

BIG BROTHER'S HELP: THE DYNAMICS OF THE INDONESIAN NARRATIVE OF CHINA'S ROLE IN INDONESIAN DEVELOPMENT ©Σ

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ABSTRACT

A narrative is a story someone tells to influence the person they are talking to, the discussion community, or society. The information narrative carries may or may not be valid. Narratives about China developed abundantly in Indonesia during the Jokowi administration. The rise and fall in narrative frequency are greatly influenced by political activities in Indonesia, public perception, and China's relations with Indonesia. While many narratives come from false information or hoaxes, many positive narratives about China come from valid data. Positive narratives about China's economic assistance, China's position as a leading country, and the influence of Chinese culture can overcome the dominance of negative narratives on social media about China and the Jokowi government, many of which originate from hoaxes. Public perception and approval of Jokowi's government confirm that the narrative about China's assistance to Indonesia is well-assented.

Keywords: Narrative, Indonesia, China, Development.

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**BANTUAN “ABANG BESAR”: DINAMIK NARATIF PERANAN CHINA
DALAM PEMBANGUNAN INDONESIA**

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ABSTRAK

Naratif adalah kisah yang diceritakan seseorang untuk mempengaruhi orang yang diajak berbicara, komuniti perbincangan, atau masyarakat. Informasi yang dibawa oleh naratif boleh sah atau tidak sah. Naratif tentang China berkembang banyak di Indonesia semasa pentadbiran Jokowi. Naik turunnya frekuensi naratif sangat dipengaruhi oleh aktiviti politik di Indonesia, persepsi awam, dan hubungan China dengan Indonesia. Walaupun banyak naratif berasal dari informasi palsu atau hoaks, banyak naratif positif tentang China berasal dari data yang sah. Naratif positif tentang bantuan ekonomi China, kedudukan China sebagai sebuah negara berpengaruh, dan pengaruh budaya China dapat mengatasi dominasi naratif negatif di media sosial tentang China dan pemerintahan Jokowi, yang banyak di antaranya berasal dari maklumat palsu (hoaks). Persepsi dan persetujuan awam terhadap pemerintahan Jokowi mengesahkan bahawa naratif tentang bantuan China kepada Indonesia diterima dengan baik.

Kata kunci: *Naratif, Indonesia, China, Pembangunan*

Introduction

Xi Jinping's emergence as China's leader for a third term in 2023 has sent a wary signal to heads of state in Southeast Asia. Indonesia, which has been under the leadership of Joko Widodo (Jokowi) since 2014, is very concerned about these developments. Fears of China's expansion and occupation also surfaced. Positive and negative narratives develop rapidly in society and often cause public hostility to the government.

In contrast to many previous academics, this paper examines the views of the government and society in Indonesia as covered in political narratives about China. Narrative studies have been carried out before; moreover, analyses like this still need to be available in China studies in Indonesia. This paper is based on research that used library studies, primarily data from digital libraries, online media, and social media of related figures. Narrative analysis is also carefully conducted using triangulation to see data directly in the field. Interviews with several prominent actors were performed indirectly.

Recent political developments, which include preparations for moving Indonesia's capital city and the election of Xi Jinping as China's president for a third term, will undoubtedly influence studies of Chinese politics and Indonesian politics. China's enthusiasm to assist Southeast Asian countries can be responded to differently in Indonesia. They tend to overcome coordination problems in engaging China when they are less contentious and have focal points establishing clear pathways for cooperation (Ian 2023 308). The narratives that emerge in Indonesian society must be explicitly examined, with a focus on China's views on aid, narratives about China and Chinese descendants in Indonesia, narratives about the relations between the Indonesian government and Chinese government, narratives about China's interests in Indonesia, and narratives that support China's prominent role, in terms of history and contemporary international politics, which China's experts in Indonesia often present.

Literature Review

The formulation of political research in Indonesia today cannot be separated from narrative studies. International Politics from a country's domestic policy also experiences the same thing. How the State of China and Chinese descent are perceived and then narrated in Indonesia is an integral part of this study. It is believed that political interests greatly influence the narrative.

Often, perceptions and realities that develop in Indonesian society originate from narratives. A narrative can be in the form of words, pictures, or events that are recorded on video and given an illustration by the person sending the message. The most essential thing in the narrative is how messages are sent and received. A narrative can be a fictional story or a report of a fact, although whether it will be considered fact or fiction will depend on the recipient of the narrative itself. Fisher (1987) explains that the meaning brought from symbols, words, sequence of events, and the sender is an essential part of the narrative.

On the other hand, Bruner (1996) emphasises that narrative focuses on stories about something new or contrary to popular belief. It is confirmed again by Shenhav (2005),

with a focus on political narratives. He underlines the importance of understanding politics and the narrative itself. For Shenhav, political narratives are part of political discourse. Deepening this thought, Henn and Vowe (2016) justify the role of the media in shaping political narratives, where, after digital technology emerged, content, daily recordings of political figures, and rationality became very important.

Only a little has been studied about the Chinese narrative in Indonesia, especially by looking at the political effects of the narrative. Narrative studies develop in a broad scope. Habibie (2021) describes how narrative strengthens public policy socialisation in Indonesia. Narratives of rejection from the public are rationalised as counter-discourses that are even stronger and can change government policies. Usually, the people who support the narrative of rejection from the community come from community leaders, community organisations, NGOs, and religious organisations. Character building is the basic idea of narrative, which is then used to oppose the government. The narrative about China is witnessed in a study of history books by Kurniawan (2021). Kurniawan presents a narrative built to convince the younger generation of Indonesia about the role of China in Indonesian history, which tends to be negative. The choice of words always frames China in a corner, although several teachers then choose a different diction.

Kwartanada (2020) and Setijadi (2017) observe how an indigenous perspective on China was built and emerged as a narrative that put forward the China problem in Indonesia. Kwartanada focuses on studying the Old Order and early New Order eras. At the same time, Setijadi thoroughly discusses Ahok's rejection and the following narrative. Surdiasis (2018) scrutinises, more specifically, the narratives that appear on government-owned social media, especially those that secure Jokowi, the president of Indonesia. Narrative studies on the rejection of the government, including those related to China, appear here.

Beyond all of this research, this paper explores the China narrative, especially when it is connected to Indonesia's political and international relations. Habibie (2021) and Surdiasis (2018) studies require more exploration of the narratives of the Indonesian government, while Kwartanada (2020) and Setijadi (2017) are supposed to see more positive narratives on China and Indonesian Chinese. This paper tries to fill it in.

In narrative studies, the data collected is in words, sentences, pictures, video recordings, and field observations. In this study, the narrative data is more significant than numbers. (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Data was collected from Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media accounts owned by political figures and community organisations. Many of them are in opposition to the government. Social media is also used as a source if it is related to official statements or narratives from the government. Almost all government agencies have used social media as an instrument of reporting. Media content will be scrutinised concerning possible editing by the message sender. The editing itself is part of the narrative.

Field observations and interviews were conducted to cross-check the narratives circulating on social media. In this case, the data population is not considered very important, but it is more focused on the sampling technique with a particular purpose (Creswell 2013). All data sources and interviewees are considered valid because they have gone through screening guided by the correct research methodology. In addition to narrative analysis, hermeneutical analysis techniques are also used to interpret data so that the relations between field data and interviews can be used ideally (Moleong 2012).

Narrative on China: From Sukarno to Jokowi's Era

The relationship between Indonesia and China has always had ups and downs. This relationship was very close during the Sukarno era, so the term Jakarta-Pyongyang-Peking axis was coined. However, this later harmed the events of the G30S / PKI, which later brought down Sukarno and raised Suharto as the prominent leader of Indonesia. China was considered to be involved in the incident. Subsequently, diplomatic relations were frozen in 1967.

Indonesia-China relations were reopened in 1990. At that time, China had commenced its policy of openness and reform. Its economy even grows by an average of over 10% every year. Even though Suharto banned various Chinese festivals and celebrations, Chinese businesspeople profited greatly during Suharto's time. The emergence of Chinese tycoons who controlled the Indonesian economy eventually sparked anti-Chinese sentiment in Indonesia, leading to the May 13-14 riots in 1998. In that year, Suharto resigned from his position as president of Indonesia. His success in re-establishing diplomatic relations with China was then littered with negative sentiment towards the State of China and Chinese descendants in Indonesia. This sentiment was preserved up to 25 years after his resignation.

Negative sentiment about China emerges as a shared discourse and narrative, especially around political contestation events. Positive sentiment towards China endured when Gus Dur was president and established Chinese New Year *Imlek* (in Mandarin called *Yinli*) as a national holiday. Megawati's government received support given that Kwik Kian Gie (a Chinese descendant) served as Coordinating Minister for the Economy. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has ministers Mari Elka Pangestu and Enggartiasto Lukita, of Chinese descent. During those presidential administrations, there were still very few negative sentiments toward China, and the narratives circulating in society never discredited China.

Negative narratives about China have increased since the election event for the Governor of Jakarta in 2012. Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, known as Ahok, accompanies Jokowi as a candidate for Governor of Jakarta and is a politician of Chinese descent who was once a regent and a member of the Indonesian Parliament. The political attack on Ahok was quite sharp, even though he had never received a similar attack while serving as a regent or a member of the Indonesian Parliament. Jokowi then received a similar attack as Ahok.

Negative narratives about China then dispersed in society. Many of these narratives were later proven false or hoaxes, but many were widely circulated and trusted by a group of people, especially those who opposed the government. Manipulation through narratives on social media is strengthened by bot technology systems that can increase content and endorsements, target individuals, and reproduce messages. The narrative is reinforced by clickbait, which can increase the spread of messages and the emergence of fake political support (Rogers 2020:24). Ahok is often narrated as an agent of the Chinese government who wants to install its power in Indonesia. From that narrative, Ahok will start as Deputy Governor, become Governor, and finally become President of Indonesia. It was then that China could colonise Indonesia.

Jokowi, who in 2012 became the Governor of Jakarta and in 2014 won the election to become president of Indonesia, is also not spared from negative narratives. Jokowi is said to be a descendant of the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) and a China

sympathiser. Strangely, at the same time, Jokowi was also narrated as a descendant of the Chinese with the full name Herbertus Joko Widodo alias Oey Hong Liong. In many studies, this narrative has been known to be propagated by Jokowi's political opponents around the 2014 presidential election campaign. Not only that, but the negative narrative campaign also attacks other parties who are considered attached to China.

Social media, community gatherings, and congregations are the primary means of developing negative narratives about China. Radical Islamic groups narrate China as a country that oppresses Muslims by referring to the Uighur case. Ideas about the Chinese government's crimes thrive in social media groups and public discussions. It is often associated with resistance to the Indonesian government. It is narrated that the Chinese government deliberately caused divisions in Indonesia, intending to create a bloody horizontal conflict. It was then that the Chinese government would later enter Indonesia under the pretext of saving Chinese descendants. With the help of Ahok and other ethnic Chinese political elites, China will capture Indonesia.

The events of the 212 rallies in 2016 ahead of the 2017 Jakarta election granted a giant narrative about the enmity between Islamic and Chinese groups in Indonesia. The political battle between Islam and China in 2017 was won by Islamic groups, with the emergence of Anies Baswedan as Governor of Jakarta. Ahok, who served as Governor of Jakarta since 2014, was imprisoned (Savirani 2020).

The narrative about China continues to grow with the commencement of the Indonesia China High-Speed Train project, the development of toll roads, seaport construction, and many infrastructure development projects in Indonesia. During Jokowi's administration from 2014-2019, there were at least 5 Chinese Giant Projects in Indonesia, which most people considered profitable for China and detrimental to Indonesia. The projects are, respectively, the Jati Gede Reservoir in Sumedang, West Java, the Medan-Kualanamu Toll Road in North Sumatra, the Indonesia China High-Speed Train, the Morowali Industrial Area in Central Sulawesi, and Nickel Ore Processing Company in Central Sulawesi.

These gigantic projects have led to narratives about China's debt trap and the enormous number of Indonesia's debt to China. In various narratives on social media, suspicions also emerged of the entry of Chinese workers who turned out to be Chinese soldiers in disguise. The construction of a Chinese military base in Indonesia is also one of the developing narratives in society.

The 2019 presidential election, followed by the Covid-19 pandemic, has resurrected the negative narrative about China. The pandemic is considered China's attempt to control Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia (Umbach 2018). China's role in Jokowi's victory in the election was raised as news that was considered accurate, and all government activities during the Covid period were considered special strategies that supported China. A significant case was the emergence of job creation law or omnibus law, the disbandment of the FPI, and the transfer of the national capital to Kalimantan, where the capital was later renamed *Nusantara* (archipelago).

Indonesian Narrative on China: The Chattering is Everywhere

China as a Big Brother

China's rise in the international world has also influenced Indonesia. The Indonesian people have long recognised that China is a great country and can be said to be Indonesia's big brother. Indonesian President Jokowi called Xi Jinping Big Brother on many formal occasions (CNN Indonesia 2022). The idea of *Heping Jueqi* (peaceful awakening), which China initiated, was well-received in Indonesia. Moreover, during the last 40 years, China had very high economic growth before finally declining due to the COVID-19 pandemic disaster.

China carries the idea of its essential role as one of the great powers in the world. Apart from being a big Asian country, China wants to act as the oldest brother (Choi 2021). China brought this narrative to Indonesia, which sinologists and experts in Chinese studies then echoed. Narratives about the rise of Asian nations that were very successful in the past are again circulating in Indonesia. The splendour of stories about the Silk Road and the maritime travels of Chinese admirals spread to all students in Indonesia. Experts in China Studies believe China will soon become the world leader, replacing the United States.

Through its diplomatic agents, the Chinese government continues to demonstrate China's progress to the rest of the world. Politically, China is a good actor emphasising the principle of mutual respect. The narrative about China's political role in the international world appears in 6 concepts, namely: Respect for the principles of state sovereignty, opposing hegemony and participating in maintaining world peace, developing mutually beneficial cooperation and mutual respect for all countries in the world, maintaining the authority and role of the UN in realising democracy among countries in the world, being open to all countries in the world, and, acting as a legal guardian of the interests and rights of Chinese people, throughout the world (Jin 2011).

Narratives about China's greatness and the possibility of its assistance were amplified by academics, business people, Chinese descendants, and Chinese diplomats in Indonesia. Wibowo and Syamsul Hadi, China experts from the University of Indonesia, came up with their book entitled *Merangkul Cina* (Embracing China). The ideas from this book were spread among academics and students throughout Indonesia. Yuliantoro, a China expert from UGM, echoed China's idea of becoming rich and noble. He also invites the idea of China becoming the most substantial world power. This narrative is also carried out in every seminar, conference, discussion, and teaching session for students throughout Indonesia.

The idea of China being strong, kind, and attractive spread rapidly throughout China's studies in Indonesia. The narrative that Indonesia must shift its consideration from the US to China spread throughout society and the government. The China Dream or *Zhongguo Meng* is not the Chinese government's idea of dominating the world but how China can live well together with all the world's nations and play an active role in developing the world (Brown 2022).

Gus Dur's confession that he had Chinese blood from his ancestors, Tan's surname, helped raise a positive narrative about China. Gus Dur's confession, which he made more than 20 years ago, is often recirculated, considering that Gus Dur is the Father of the Nation, also known as the Father of Pluralism. Many of Gus Dur's words were still used

until the end of Jokowi's leadership, and some of them strengthened the narrative about respectable China.

Chinese diplomats in Indonesia, such as Ambassador Xiao Qian, provided interesting information about China's position towards Indonesia. Recognition of Eastern ideas as better than Western ideas and kinship between nations is a narrative that continues to be developed by Chinese diplomats. The Cultural Diplomacy that was carried out then became more robust with the establishment of Confucius Institutes in several cities in Indonesia. Besides teaching Mandarin, the Confucius Institute introduces various Chinese cultures, including *Kung Fu* and traditional dance. However, the most important thing is that the narrative about China that is conveyed is always positive and is spread massively in the environment or cities where the Confucius Institute is located.

China's ambassador said, "China and Indonesia have built a strategic partnership, which is useful for developing China, Indonesia, and the world. This partnership can be traced back to the Majapahit Kingdom, with the arrival of Admiral Cheng Ho to Indonesia."

At the beginning of the pandemic in Indonesia, Ambassador Xiao Qian, via Kompas newspaper, gave a narrative about the good cooperative relations between China and Indonesia in dealing with the pandemic. He wrote about "*berat sama dipikul, ringan sama dijinjing*" a traditional Indonesian saying that there is no heavy burden if we handle the problem together. It tells how the Indonesian government is very touching and cooperating to overcome the pandemic. Indonesia sent aid when the Covid-19 case first burst in Wuhan. As reciprocal action, when the pandemic reached Indonesia, President Xi Jinping contacted President Jokowi directly to unite the Indonesian and Chinese people in overcoming the Coronavirus (Tsang 2022). China Minister of Foreign Affairs also called Coordinating Minister for Maritime Affairs and Investment Luhut Panjaitan and Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi to express condolences and provide medical assistance. As an older brother, China sent aid, which arrived in Jakarta on March 28, 2020. The aid was in the form of corona test kits, medical masks, hazmat, and ventilators. The whole lot is then distributed to the National Disaster Management Agency.

On the other hand, politicians deliver a narrative about China's influential position in the international world, especially towards Southeast Asian countries. Although there are also narratives about anti-China sentiment across the globe regarding the Hong Kong protest in 2019 (Chew 2023), Indonesian people at large did not pay good attention in that case. The people consider China to be an older brother that assists other Asian countries, including Indonesia. Unfortunately, this narrative about China's important role only circulates within the highest levels of government and the associated agents. Minister Panjaitan always talks about China's technological advances, the hard work of Chinese workers, and Chinese investments that have been dispensed worldwide. The Belt and Road Initiative giant project is said to have helped many countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The narrative about China also shows how China's economic cooperation is developing with countries in Latin America and Central Asia, as well as big countries like Russia, India and South Africa. China's position as the number two economic power in the world and the number one in purchasing power parity capability is a narrative that continues to be told. It then circulates and develops rapidly in society.

Panjaitan said that almost 18% of the world economy is influenced by China. Therefore, whether we like it or not, China is a world power that cannot be ignored. Explicitly, Indonesian President Jokowi referred to Xi Jinping as Big Brother at his meeting in Bali in November 2022. This event strengthens the view that the Indonesian

government has also clearly recognised and supported the narrative about China as Big Brother.

Economic Aid

During the pandemic, China's economic assistance to Indonesia has always been an accepted view, narrated by economic actors and politicians supporting the government. On the other hand, politicians provide narratives about the importance of Chinese assistance for Indonesia's development.

China is a big country that has influenced the development of civilisation in Indonesia for centuries. Various kingdoms in Indonesia have always recorded China as an advanced country and a source of civilisation during historical times. The role of Chinese descendants has also been recorded in various kingdoms and during the Dutch Colonisation. This narrative was used by Sukarno when he later had good relations with China.

After an unfriendly relationship at the beginning of the New Order era, China's rise in the international world brought good relations with Indonesia in the last decade of the 20th century. China's resilience in facing the economic crisis of 1997-1998 then raised Indonesia's constructive view of China. China is a developed country with extensive opportunities for economic cooperation. Despite still having good relations with the United States, in March 2012, Indonesia signed a trade agreement worth USD 17,4 billion (Antarajatim, 2012). In 2013, Indonesia then signed an Indonesia-China strategic partnership agreement (Kementerian Setneg, 2013)

During the administration of Jokowi, Indonesia received assistance from China in various fields, including infrastructure, investment, trade, maritime, and economic cooperation. Among the most famous and arousing controversies is the Jakarta-Bandung Railway Project. Various narratives have developed regarding this project, but the government's version dominates.

Initially, the project will be funded by JICA or the Japan International Cooperation Agency. JICA included the Jakarta-Bandung Railway Project in its overseas development assistance plan for Indonesia. The government finally chose to work with China on the Jakarta-Bandung Railway Project. This project has been recognised as the Indonesia-China High-Speed Train Project since then. China offers advantages over Japan regarding development, speed, and financing.

The Indonesia China High-Speed Train Project was initially estimated to cost IDR 86.67 trillion. However, there has been a cost overrun (excess costs) to IDR 114.24 trillion in 2021. The Ministry of State Enterprises said this cost expansion was normal due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the financial capacity of the high-speed train project consortium (Kompas, 2021).

The financing for this project is 75% from loans through the China Development Bank (CDB), and the remainder is capital contributions from a consortium of two countries, namely Indonesia and China. The division is that the Indonesian BUMN consortium contributed 60%, and 40% came from the China consortium (Otele, 2022). Indonesia's total loans to the CDB reached IDR 8.3 trillion. The debt will be used to finance the rising high-speed train costs. Nevertheless, the interest offered by China is 3.4% per year with a tenure of 30 years (Liputan 6, 2023).

Panjaitan said China was reluctant to reduce loan interest to 2% with a tenor of 40 years - which was the initial financing scheme (Mahardhika, 2023). Even though it is

considered burdensome, he said that the debt interest set by China is “not a problem” because Indonesia can pay the loan from taxes.

The statement is not without reason. Indonesians should be optimistic. The 2020 recession cost Indonesia its upper-middle-income class and created fears about social unrest due to the contraction of the labour market. Conversely, in 2021, the global commodity boom and government spending drove the economic recovery, and Indonesia posted modest positive growth (Jaffrey, 2022: 142). A prudent expansion of the social assistance programme also mitigated the impact of the Covid-19 Delta wave on poverty despite the critical narratives continuing to appear.

Apart from the Indonesia-China High-Speed Train project, many significant projects were crafted with Chinese assistance. One of them is Jatigede Reservoir. The construction of the Jatigede Reservoir project has an investment value of IDR 4 trillion through APBN funds and a China Exim Bank loan of 90%. Apart from that, there is also the Medan-Kualanamu Toll Road. This 17.8 km long toll road costs IDR 1.347 trillion. Of the total construction of IDR 1.347 trillion, 90% came from Chinese loans through China Exim Bank and 10% from the State Budget (Oswaldo, 2023).

The Jokowi administration has also committed to utilising Indonesia’s nickel reserves to develop the downstream industry. In January 2020, he banned the export of nickel ore—earlier than the intended date of 2023. This policy will prompt miners to develop smelters and produce higher-value ore products such as Electro Vehicle batteries (Negara, 2021, p. 178). Gunbuster Nickel Industry Company (GNI) was founded in 2019. GNI is a nickel ore processing company located in Morowali, Central Sulawesi. GNI has 24 production lines with a capacity of around 150 thousand tons per month or 1.8 million tons per year. Investors in this company are Alchemist Metal Industry Pte Ltd (99.60%) and Merlot Group Indonesia Company (0.40%). GNI nickel smelter, which has an annual capacity of 1.8 million tons, was launched at the end of 2021. An estimated USD 2.7 billion was invested to build the smelter.

In the Foreign Direct Investment field, Chinese companies have invested their capital in strategic sectors in Indonesia, such as manufacturing, energy, agriculture, and technology. In 2022, China will have 1,584 investment projects in Indonesia. Data from the Investment Coordinating Board (*BKPM*) states that the realisation of Chinese investment in Indonesia will reach USD 5.18 billion in 2022. This figure has jumped 63.92% from the previous year and is also the highest record in the last decade (Infobanknews, 2023).

China’s investment that entered Indonesia with significant value was the Morowali Industrial Zone. China is recorded as investing in Indonesia worth USD 1.63 billion, or 21.7 trillion, to build an industrial area there. Apart from that, China is also investing in developing a port in Kuala Tanjung, North Sumatra, to improve maritime connectivity and trade. China also invests in Special Economic Zones such as Morotai, Mandalika Lombok, Kura Kura Bali, and several other areas.

The Disinformation and Hoaxes

Disinformation, misinformation, and fake news dominate the political stage almost worldwide due to the development of digital technology. In Turkey, the government must work hard to fight for valid information and truth as a human right (Altun, 2023). Disinformation and hoaxes also occurred in the case of Brexit in England, the presidential election in the US, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the spread of COVID-19 due to China’s failure.

In Indonesia, some of the circulating narratives about China are positive. However, some narratives also say terrible things about China. Later, many of these opposing narratives are proven to be hoaxes. China's narrative has dominated social media since Jokowi's campaign as a presidential candidate in 2014. It ranges from Jokowi, declared of Chinese descent and named Oey Hong Liong, to Jokowi, a descendant of the PKI leader affiliated with China's communists. In another narrative, Jokowi is also mentioned as the son of Oey Hong Liong. However, the public does not see this oddity, especially those who do not support Jokowi as a presidential candidate.

The public also never pays attention to many explanations from experts regarding the PKI relations with the China Communist Party, the development of China's state, and China's economy, which is already very capitalist (Bing 2022). The narrative that is rapidly developed and accepted by society is that the PKI is evil, Communism is evil. Therefore, China is evil, and Jokowi is evil. Jokowi is a Chinese agent, and the Jokowi government is run according to pressure or orders from China.

This narrative is also continued by the story of Chinese descendants in Indonesia who are described as greedy and evil rich men. They like to oppress the natives and exploit the wealth of the Indonesian nation as much as possible. As many as 8 of the ten wealthiest people in Indonesia are of Chinese descent. They control 75% of Indonesian wealth. Meanwhile, natives, 25.9 million or 9.36% of the Indonesian population, are poor (Pitoko 2023).

The narrative about Chinese assistance has also transformed into claims that China controls many Indonesian strategic assets through their investments. China's economy dominates Indonesia, and Indonesia will soon be seized in a debt trap. With this strategy, the Indonesian Railway Company would soon become Chinese property, and even Kalimantan Island would soon be given to China because Indonesia failed to pay its debts.

The narrative about China originating from hoaxes also targets security issues. When there are photos of *Brimob* (Mobile Brigades – Police Special Troops) personnel whose faces resemble those of Chinese descent, it is said that China has invaded Indonesia. This narrative emerged regarding increased security at the Constitutional Court Building during the lawsuit over the election results in May 2019. China soldiers were said to have entered Indonesia by air using Lion Air aircraft.

This narrative is intertwined with the large number of foreign workers from China who enter Indonesia. Many stories are circulating in the community that they are too sturdy to be seen as construction workers. It cannot be denied that they are all Chinese soldiers disguised as labourers. In June 2022, a narrative circulated that the Chinese Army had openly started fighting the Indonesian Army. It is based on a video of several armed people confronting Indonesian Soldiers in an oil palm plantation. Until July 2023, the narrative about Chinese soldiers is still emerging. Finally, a video circulated of a group of camouflaged clothes being hung up, which was narrated as Chinese army uniforms being washed by a laundry in the Kelapa Gading area, Jakarta. With the addition of the narrative about the entry of Chinese ships in the Natuna Islands area and that China will attack Indonesia because of Indonesia's support for Uighur Muslims, the fear spread by the negative narrative about China is complete. The Uighur case itself has never been fully explained to the Indonesian public. However, photos of the torture of Muslims in China circulating in Indonesia have been proven to be a hoax. Indonesian government declared it was just China's domestic politics. It did not want to engage in the Uighur persecution narrative because it would only empower the Islamists and radicals belonging to the opposition (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict 2019).

The narrative about Chinese crimes continues to develop even during the pandemic. Moreover, the global Covid pandemic originated in China. It is said that the government banned eating Chinese products because they contained the Covid-19 virus. This prohibition was conveyed through the embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Despite much news about the COVID-19 virus being transmitted by consuming food made from wild animal meat, there has never been a ban on this. Relations with China regarding food continue, and trade stops are only made when there is awareness on both sides about widespread COVID-19.

During the COVID-19 era, it was also said that China was greatly interested in Indonesia, from the problem of spreading COVID-19, which was planned by China, to the Sinovac vaccine, which was only offered to Indonesia because other countries were not interested. However, it was later discovered that Sinovac was also sent to Brazil, Chile, Turkey, and Bangladesh. There is also a narrative that says China is not using the Sinovac vaccine because it is not applicable. China bought vaccines from England using the Pfizer-type vaccine BioNTech produced. China indeed uses Pfizer, but the Chinese government has not authorised this plan, and it turns out that the Pfizer vaccine is only used as a booster after receiving two Sinovac injections.

The Indonesian Ministry of Health states that the vaccines consumed vary greatly, depending on availability and community needs. As of November 5, 2021, the government had distributed 202.7 million vaccine doses, mainly under the Sinovac-Bio Farma, AstraZeneca, Pfizer-BioNTech, Novavax, and Moderna brands (Sari 2023). This number does not include vaccines distributed through non-governmental organisations.

In line with the economic assistance coming from China, Chinese workers are also coming to Indonesia. Hoaxes and negative narratives about the arrival of Chinese citizens started during the 2016 Jakarta Governor election campaign. Many narratives circulated that Chinese citizens had come to vote as local citizens so Ahok, a Chinese descendant, could prevail in the election. All arriving Chinese immigrants were granted ID cards. Ahok is also expected to continue the coastal reclamation project in Jakarta Bay. The reclaimed islands are planned to be occupied by immigrants imported directly from China. The hoax is getting out of control by saying that there is a plan from the Chinese government to bring in 200 million of its residents to occupy the reclaimed islands in Indonesia. China itself will construct the ten most significant coastal reclamation projects in Indonesia.

Other disinformation circulating about China also shows the aversion of some Indonesian citizens and a few political elites toward China's domination in Indonesia. The arrival of large numbers of workers made the idea of a Chinese invasion of Indonesia seem authentic. Footage was made to show Indonesian workers' refusal to resist the arrival of Chinese workers in Morowali. Furthermore, a narrative emerged about tens of thousands of Chinese workers' mischief on the site. It was continued with a narrative about a Chinese Worker torturing an Indonesian Worker.

Cultural Narratives

Behind the lousy rejection of Indonesian citizens towards China due to social class sentiment and political fear, many Indonesian people also inadvertently recognise the importance of China in the formation of culture and social systems in Indonesia. Since Gus Dur declared Chinese New Year a national holiday, awareness has emerged that much of Chinese culture is applied in Indonesia. Furthermore, on many occasions, Chinese culture is recognised as superior to the Indonesian culture.

Indonesia does not have a superior dragon animal tradition. The Indonesian dragon is a *wayang* mythology that appears more in the form of a snake that lives underground. It is very different from a Chinese dragon called *liong*, which has a mane like a lion, is able to fly in the sky, has claws, and has a mouth that can emit fire. Indonesians recognise that the China Dragon is a symbol of might and strength.

This dragon appears in the *barongsai* dance when Chinese New Year is celebrated. Dragons also appear in carvings on Chinatown gates and various temples in Indonesia. The good thing is that temples and *barongsai* are rarely associated with economic colonialism, which was associated with the dominance of Chinese descendants in Indonesia. The term nine dragons for the wealthiest tycoons in Indonesia only appears in words. When depicted, the nine dragon tycoons always have a background of money or symbols of prosperity, not a picture of a dragon.

Respect for China can also be seen in the Sam Poo Kong temple in Semarang. Many Muslims in Indonesia came to this place to pay their admiration. Muslims believe Sam Poo Kong is none other than Admiral Cheng Ho, who is Muslim. They also believe that Cheng Ho was one of the main actors who brought and spread Islam in Indonesia. This idea then developed, especially among Chinese people of Muslim descent. Big cities in Indonesia will soon have mosques with Chinese architecture. The mosque was named the Cheng Ho Mosque.

In line with Cheng Ho, the historical narrative clearly states that the first Islamic Kingdom in Java, namely the Demak Sultanate, was established by a person of Chinese descent, Penembahan Jin Bun, well-known as Raden Patah. Some of the *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints) can be traced to Chinese descent, such as Bong Swie Ho, who is known as Sunan Ampel; Bong Thak Keng, who is Sunan Drajat; Tu An Po, who is Sunan Gunung Jati, and Gan Si Cang who is Sunan Kalijaga (Ubaedillah 2023). The hatred towards Chinese descendants during the New Order era prevents the narrative of prominent Chinese Muslim legacy in history from circulating in society, even if it was a result of valid research. However, during the Jokowi era, narratives like this slowly re-emerge.

The civilisation that China brought to Indonesia also appeared in food. Almost all Indonesians know that the *Bakso* food available in almost every city in Indonesia is a cultural heritage of Chinese cuisine. *Bakso* is Hokkien Chinese for pork-meat ball soup. Other types of food, such as *bakwan*, *bakpao*, *bakpia*, and *bakmi*, also originate from China (Sijabat 2022, 493). The word *bak* means pork, but Indonesians, primarily Muslim, replace this ingredient with beef. Furthermore, in *bakpao* and *bakpia*, pork ingredients are even replaced with green beans. Other foods also come from China. We will know that if we observe their names, they are grasped from the words of Hokkien Chinese. *Cap Cai*, *kwetiau*, *lumpia*, *siomay*, *tauco*, *tauge*, and even *tahu* are Hokkien. If we trace it further, even Fried Rice, Fried Noodles, Chicken Noodles, and *Nasi Tim* come from China. The public's knowledge and acceptance of the narrative about China's virtuous and its corrupt differentiates these perceptions.

The rise of Mandarin, which developed as the primary language in China and then spread throughout the world, caused the Hokkien dialect to be marginalised in Indonesia. Words like *Liong*, *Hong Sui*, and *Kong Hu Cu* began to be dismissed. They were replaced by words in the Mandarin dialect, such as *Long*, *Fengshui*, and *Kong Fuzi*. However, *Imlek*, the Chinese New Year holiday, is still celebrated without changing its name to *Yinli*. People of Indonesian and Chinese descent are starting to remember that so many words of the Indonesian language come from Hokkien Chinese. The words *Gue* and *Lu*, commonly used by the younger generation, are taken from Hokkien, which means I and you (Perdana 2021). Likewise, various terms were previously circulated as the Betawi

Language or Jakarta Language. *Engkong* is for Grandfather, *Koko* is for Brother, *Suhu* is for Teacher, *Goban* is for Fifty thousand, and *Cepek* is for one hundred. Other examples, such as *Gincu*, *Loteng*, *Nyonya*, *Lontong*, *Kuaci*, and *Anglo*, have been wholly absorbed into Indonesian.

The word *Suhu* is more often oriented towards martial artist masters. It is in line with the development of this sport in Indonesia. Apart from having traditional *silat* styles, various regions in Indonesia also developed Kungfu schools (Sufianto 2015). In several other areas, such as South Kalimantan, this martial arts school appeared in the form of Kuntau, while other teachings gave rise to the Tay Kek Koan martial arts school in Makassar. In modern martial arts, they are now all known as wushu and tai chi. This narrative about the contribution of Chinese martial arts is well-circulated among political and economic figures who also observe martial arts. This circulation is undisclosed because many political and economic figures do not say that they follow one of the martial arts schools (Nova 2022). However, after further investigations, almost all the male political elites in the capital city and in the provinces were martial arts practitioners at one time in his youth.

Narrative's Response during the Jokowi Administration

Narratives circulate by word of mouth and from social media to social media. Some algorithms regulate what information goes to someone's social media. From a study in Australia, this algorithm leads society towards narrative polarisation with dangerous consequences (Housego 2022). Narratives also develop in WhatsApp group conversations, official meetings, and discussions in coffee shops. Many narratives developed about China during the Jokowi era, ultimately influencing the perception of Indonesian society.

A survey by the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia (FPCI), a non-profit institution, 2017 showed that the public strongly supports Indonesia's relations with China. Surveys show that people believe that the foreign country with the most influence on Indonesia is no longer the US but China. It differs from the public view in 2016, which still said that the US was Indonesia's most important country (Jackman & Flake, 2017; Zhao, 2023). "Survey on America's Role in the Indo-Pacific" is the result of collaboration from The Asian Research Network, consisting of FPCI, Perth US Asia Center and Australia's United States Studies Center from Australia, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies from China, Brookings India, The Asian Institute for Policy Studies from South Korea and Canon Institute for Global Studies from Japan.

Narrative studies and developments in the field show that the narrative about China is developing rapidly in line with political developments in Indonesia, followed by the influx of Chinese aid. The narrative about China, with all its advantages and disadvantages, developed rapidly during the 2016 – 2017 Jakarta Governor election campaign. Moreover, after Baswedan was elected, it seemed as if the negative narrative about China dominated. However, this is not evident for the central government and Indonesian regions outside Jakarta. A positive narrative of China continues to emerge, as evidenced by the dissolution of HTI, whose members gave many negative narratives about China, especially around the issue of Uighur Muslims and the economic dominance of Chinese descendants in Indonesia. A positive narrative about China also aligned with Jokowi's visit to China, which invited Xi Jinping to invest in Indonesia.

In its development, the narrative about China then hurt public perception. The Indonesian China High-Speed Train plan, which had to postpone work and could not reach the completion target in 2019, dominated the negative narrative and caused perceptions of China to decline. The costs then also increased, from the planned USD 5.13 billion in 2015 to 6.07 billion in 2016, and continued to increase in the following years. In fact, by the time it is completed in 2023, its costs reached USD 7.27 billion. In 2019, Indonesians still see China as the country with the most influence on Indonesia, more influential than the US, but China's influence tends to be negative. This is proven by the LSI survey 2019, which was conducted with the Asian Barometer (Lembaga Survei Indonesia 2020).

Narratives that follow a negative view of China continue to circulate in line with the arrival of the Coronavirus, which originated in Wuhan, China. Memories of the swine flu case and the bird flu case re-emerge to accompany the narrative about China's biological weapons. The Covid pandemic is China's instrument of exterminating Indonesians.

Negative narratives also emerge in line with political developments in Indonesia. Just as the narrative in 2019 emerged accompanying the presidential election, in which Jokowi ultimately triumphed again, in 2020, the narrative that emerged followed the Omnibus Law, a law deemed to benefit the Oligarchy and, therefore, China. In 2021, politicians are busy with the Draft Law on National Capital. Due to population density, Jakarta has been deemed unfit to be the capital city. It is said to be a city that will sink, so a new capital located more centrally and close to Papua to the east is needed. With many pros and cons narratives, the law regarding the relocation of the nation's capital was finally passed in February 2022.

Opposition groups in society explain the relocation of the capital as a political effort to control an unmanageable Jakarta. The oligarchs and economic elite of Chinese descent in Jakarta feel disadvantaged because of Governor Baswedan's leadership, which is considered anti-Chinese. In general, it is tough for investment from China to enter Jakarta. Regarding differences in investment treatment towards China, the narrative in society says that investment from Saudi Arabia is more desirable than from China.

The narrative of going along with China was also seen in 2021 when President Jokowi signed Presidential Regulation Number 93 of 2021, which stated that the government would invest in the state capital and guarantee the Indonesia-China High-Speed Train Project. Whereas In 2016, this was thought to be why Indonesia rejected Japan's offer of the High-Speed Train Project.

With clear logic and readily available data, the narrative circulating cornered the government against everything related to China. The Lowy Institute captures the results of developing narratives about China in society, which emerge as perceptions. The Perception Survey, which was held at the end of 2021, shows how Indonesian people still think that China is the most influential country in Indonesia (Bland et al. 2022). The view towards China is still very negative, which is in line with rumours circulating that Jokowi is China's accomplice. The developing narrative about enormous investment and the subsequent uncontrolled influx of Chinese labour has greatly coloured public perception. Even though the narrative about Chinese workers has never been verified directly by the public, this has greatly influenced the image of the Jokowi government in its relations with China.

Chinese government's digital influence operations were minimalist and ineffective, limited to tweeting harmless and blatant propaganda through official social media

channels (Kalanthil, 2020, p. 38). Nevertheless, there have been efforts to raise a positive narrative about China that is developing in Indonesian society. Chinese government media, namely Xinhua and China Daily, collaborate with major media in Indonesia, such as Metro TV, Antara, and the Jakarta Post. CITV, a government-supported TV broadcaster from China, has even opened a branch in Jakarta. The success of China's positive narrative towards society is noticeable in the narrative surrounding Indonesia's foreign policy regarding the Israel - Palestine case, the success of the Sinovac vaccine in Indonesia, the increase in nickel smelter output in Morowali, and the launch of the Indonesia China High-Speed Train which provides free tickets for one month to all passengers in September 2023.

Positive narratives and good public perceptions about China have also re-emerged after historical narratives about Indonesia's struggle for independence were widely discussed on social media. It is mainly related to commemorating the day of upholding state sovereignty on March 1, 2023, and Independence Day on August 17, 2023. It was the role of Admiral John Lie, who helped smuggle weapons during the revolution against the Dutch, which confirmed the narrative about Chinese descent, then the narrative about four people of Chinese descent who were members of the Preparation Body for Indonesian Independence (*BPUPKI*), and also the narrative about Djiaw Kie Siong who allowed his house to be used as a place for Soekarno and Hatta to transit when youth patriot took them to Rengasdengklok, West Java.

Positive narratives towards the Indonesian government and China continue to increase, which affects Jokowi's affirmation of his commitment to cooperation with China. This can be seen from the meeting with Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang in Jakarta in September 2023. In that meeting, Jokowi confirmed China's new commitment to investment, amounting to USD 21.7 billion, with the possibility of expansion reaching USD 44.89 billion. Jokowi also invited China to continue developing investments in the high-speed train project and infrastructure development of the new state capital in Kalimantan.

The positive narrative accompanying Jokowi and cooperation with China was followed by survey results from Indonesian political indicators in July 2023, which stated that the Indonesian people's approval level for Jokowi's leadership was still at a very high level, namely 82%.

Conclusion

The narrative about China developed very rapidly during Jokowi's administration. It starts from Xi Jinping's enormous power in China to the belief that China will replace the United States as the world's leader. The narrative about China contains positive and negative sides, all developing in line with the growth of social media use, political struggles in Indonesia, and public acceptance of government policies. As it has been conducted in narrative research on sociology, psychology, literature, culture, and politics, the narrative is always accepted as a perception. In the narrative idea, whether a story is true or false is not the principal thing, nor is the information conveyed fact or fiction.

The narrative focuses on the message somebody wants to convey. The messages and ideas that then developed dominated public discussions and then interacted with the world of politics and economic development in Indonesia. President Jokowi, as directly

involved, is often at the centre of a circulating narrative. The government's foreign policy towards China, economic development with Chinese assistance, the economic dominance of Chinese descendants in Indonesia, and the influence of Chinese culture in Indonesia from the historical sector are narratives that have developed widely in Indonesian society, at least since Jokowi was elected Governor of Jakarta in 2012.

The idea of China's contribution or role in Indonesia's development is also developing in society. Intellectuals, academics, and upper and middle-class social circles are paying particular notice to the positive narrative growing around the Jokowi government, Chinese aid, and China's position in the international world. Meanwhile, negative narratives emerge more from government opposition circles during political contestation, fanatic Islamic groups, and also lower society who lack literacy in understanding information and social media. In the end, by inspecting the level of public approval for Jokowi in 2023 and Chinese investment, which will increase, it can be believed that the narrative of China as the big brother who helps Indonesian economic growth dominates and influences Indonesian society and policymakers in the era of Jokowi administration.

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