

The Message of Plurality on The Chinese New Year News in Indonesia's Cyber Media

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ABSTRACT

After the Reformation, a number of mass media began to raise the issues related to the ethnic Chinese or Chinese Indonesian. It mainly discussed after the fourth Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid, endorsed Confucianism an official religion of the Indonesian population. Celebrations of Chinese/Lunar New Year or widely known as Imlek were reported in a sizeable portion in a number of cyber media or online media in Indonesia. In this case, the media have routinely set up a setting agenda for the Chinese New Year celebrations in several cities in Indonesia. The cyber media use the term such as respect, harmony, togetherness and so forth, in every news. By content analysis method, it is discovered the message of plurality by the usage of such words which was highlighted by the cyber media when reporting of the Imlek celebrated by the ethnic Chinese citizen. In 2021, the celebration was restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This research found that the news of Chinese New Year has not attractive yet for cyber media than the political news. This news is more likely to be published in the form of soft news than hard news. There is cyber media highlighted its news by using plurality terms. However, another cyber media preferred to reflect the plurality by opt its news source other than using such terms. In addition, the cyber media in this research have used ethnic Chinese citizen as news sources, academia, and government side. On top of that, there is cyber media which is more prominent by using a wide variety of news sources. Unfortunately, these cyber media are not using interfaith opinion leaders on the news of Chinese News Year in 2021.

Keywords: *chinese new year; cyber media; plurality; agenda setting*

1. INTRODUCTION

The date of the 2572 Chinese New Year or Imlek celebration is 12 February 2021. The media outlet published news related to the celebration on 26 January 2021. The celebration lasted for 16 days and ended with the Lantern Festival on 26 February 2021 [1].

The 2021 celebration differs from the previous years as it begun with the social restriction to contain the spread of coronavirus. Some news presented features entitled: "Tak Ada Perayaan Imlek di Solo, Diganti Pembagian Masker dan Donor Darah (*The Imlek Celebrations in Solo Changed with Mask Distribution and Blood Donors*)", "Perayaan Imlek 2572 di Kota Semarang Tanpa Barongsai dan Pasar Semawis (*The 2572 Imlek Celebration in Semarang City Without Barongsai and Semawis Market*)". This news coverage is featured in the cyber media Kompas.com. Meanwhile, on 1st February 2021 Kompas daily in Indonesia published a news photo showing Chinese citizens doing the rituals of bathing the umbrella of a goddess at Hok Lay Kiong Temple, Bekasi. Such ritual of bathing a statue of a god or goddess is a series of activities leading up to the

2572 Chinese New Year, which means cleaning before facing God [2].

The journalists of Kompas.com and Kompas Daily itself often received diversity award due to their contribution in writing news related to diversity issues. This award comes from the Serikat Jurnalis untuk Keberagaman (Sejuk) or Journalists' Union for Diversity. As one of the popular mass media in Indonesia, Kompas often remarks on the issues of diversity and pluralism. In this case, the value of the media organization will determine how the information or news being narrated by its journalists. The media companies or newsrooms play a significant role in bringing the issue to be highlighted. Research about journalists who have been living in the conflict areas in Indonesia such as Maluku (or the Moluccas) and Daerah Istimewa Aceh (one of the special autonomy provinces), found that the newsroom which particularly located in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, have had a main role when decided on their news' report. This research suggested the headquarter of media companies to increase the number of news that reflected diversity in the post-conflict area [3].

Journalism content is selected, formed, and presented to the public caused by many factors. Wahyudi examined by

studying gatekeeper roles in the 1950s whereby journalism output was affected by many factors, such as the bureaucracy in the newsroom, the media organization, the demand and the external's tension, and the media ideology [4]. If connected with the news of Chinese New Year in Indonesia, its factors can be relevant.

The celebrations of Chinese New Year were reported in a sizeable portion in a number of mass media including cyber media or online media in Indonesia. In this case, the media have routinely set up a setting agenda for the Chinese New Year celebrations in several cities in Indonesia. In Indonesia, ethnic Chinese society or so-called Tionghoa, began to be recognized after the fall of Soeharto's New Order regime in 1998 which then led to the political revival of Chinese identity. In this era, the expression of Chineseness was no longer forbidden [5]. The freedom for the media to report Chinese New Year celebrations and a number of ethnic Chinese activities occurred after the 4th Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur, endorsed Confucianism as an official religion in Indonesia. Gus Dur himself became known as the Father of Pluralism and Multiculturalism [6].

Despite being in the era of media freedom, yet in practice, the reporting of ethnic Chinese-related issues is not as much as the reporting of the majority group. This is the drawback of the mass media in Indonesia. The diversity of opinions expressed by the mass media tends to be dominated by the elite and the majority group, such as experts, political figures, celebrities, government officials, religious or business leaders. Meanwhile, opinions or aspirations of the lower society as well as minorities (ethnically or religiously) are rarely brought up. This condition seems contradict when the mass media are placed as an openly public sphere to all the level of societies [7].

The 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, during his keynote address at the 4th Congress of Indonesian Diaspora in Jakarta, 1 July, 2017, described some of the toughest challenges of the future, including pluralism and tolerance. In fact, he said, the freedom of the press also requires tolerance. With the advancement of technology, Indonesia is connected with the world. "Television, Facebook, and Twitter allow us to communicate and connect with each other. However, sometimes it can create depression or worsen the situation by starting to talk about racial and religious discrimination. We must fight this. If we do not fight for tolerance, progress can not be achieved," said Obama who had spent his childhood in Indonesia [8].

In Indonesia, the rapid development of digital-based media in recent years is characterized by the emergence of news portals. The Indonesian Press Council which assisted the government to nurture the growth and development of the national press together, has established the guidance of cyber media news on 2nd February 2012 [9]. The proliferation of digital-based media is spurred by the increase of internet user in society. According to survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2020, the internet user in Indonesia is expected nearly 196,7 million. This number is higher than 171 million in 2019. The number of populations in

Indonesia itself, based on Indonesian Statistical Agency, is around 266,9 million [10].

1.1. Agenda Setting of Chinese New Year Celebrations in Indonesia

Agenda-setting focuses on how information/news is deliberately formed/highlighted by the mass media to influence public agenda and audience perception. Agenda-setting is at the first level where mass media conduct salience transfer, namely the ability of the media to convey the importance of an information with the placement of the issue in the news agenda. The mass media has the ability to shape the public agenda. Information that is considered important by the media, will also be considered important by the audience. Information not reported or neglected by the media, will slip pass the attention of the audience [11]. The agenda-setting study explains why information is raised on one particular issue, and yet not on another particular issue, and conveyed to a democratic public. Agenda-setting also explains how public opinion is formed and why certain issues are directed towards policy action, and others do not. Agenda setting process is composed of the media agenda, public agenda, and policy agenda, and the relationships between these three elements [12].

The presence of Chinese-language media in Indonesia began when a sense of nationalism emerged in China in the first decade of the 20th century. Newspapers with Chinese letter was established, yet the amount was still in fewer than the Chinese daily newspaper using Chinese-Malay language, a language used by Chinese migrants who were already mingling with the local culture (Peranakan Chinese). In 1960, tension occurred on the Chinese community which despite being a minority, still held an important role in economic affairs. Through the Emergency Law, the government bans all newspapers and periodicals in Chinese letter. Only after it was revoked in 1963, the Chinese-language newspapers were reborn.

The prejudice in circulation towards ethnic China minority was that they were pro-communist. When Soeharto ascended to power after the 30th of September Movement in 1965, the military deemed that the government of the People's Republic of China were involved in the event by supporting the left-wing movement. The New Order government imposed a ban on Chinese-language publishing with reference to the 1966 Decree of the Parliament which abolished foreign publications not using Roman script. The use of Chinese language and script for press purposes and non-press publishing is prohibited. In 1994, the ban was eased for the purpose of attracting Chinese-speaking tourists which were important to boost the country's economy [13].

After the New Order era, especially once Confucianism was approved as an official religion in Indonesia, news on ethnic Chinese especially when they celebrate Chinese New Year began to emerge in the mass media. More and more studies and research relating to news on Chinese ethnicity in mass media were conducted.

Cheristien and Susanto [14] highlights the shift of Chinese New Year's celebrations meanings in Chinese ethnicity in Jakarta, Indonesia. The others research are focus on the cultural communication in Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia [15] [16]. Meanwhile, the research of Chinese ethnicity in television and newspaper as mass media was conducted by Suwito, Susanto, Junaidi entitled *The Presence of Chinese Ethnicity in Mass Media Spotlight* highlights the values and reality of Chinese ethnicity in the 2011 Lunar New Year celebration on television. Using Pan and Kosicki framing analysis, the researchers selected a number of Chinese New Year's related audio-visual news on Metro TV. The study concluded that television, in this case news television in Indonesia, Metro TV, had presented a frame that the ethnic Chinese are a part of the nation, had well presented a frame of event with existing devices, until the emergence of personal values of journalists and ideology of media involved in covering the event [17].

Meanwhile, a study published in international journal, highlighted the realities of Chinese ethnic life in post-reform Indonesia. The study that was conducted by Setijadi highlighted the association of ethnic Chinese citizens volunteer (shetuan) post-Soeharto government. This association became a kind of unofficial trading chamber that facilitated most of the trade and investment of Chinese businessmen from Indonesia with China. The association made use of their Mandarin ethnicity and language ability as a strategic asset in building trade relations [5].

Research conducted by Freedman specifically questioned how the legal and institutional changes in post-Suharto Indonesia were able to shape the ethnic Chinese identity. The research focused more on the political change within and outside the government, the political body established by the Chinese group, and the opportunities for the future of Chinese Indonesians [18].

1.2. The Message of Plurality Through Mass Media

An understanding of plurality and pluralism can be studied from different areas of life. Plurality involves the relationship between the value of an individual with their personal identity and the broader issues of social identity. Jackson expressed plurality from the religious side. The context of religious education in the 21st century is plurality, the interplay between traditional and modern plurality. Modern plurality is a direct experience of many effects of globalization and increasing awareness of concepts such as religion, ethnicity, and culture [19].

Carr stated that pluralism is an assumption that groups in a pluralist social state are characterized by differences and are largely at odds with the beliefs and ways of the dominant group. However, according to Galston, pluralism "does not abolish civic society" or "does not eliminate the unity of citizens" [20].

In the economic context, Arnspurger called pluralism the work of bound economic work between the work of a universally opportunistic consultant and a critical consultant.

The free-economy is a discipline that shapes and supports diverse economic reflections or plural [21].

Herman van Gunsteren in his book, *A Theory of Citizenship: Organizing Plurality in Contemporary Democracies I*, mentioned some of the things that reflect plurality in a democratic country. Several words, which are plural, dialogue, cooperation, togetherness, solidarity, tolerance and respect, unity and harmony, equality, diversity, integration, sharing, freedom, are then often used by the mass media to convey the message of plurality [22].

Another word that contains a message of plurality and often used by the mass media in Indonesia are '*kebhinekaan*', the motto of the nation that refers to the word diversity. *Kebhinekaan* comes from the motto of the nation, "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*", which means "different, yet still united". The word *kebhinekaan* or *bhineka* used in everyday conversations is equivalent to the word diversity. These words are used in mass media coverage with different proportions.

1.3. Research Question

Several research that has been done by researcher were more likely focused on qualitative method. Meanwhile, this research is done by using mix-method (quantitative and qualitative). Based on the context of Communication Studies, this study highlights the agenda of cyber media in highlighting the message of plurality and the tendency of reporting (type of news, news source) on the Lunar New Year in 2021. The purpose of this research is to know the effort of the cyber media in conveying the message of plurality and the tendency of reporting concerning celebration on Chinese New Year in Indonesia. The tendency of reporting such as the type of Imlek news selected by cyber media, selection of news sources, and the tone of the news.

This research focuses on cyber media as a number of internet user in Indonesia is increasing every year. The researcher used *Okezone.com* and *Merdeka.com* as cyber media representative in Indonesia. According to Alexa, a ranking website, the two cyber media are the top 15 most accessed sites in Indonesia. *Okezone.com* is the first cyber media or has the highest popularity site in Indonesia.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research used mix-method approach. It was conducted through quantitative content analysis method on 30 news samples in *Okezone.com* and *Merdeka.com* on a week before Imlek to a week after the Lunar New Year itself which falls on Friday, 12 February 2021. The reason for selecting the timing was, firstly, the news of Imlek before, during and after the celebration was more varied; secondly, the frequency of news about Imlek before, during, and after the celebration in both cyber medias are more balanced. Content analysis focuses on explicit material. The researcher codes (marks) what is seen directly in the news. Therefore, the

researcher's focus is to calculate and measure accurately the aspect or dimension of the text [23].

The characteristics of unit analysis of the cyber media that is studied are the frequency of use of the terms related to plurality in every news, the effective quality associated with components such as news types, news sources, and tone of news. To support the findings of content analysis, the researcher combined with interviews as qualitative method. All units are analyzed using Agenda-Setting Theory, interviews with ethnic Chinese figures and the cyber media editorial teams.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. The Proportion of Chinese New Year 2572 News in Indonesia Cyber Media

Lunar New Year celebrations had been banned in Indonesia since 1967. During the economic crisis of 1998, the government reiterated the ban on Imlek which further reinforced the height of anti-Chinese sentiments. The message that was conveyed during the New Order period was that ethnic Chinese's rights as a minority were to be under the majority, and they are to be the subject of the government's 'decisive action'. The response from ethnic Chinese showed how far they conditioned themselves to accept the statement without being able to oppose it [24].

In the Reformation Era, specifically when President Abdurrahman Wahid endorsed the Confucianism as an official religion in Indonesia, the media no longer hesitate to report news on Chinese New Year and other ethnic Chinese festivals. They openly cover the news the Lunar festivities and cultural attractions that are offered. The cyber media continues to report Imlek with an increasingly high and varied quantity. Sendjaja noted that the post-Soeharto government took a series of liberalization measures. One of them was the dissolution of the Information Department which were responsible for a series of media banning decisions in Indonesia [7].

Coding results by two coders on four dimensions using the intercoder reliability formula from Holsti, showed reliable measurements on three dimensions. These three dimensions are the message of plurality that are highlighted through the use of words, type of Imlek news selected by both cyber media, and selection of news sources. Of the three dimensions, the average reliability test is 0.84 or 84%. The reliability number tolerated by the Holsti formula is 0.7 or 70%, thus it's reliable. However, the dimension of the tone of the news showed unreliable.

3.2. The Message of Plurality in Chinese New Year 2572 News in Indonesian Cyber Media

Executive Editor of Merdeka.com, Ramadhian, admitted that the number of reporters and editors of Merdeka.com wasn't sufficient to accommodate all news. With a minimal amount of human resources, the editorial team had to

prioritize news that interests the public. Moreover, the cyber media business put the number of page view and share above everything. Readers' interest in Lunar New Year news is not as high as in the political news so the proportion of news on this topic decreased.

McCombs and Shaw considered the media to have the ability to address important issues on the media agenda to the public agenda. This meant the media have the power to distract the public from their own agenda to the media agenda. The issues the media chose to publish, eventually became an issue that audience were thinking and talking about [25]. Chairman of the Press Council of Indonesia, Bagir Manan called the mass media or the press as an industry that was undergoing the process of industrialization. As an industry, the press was an economic activity to seek profit as much as possible. The freedom of the press could be exchanged in line with the economic interests of the press company concerned [26].

The process of industrialization in the mass media was reflected in the statement of Merdeka.com Economic Editor, Idris R. The holy day of Cap Go Meh which fell the 15th day of the Lunar calendar every year, was not at all reported by Merdeka.com. It depends on the media agenda. In 2017, for example, the media agenda was mainly reporting the 112 rally (11 February) by Islamic community organizations. The protest was the continuation of the 212 rally (December 2). The "Defending Islam" movement was a protest against the statement of Jakarta Governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama who was considered to have blasphemed Islam. Basuki or Ahok, was the Jakarta Governor from ethnic Chinese who took up the position, succeeding Joko Widodo who in 2014 was elected President of Indonesia. At that time, it was predicted that the majority of Merdeka.com readers wanted to access more news of the 112 rally rather than news of Cap Go Meh.

There is a policy, and we also do not want to lie, that we give news that many people read to the readers. Maybe from this we also see the traffic of the news, or what the readers want. We're like in a trade, what people want, that's what we will give. We didn't forget to cover about Imlek, because there are some people who also needed that information. But perhaps the majority want that [112 rally] news because a lot of readers needed the [112 rally] news. (Putra)

According to Sendjaja, the Reformation era has created many problems, among others, the emergence of the practice of presenting information on "conflict", "sensation", "gossip", "sex" and "violence" as well as "mystical" or "mystery" stories as commodities that would sell well [7]. The editor of Merdeka.com, according to Idris, didn't not forget the Lunar New Year because there were readers who needed that information. However, the readers of Imlek news and Imlek celebrations were not comparable with the readers of the 112 rally and the political news. This was what Sendjaja called, the drawback of mass media in Indonesia, which was the domination of the "elite" and the "majority" group.

Chinese Communications and Identity Expert, Rustono Farady, assessed that minority accommodation is difficult

to occur in the absence of accommodation from the dominant majority side. Both, either the majority and the minority, must be harmonious and understand each other. Currently, Imlek news should be acceptable to various media as one commodity news, although there are still media that are being selective. Therefore, there should be a more complex understanding of the Chinese identity.

From the side of messages relating to plurality in Imlek news, Okezone.com was more dominant than Merdeka.com. Some Imlek news in Okezone.com that became the sample of this study have plurality messages. This was demonstrated by the use of the words “*kebersamaan*” (togetherness), “*bersama*” (together); “*berbagi*” (sharing), “*memberi*” (giving, give); “*kerukunan*” (harmony), “*keharmonisan*” (harmonism) “*peace*” (damai) “*peaceful*” (kedamaian); and lastly “*respect*” (menghargai/menghormati).

Meanwhile, the message relating to plurality in Imlek news in Merdeka.com did not appear and had a lower frequency than that shown in Okezone.com. According to Ramadhian, words like “plurality”, “diversity” in Imlek news were just a jargon that anyone could deliver. Merdeka.com put forward the thematic elements or a real example of plurality in society. For example, the stories on Chinese Admiral John Lie, activist Soe Hok Gie, activist of Muhammadiyah Islamic Society Abdul Karim Oey, human rights defender Yap Thiam Hien, ethnic Chinese ministers in the time of President Soekarno, Chinese politicians and other Chinese figures that were deemed inspirational. Considering the readers’ characteristics that were likely to share good contents, then the news about inspiring ethnic Chinese figures proved to be read and shared more by the readers of Merdeka.com.

I think that's more effective. People who share a lot of solid news. Jargon are never effective in the news. Imlek news that are read more are the ones like an article about John Lie, a military of ethnic Chinese, and on the average, readers like such historic stories. (Fadillah)

This revelation by Ramadhian was in accordance with the purpose of the establishment of Merdeka.com that presented news quickly, accurately, accountable, and enjoyable. The news in Merdeka.com that presented inspirational ethnic Chinese figures was in line with Rustono's expectations. According to him, mass media journalists should cover the news of Chinese figures who had contributed to the nation, that could generate nationalism among the youth.

According to Manan [26], the press or the media was not just a distributor of opinion, but it also served as a source of ideas both as a creator or channel of ideas. Ideas derived or channeled by the press played an important role in encouraging dynamics and change. Such was the role of the press or the media as an agent of change or agent of reform. Nevertheless, Sendjaja underlined the importance of conveying messages on tolerance and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and culture (SARA).

3.3. The Tendency of the Media in Presenting Chinese New Year 2572 News in Indonesia

The news of Chinese New Year 2572 are more likely to be published as soft news than hard news. From the dimensions of the diversity of sources, both cyber media have accommodate news sources from Chinese citizen in Indonesia. However, Merdeka.com tended to not yet accommodate the newsources from Chinese figures on 2021 Imlek news. This was different from Okezone.com where the Imlek news was dominated by speakers from Confucian/Chinese community as well as Chinese figure.

Also, from the findings of the study, the cyber media Okezone.com and Merdeka.com tend to cite news sources from Chinese descent citizen, academia/expert (lecturer), and government official. Unfortunately, these cyber media are not using interfaith opinion leaders on the news of Chinese New Year celebration in 2021.

According to the Chinese Communications and Identity Expert, Rustono Farady, there are two types of Chinese identity, namely the separated and the accommodative, or the community that are still separated and the community that have been accommodative. Accommodative Chinese group can still be accepted by the media, even became a feature in the news. However, it does not rule out the separated Chinese group to be accommodative group. The mass media is expected to become the educator and the means to make this separated group to be more accommodative.

On contents we see that what is happening today is part of the reflection of what happened in the past decades. There still are media that tend to corner certain ethnic group. They tend to idolize, then try dominate in various ways so in order to make people have certain perspective whether they are negative, destructive, or constructive perspectives. (Marta)

According to Sendjaja, the essence of democracy is the guarantee of freedom for the emergence of various opinions without regarding the size of the group or the number of supporters of the opinion. The content of media coverage should reflect the diversity of opinions. In practice, however, the opinions or aspirations of lower societies as well as minorities (ethnically or religiously) are rarely mentioned. Given this situation, it is not appropriate if mass media is considered as a means of public space open to all levels of society. Practicing the freedom of editorial content needs to follow certain criteria and standards of professionalism. One commonly accepted criterion is that journalists should clearly separate what their opinions are from the true opinions of the interviewees [7].

4. CONCLUSION

When faced with media business and industrialization issues (minimal resources and page view targets), Chinese Lunar New year-related news in cyber media was not a priority for news covering. The editorial team of cyber

media prioritized news that attracts the public's attention with the potential of high pageview and share. Imlek news was considered to have a lower page view and share potential than the political or health news which also took place at the same time. Also, Chinese New Year news are more likely to be published as soft news than hard news.

There is cyber media highlighted its news by using plurality terms. However, the message of plurality in Chinese New Year news was not the focus of attention in another cyber media. The message of plurality was deemed to be just an ineffective jargon on influencing the audience/readers. To target high page view and share, Chinese New Year news relating on ethnic Chinese prioritized on humanist and enjoyable stories. The real news about Indonesia Chinese figures that inspired and had contributed to the nation were read and shared more by the readers. In this case, the practice of presenting information as a commodity also occurred on the news of ethnic Chinese in the Imlek celebration.

In addition, the cyber media in this research have used ethnic Chinese citizen as news sources, academia, and government side. However, there is cyber media which is more prominent by using a wide variety of news sources. Unfortunately, these cyber media are not using interfaith opinion leaders on the news of Chinese News Year in 2021. There still are separated Chinese ethnic groups that can be accommodative groups with the help of mass media. The mass media, in this context is the cyber media, must also accommodate the aspiration of Chinese ethnic groups as a minority group, and not just accommodate the majority group. In Indonesia, there still are cyber media that does not accommodate speakers from Chinese figures and Chinese community when reporting Imlek. Resource that were interviewed came more from the outside of ethnic Chinese and from the government, or the majority group.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to thank Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Universitas Tarumanagara for supporting this work.

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