th century (Kusno, 2016).

Space of Chinese-ness in Two Museums

A museum is built for the purpose of preserving certain memories by collecting artifacts from a variety of sources—mostly private collections—and cataloging these artifacts. According to Anderson, the purpose of an artifact collection is to construct the history of a nation or state, which will, in turn, create a sense of unity among the members or citizens of the place, even if the nation or state was not established due to some inherent or ‘original’ factors, but rather because of a collection of multifarious components and aspects of ideology and power (Anderson, 1983). In this sense, a museum is a type of prosthesis to the collective memory of a nation. It preserves and also represents a nation in its history. Thus, for the most part, a museum’s function is to preserve and reconstruct the historical events of a nation. We can say that the museum is a repository for data pertaining to certain collective memories deposited in people’s minds, and, in this role, it also continuously reactivates the memory. However, the museum exhibit works that are selected by the curator and, therefore, the museum is not free from the ideology of the commissioner or the state. In this sense, as a result of this, a museum cannot cover all aspects and thus always leaves a space—a void—in it. This space or void could either be filled by a private museum that complements the state museum or by opening an alternative space of negotiation or contestation.

How do the Peranakan view themselves in the space of nationalism? This question motivated Udaya Halim to purchase two old houses in the Pasar Lama area of Tangerang. He wishes to preserve the features of Chinese culture, which are then incorporated into the houses’ architectural style, both for the exterior and interior, in an effort to reestablish the collective memory of the Benteng or Tangerang Chinese, with he himself, as an Peranakan *Tionghoa*, being a part of the collective memory. Meanwhile, Azmi Abubakar is a non-Chinese Indonesian and

witness of the 1998 tragedy. He has contemplated the entire phenomenon and decided to take action so that the roles of Indonesian Chinese citizens may be represented in Indonesian history in a fairer way. He believes that this can be achieved through the establishment of a museum. Both museums provide a new space for discussions about the Indonesian Chinese. This space is comparable to the Foucauldian concept of “space of contestation” as part of his idea of “heterotopia,” which is summarized by Boyer (2008, p. 64) as follows.

This space of the ‘other’ is a space of contestation and reverberation, never closed nor completed but open to constant reinterpretation and invention. Hence, the double logic deployed by Foucault: spaces of normalization coexist alongside different modes of existence, different temporalities and spatialities that constitute counter-discourses and ‘other’ spaces.

The space of nationhood is a text that cannot be read in only one direction. Rather, it is a text that allows various interpretations and significations as demonstrated in the reading of the two museums that have been established by two ordinary citizens who happen to have different interests and intentions. Museum Benteng Heritage and Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa feature the theme of Chinese-ness, which can be interpreted in different ways, despite having an almost similar purpose, that is, to reopen the space of nationhood that was once closed to the Indonesian Chinese. The former museum focuses on material culture, so it displays artifacts related to the Chinese. The latter museum focuses on literature, displaying various literary works written by Indonesian Chinese writers or those concerning the Chinese in Indonesia.

Against the present political backdrop, these two museums now deliberately showcase Chinese culture and feature the term Tionghoa as part of their identity. This is a bold move on their part because such an action was completely inconceivable during the New Order regime, when any thoughts of displaying Chinese culture, or even anything related to the Chinese culture, virtually did not exist. Taking into account such a historical background, the two museums in South Tangerang are not only worth visiting but also hold significant meaning, especially for the Indonesian Chinese. Their existence is significant in maintaining Indonesia as a multicultural country and for creating a fairer and more civilized space of nationhood. Thus, the space that is created by the two museums is never complete or perfect but is always open. This means that the museums can serve as spaces of contestation against the mainstream space and as spaces that provide room for interpretation and from which subsequent reinterpretations may flow.

Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa (the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese Literature Museum)

Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa is located in BSD, Banten Province, and occupies a relatively narrow shophouse.⁶ Upon entering the museum, visitors will be surprised because the small shophouse is full of various old newspapers and books.⁷ The second floor of the shophouse is entirely dedicated to the keeping of *Cerita Silat* (Chinese Martial Art Novels) and Peranakan Tionghoa Comics, which have been collected by the building’s owner, Azmi Abubakar,⁸ a 46-year-old man who was born in Jakarta but is actually of Acehnese descent and is from Bireun. The museum is quite unique because it is not open every day as regular museums are, but rather it is open only by personal appointment with Azmi Abubakar. This museum may be more or less a type of museum for printed media because it houses books, newspapers, magazines, and journals that discuss Chinese Peranakan and have been collected by Azmi Abubakar.

⁶ The museum’s address is Ruko Golden Road, C28/25, CBD BSD, Jalan Pahlawan Seribu, Lengkong Gudang, Serpong, BSD, Tangerang Selatan 15320.

⁷ See the photograph in Figure 1.

⁸ We conducted two interviews at the Museum Pustaka Tionghoa, which were on 11 March and 8 April 2017.

Even though the museum is only in a shophouse, we can see a sign outside the shophouse in the Chinese style with red and gold color (Figure 1). Azmi said that he intended to give the museum an aura of the long-gone era of the Peranakans. The words are framed by handcrafted wood carvings that symbolize Indonesian heritage and indicate that the Peranakan Tionghoa is within the meaning of Indonesian nationhood. Azmi has designed all this and has commissioned the signage of his museum in that style. This is also a very effective strategy for introducing the museum to non-Chinese Peranakan. They wonder what is inside the shophouse under the signage, and for the Chinese Peranakan, it is a sign that evokes the memory of their ancestors nestled in Indonesia. Thus, it is not only a sign but also an icon of Chinese Peranakan. Nora describes this process in clearer terms: “Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image...” (Nora in Storey, 2007). More can be said about the architectural design of this museum: The shophouse⁹ is a specific Chinese Peranakan building that was developed in SEA and that spread throughout the region. Kusno (2016) has demonstrated that shophouses in Indonesia are not only mere buildings but are also icons of half the history of the Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia.¹⁰ The small and cramped shophouse turns out to be a ‘rich’ and insightful museum for visitors (Figure 2).

Arguably, this museum is one of the most complete Indonesian Peranakan Chinese literature museums because it houses a large collection of books, manuscripts, and other literary texts concerning the Peranakan Chinese, totaling over 20,000 items. Several of the books (see Figure 2) in this museum are first-print editions, so they are very valuable, such as the first printings of the translation of *Samkok* (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) during the Dutch colonial era. Several literary works can also be found, such as those written by Kwee Tek Hoay or early *Si Put On* comic books by Kho Wan Gie, along with several other comic series from the golden age of Indonesian comics, which features authors such as Ganes Th(io), Hans Jaladara, and Zaldy. Additionally, a large number of newspapers can be found, such as *Sin Po*, *Keng Po*, and *Ik Po*, the *Pantjawarda* magazine, and various other types of printed publications. Needless to say, this museum can satisfy the curiosity of both serious researchers and casual visitors.

Azmi, as the owner of the museum and its entire collection, said that he has been collecting various works and publications related to the Peranakan Chinese ever since 2001, after the 1998 reform. He immediately realized the importance of disseminating knowledge about the roles and contributions of the Indonesian Chinese among the populace. This raised a greater awareness within him, which changed his concept of nationhood. Enlightened by this new understanding, he began to question the prevalent stigmas against the Indonesian Chinese, whom he considers his fellow countrymen, and the importance of raising a broader sense of multicultural nationhood in Indonesia.

For us who are actively involved in the Peranakan Chinese Literature Museum, the struggle in the area of literature is a choice which we believe would change the way people see our brothers and sisters, the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese... The prevailing negative stigma against the Indonesian Chinese (which, we believe, does not represent the opinion of the majority of the Indonesian citizens) is the accumulation of plenty of malicious information which has been absorbed by the general public ever since the colonial era... (Azmi Abubakar’s statement on his Facebook account, March 31, 2017).

Azmi’s statement above confirms the fact that the space created by the establishment of the Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa has become one of contestation against the mainstream

⁹ Shop houses was the first building that was built by the fist Chinese Traders in SEA (Koo, 1998).

¹⁰ It is a building type that both marks and discloses the unsettling history of the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia (Kusno, 2016). The shophouses was targeted during the riots in 1998 and it is a kind of building that marks the Chinese Peranakan settling down in Indonesia but also a sign of some traumatic experiences for them.

space that has taken root among the general public. Such a space of contestation opens up different interpretations and significations from those generated by more established spaces, which too frequently exploit the issue of Indonesian Chinese identity. The space of contestation arising from the literature museum has opened up new signification of the roles and position of the Indonesian Chinese in the formation and development of the Republic of Indonesia.

And there is another important thing. So far, the Indonesian Chinese have always been expected to bear the responsibility for justifying their own identity. It is the Chinese themselves who must do something to change people's perception of them. Such assumption is very misleading, and, the ridiculous thing is, in my opinion, such assumption has always been used as the basis for making policies. It is supposed to be reciprocal.¹¹

This statement implies that all the initiatives to raise people's awareness of the roles and contributions of the Indonesian Chinese must come not only from the Indonesian Chinese themselves but also from members of the majority culture. This bold opinion really offers a counter narrative to the prevalent stigma against the Indonesian Chinese.

In my opinion, if I may offer my thought on this matter, the main problem still revolves around ineffective information about who the Chinese exactly are and what their roles are. To be honest, from my experience of managing Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa, I found that this situation also prevails even among the Chinese themselves. Many of them have already forgotten their 'real selves', which I suspect is the terrible consequence of a wholesale and misguided assimilation process (Azmi Abubakar's statement on his Facebook account, March 31, 2017).

This awareness of Azmi was intended to offer the museum meaning as a space of contestation to the mainstream space of nationhood in Indonesia. The museum indicates that the Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia are not mere guests in the archipelago but made an intellectual and material contribution to Indonesia's independence struggle and also actively supported the development of Indonesia's nationhood. Thus, the Chinese Peranakan should be viewed as a counterpart and companion in the building of Indonesia's nationhood.

Museum Benteng Heritage

The Museum Benteng Heritage was established by Udaya Halim (see Figure 3), an Indonesian Chinese who works as an English teacher in South Tangerang City.¹² Also born in Tangerang, Udaya wishes to preserve the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese culture native to that area. He is determined to do this because there has been a decrease in the number of old buildings from the Dutch colonial era. He said that this is happening because most people buy such old buildings without any idea about how to appreciate their historicity. Thus, more and more old buildings are being demolished and replaced by modern buildings and this means also diminishing the history of Peranakan Tionghoa there. He bought two adjacent houses in 2009, which are thought to have originated in the 17th century. He then renovated the buildings at his own expense and filled them with various Chinese artifacts and established the whole structure as Museum Benteng Heritage in November 2011.

This restoration was born of the awareness of the importance of preserving historical heritage of all cultures and traditions flourishing throughout the Indonesian

¹¹ This is the commentary which Azmi Abubakar put on his Facebook account when uploading an article written by Kwee Kek Beng and published in *Moestika* magazine in 1948.

¹² According to Udaya, there are also many Indonesian diaspora children who attend his course to learn Indonesian language and culture. Interviews were conducted in March and December 2014. The museum's address is Jalan Cilame No. 20, Pasar Lama, Tangerang 151188.

archipelago. To realize this dream, we are determined to actively participate in rescuing cultural sites which are still scattered everywhere, so that they will not fall into extinction and deprive our nation of all tokens of remembrance of its great civilizations, which may lead to a nationwide ‘historical amnesia’ (Museum Benteng Heritage official webpage).

Museum Benteng Heritage (MBH) is intended to showcase Benteng Chinese artifacts so that visitors can acquire knowledge about the land where the Benteng Chinese lived and flourished. The Benteng area itself is full of historical significance. The name Benteng (literally meaning “fortification”) is believed to refer to a fortification that marked the boundary between an area ruled by the Dutch colonial government and the surrounding areas not controlled by the Dutch, which were part of the Parahyangan kingdom. A group of Chinese people came and settled in the area, which came to be known as Benteng, along the Cisadane River. According to the information on MBH’s webpage, the Chinese came with the great armada of Admiral Cheng Ho (Zheng He), which visited the Indonesian archipelago in the 15th century. This historical account is believed to have been recorded in a manuscript called *Tina Layang Parahyang*.¹³ One of the first Chinese settlers is said to be Tjen Tji Lung, who landed in the Teluk Naga area. His offspring then became the precursors of Peranakan Benteng Chinese, along with many other Chinese who arrived in the area to live and even intermarry with local people.

... ever since the arrival of Cheng Ho’s armada which consisted of approximately 300 jungs (ancient Chinese ships), both large and small, and carried almost 30,000 followers of the Admiral. A part of this large entourage was led by Chen Chi Lung who is believed to be the ultimate ancestor of the Tangerang Chinese or the Benteng Chinese who arrived at Teluk Naga in 1407. But there are more surprises for you who love history! This museum is built to achieve our mission to spark curiosity about and enhance appreciation of history (MBH official webpage).

This museum is open to the public (Figure 3), and the entrance fee includes a museum guide. Additionally, the museum has a souvenir shop and provides a photography service: Visitors can have their photographs taken in Chinese dress in front of the museum for a fee. In addition to those artifacts representing Chinese culture in general, there are also artifacts representing the Benteng area, such as bottles of Teng Giok Seng soy sauce and Siong Hin soy sauce, both of which are originally products of the Benteng Chinese and are still produced today. The Peranakan Chinese carried with them food manufacturing and agricultural technology from their native land, so this area was once considered a food center by the Dutch colonial government. On the 3rd floor, we can see the balustrade that was decorated with the story of Samkok¹⁴, or The Three Kingdoms (Figure 4), a story that is well known to the migrant Chinese Peranakan in SEA. This story is especially important to them because it depicts a hero named Kwan Kong, or Guan Yu, and was considered one of many gods by them. Some considered him to be the ancestor of the Chinese Peranakan and their protector in their endeavors in their new homeland. Most of my generation can recall how this story was told by our parents, and books and comics on the theme of Samkok were abundant during that time. Thus, in highlighting the balustrade, this museum also wished to

¹³This manuscript is considered as a historical source of ancient Sunda people which describes the origins of various names or areas, as well as containing other historical accounts.

¹⁴ “Literature written by peranakan Chinese flourished at the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, thus preceding the publication of modern literature by indigenous Indonesians. Most peranakan works at that time were translations of Chinese classics such as Sam Kok and Sampek Engtai or adaptations of traditional Malay syair...” (Allen, 2003)

signify the space of Chinese-ness for the Peranakan of Indonesia, in fact the story itself was a kind of pioneer of the Indonesian literature, as Allen (2003) has indicated in her essay.

Udaya has put much effort into collecting various Benteng Chinese artifacts, but he has admitted that doing so is a difficult enterprise; most artifacts can no longer be extracted because many sites have been settled by crop or animal farmers. One unique feature of the museum is the display of artifacts from mainland China because Udaya hopes to reconstruct the time when the first Chinese merchants arrived at Teluk Naga. In addition, this museum displays objects that may provide visitors with information about the distinctive culture of the Peranakan Chinese: a hybrid between the original Chinese culture and local cultures. However, we posit that it may be challenging for visitors to fully appreciate the hybridization because the museum tends to overlay original Chinese objects and architectural style. Nevertheless, this museum's presence as the first Peranakan Chinese museum in an area close to Jakarta can still be interpreted as a form of contestation and a reinterpretation of the identity of the Peranakan Chinese in the Benteng area. Locating the museum in the wet market of Pasar Lama is also significant because the museum hopes to show the origin and, at the same time, how the people of Benteng lived in and interacted with the local community. In addition to pointing this out, the museum also offers text demonstrating the Chinese Peranakan's connection with the people through trade and food culture.

CONCLUSION

With the current political openness in Indonesia, works on the Chinese Peranakan in Indonesia have been proliferating, but one must not forget the issues that are very complex, especially in facing globalization. Politically, Chinese Indonesians now have greater representation and participation than ever before. However, far from being 'unified,' their political views and aspirations are extremely diverse. In this sense, the nation-building discourse is a struggle to create tolerance, inclusiveness, and diversity pinnacles in future politics.

The two privately owned museums showcase the unique space of Chinese-ness of Indonesia, and, in doing so, they are showing that the nation of Indonesia is multicultural and must embrace pluralism. On the other hand, national museums that do not include Chinese Peranakan culture illustrate long-standing marginalization, but the void in this space is being replaced by the efforts of the two privately owned museums that introduce and promote Chinese Peranakan culture as one of the elements of this nation. Initiatives from private parties should be developed considering it is the private sector that directly faces everyday life, and it can thus fill in the spatial voids that occur in state-sponsored museums.

By incorporating various objects from mainland China in its effort to reconstruct the time when Tjen Tji Lung arrived at the mouth of the Cisadane River, Museum Benteng Heritage offers a reinterpretation of the space of Chinese-ness as a cultural heritage. After several hundred years, this heritage has now become a cultural part of the Benteng area, particularly Pasar Lama. Several cultural elements, such as culinary tradition, dances, food technology, and agricultural technology, have all been fused with the geographical space. It is hoped that through examining the objects displayed in Museum Benteng Heritage, visitors, particularly the young Chinese generation, can visualize the harmonious multicultural life that once thrived along the Cisadane River. A lesson on the position and the role of Chinese Peranakan through a myriad of artefacts displayed in this museum and on the mutually beneficial interactions among different communities in the past is expected to promote the confidence and to foster the sense of solidarity and nationalism among the young generation.

Meanwhile, Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa takes a step further by touching a thornier issue of the identity and existence of the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese. This bold action

is performed by reintroducing the culture and roles of the Indonesian Chinese as is evident in the museum's large collection of written materials. This museum provides an oasis for those who wish to satisfy their thirst for the Indonesian Peranakan Chinese culture and information about their roles in the past. Such knowledge is expected to enhance a sense of unity as a great nation and to generate a space of contestation against the 'normalized' space, which has been imposed and internalized for a very long time. More meaningful is the fact that the many of books and other publications have been collected and initiated by a non Peranakan Tionghoa. This in turn, conveys the core of the culture of Peranakan Tionghoa as a space of alternative and open to all who wants to participate. Obviously now the Peranakan Chinese identity must be viewed as a process that does not stop at a particular point but evolves continuously and generates a space in which everybody can learn and engage in dialogs in the effort to develop a stronger sense of nationhood.



Figure 1.

Shophouse. The shophouse that has become Museum Pustaka Peranakan Tionghoa. Azmi Abubakar, the museum's owner, is standing on the left side (a photograph taken by the author).

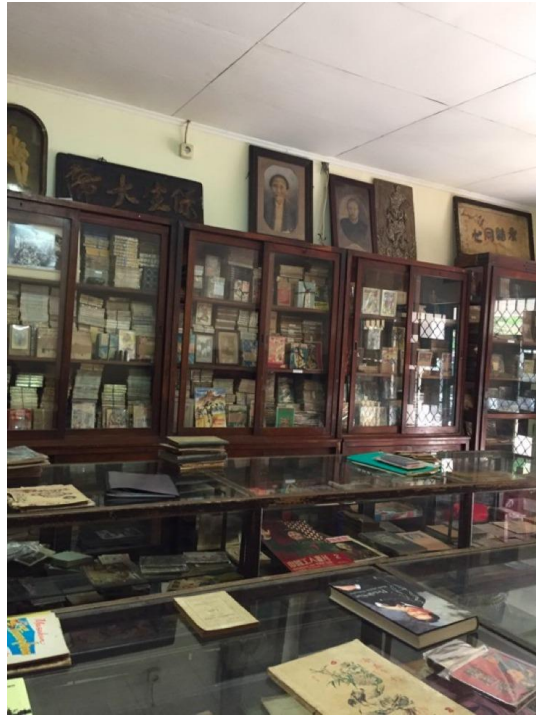


Figure 2.

First Floor of Shophouse. The first floor of the shophouse is full of old books and manuscripts. There are also many old photographs and objects that exhibit Indonesian Chinese Peranakan characteristics (a photograph taken by the author).



Figure 3.

Students and Udaya Halim. A group of students from Madison University, United States. Udaya Halim, the museum's owner, is standing in the middle, wearing a black t-shirt and a pair of glasses (a photograph taken by the author).



Figure 4.

The 3rd floor of Museum Benteng Heritage. *The 3rd floor of the Museum Benteng Heritage was decorated with balustrade depicting The Three Kingdoms (Samkok) (photos by the author).*

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