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An integrated threat theory analysis of latent tension between native Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians

Tommy S. Yotes and Stephen M. Croucher

School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

The relationship between Chinese Indonesians and native Indonesians (*Pribumi*) is marred by tensions and violence. The Dutch colonial legacies have positioned Chinese Indonesians as perpetual outsiders, making them constantly question their roles and identity in the process of Indonesian nation-building. Despite their centuries-old presence and Indonesia's almost three decades of reform, prejudice towards Chinese Indonesians persists. This was reflected in the 2017 Indonesia National Survey Project, suggesting native Indonesians still perceive their Chinese Indonesian counterparts as an economically privileged group, greedy, selfish, and exclusive. Using integrated threat theory, this study explores the link between the perception of threats and prejudice towards Chinese Indonesians. Using multiple regression analysis, this study found stereotypes, realistic threats, history of intergroup conflicts, and age are strong predictors of prejudice towards the ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Theoretical, methodological, and practical implications for integrated threat and prejudice are discussed.

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Integrated threat; prejudice; stereotypes; Chinese Indonesian; intergroup communication

Interethnic tensions between native Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians are well documented. Chinese Indonesians, representing 1–2 per cent of the country's population of 275 million (World Bank, 2022), have faced discrimination since Dutch colonial times (Coppel, 2013). Situational factors, primarily socioeconomic and political, often dictated anti-Chinese Indonesian sentiments during both colonial and post-colonial times. The 1998 May riots loom large as arguably the most recent and painful anti-Chinese incidents in the collective of Chinese Indonesians. In the days following pro-democracy demonstrations in Jakarta, which eventually toppled Indonesian dictator Suharto after 32 years in power, rioters killed more than 1,000 ethnic Chinese, raped hundreds of Chinese-Indonesian women, and looted their homes and shops (Himawan et al., 2022).

A 2017 national survey revealed most native Indonesians (*Pribumi*) view Chinese Indonesians as an economically dominant and privileged group (Fossati et al., 2017). Native Indonesians also perceive Chinese Indonesians as an exclusive group and

CONTACT Stephen M. Croucher s.croucher@massey.ac.nz

having too much influence in Indonesian politics and economy. These perceptions have been echoed in studies on Chinese-Indonesian stereotypes. Kuntjara and Hoon (2020, p. 2014) found the old stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians being "exclusive, disloyal, and apolitical" continue today with less racialisation. Herlijanto (2016), however, highlights that some segments of the *Pribumi* elite, which include heads of various Islamic organisations, intellectuals, and politicians with nationalist views, still view Chinese Indonesians with new suspicions, including concerns about the visibility and prevalence of Chinese culture, and their activism in Indonesian politics. Such suspicions might stem from the rise of China, the imaginary conspiracy theory that Chinese communities conspire with the Chinese government to exert their economic, cultural, and political dominance over the *Pribumi* majority (Herlijanto, 2016). Lie and Sandel (2020) highlighted the portrayals of Chinese Indonesians on social media, particularly in Facebook comments. They found that rhetorical terms like "Cina" (a racial slur against Chinese Indonesians) and *Pribumi* were used to magnify the otherness of the Chinese Indonesians, reinforcing their image as perpetual outsiders and as default scapegoats for societal problems.

Understanding the current perceptions of Chinese Indonesians in the eyes of the *Pribumi* public is essential from both practical and theoretical perspectives. In practical terms, such an understanding may help mitigate the adverse outcomes of intergroup conflicts and prejudice between Chinese Indonesians and *Pribumi*, whose intergroup relationships have historically been precarious. Theoretically, communication research has indicated public discourse and everyday conversations actively communicate prejudice (Ruscher, 2017). Studies have shown specific daily communicative patterns among family members and media portrayals, for instance, can influence prejudice and intergroup attitudes (Odenweller & Harris, 2018; Tal-Or & Tsfati, 2016). In addition, Kim (1988) also highlights that increased prejudice in intergroup relations could bring about less communication between groups. This is particularly pertinent for the case of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia who have historically experienced discrimination and negative stereotypes in their everyday lives (Maryanah, 2018; Setijadi, 2019).

Sparse research has far examined the role of threat as a predictor of prejudice towards Chinese Indonesians. Much of the past research on the ethnic minority group has centred on historical, post-colonial, socioeconomic, identity, and cultural approaches to understanding their relationship with the *Pribumi* (see: Chen, 2022; Herlijanto, 2004; Ingketria, 2018; Koning, 2018; Sai & Hoon, 2012; Suryadinata, 2008). Stephan and Stephan's (1996) Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) offers a relevant communication framework to explain how threat perceptions can lead to prejudice and negative sentiments against a minority group. Previous research has shown intergroup threats serve as potent predictors of prejudice towards minority groups (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001; Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999; Stephan et al., 2000). Within the communication field, researchers have used ITT to understand further the complex relations between perceived threats, prejudice, culture, intergroup communication, and intercultural communication (Croucher, 2013; Khan & Bruschke, 2016; Nshom, 2016).

The vast majority of ITT research is Western-centric, anchored in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Research on ITT examining prejudice and other negative attitudes towards minority groups, especially in Southeast Asia, is limited. Therefore, this study aims to capture diverse samples and gain a comprehensive view

of anti-minority prejudice. Given this context, this study seeks to understand the varying public views in Indonesia on perceptions of threat and attitudes towards Chinese Indonesians. This juncture is rooted in the idea that prejudice emerges when a majority group senses their interests are under threat (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010). Next, this study tests the application of ITT in the Indonesian context and setting to ascertain its relevance across cultures and within an intercultural setting.

Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia

Pre-colonial Indonesia has recorded the presence of Chinese migrants since as early as the twelfth century when merchants from the Song dynasty migrated to the Sumatran state of the Srivijaya Kingdom. Lockard (2013) found that by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Chinese traders had already established themselves in Javan ports by building social ties with the native population and marrying local women. The Chinese traders in colonial Indonesia or the Netherlands Indies predominantly came from Fujian, the southeastern part of China, and they were called *Huaqiao*, which means "Chinese sojourner" (Claver, 2014). They served vital economic roles, acting as merchants and tax collectors. Leggett (2010) argues the Dutch colonial hierarchy was designed to perpetuate the status of the Chinese people as outsiders whose duties were to secure taxes from the native Javanese. The role taken up by the Chinese people as middlemen between the Europeans and the Javanese peasants was deliberately made salient to carry "the weight of blame for [the Dutch's] colonial exploitations" of the indigenous Javanese (Leggett, 2010, p. 1272).

Post-independence Indonesia, under the Sukarno rule (1945–1967), the ethnic Chinese experienced varying degrees of treatment, evolving from a welcoming stance to growing discrimination. Towards the end of his administration, Sukarno developed close ties with Beijing, leading to growing suspicion among the nationalists of the influence of communism in the country through the Communist Party of Indonesia, or PKI (Liu, 2011). During this time, indigenous populations harboured distrust and jealousy towards ethnic Chinese, primarily because of the latter's role in the economy since colonial times (Anwar, 2019). In 1959, to limit the growing economic influences of ethnic Chinese, the government issued the PP-10 regulations that prohibited immigrants from engaging in trade and living in rural areas (Permana & Purwantiningsih, 2021).

Chinese Indonesians under the Suharto regime (1968–1998) experienced heightened discrimination. Suharto framed the economic disparities between the *Pribumi* and ethnic Chinese as the "*masalah Cina*" or the Chinese problem, situating the latter as an ethnic group so disparate in terms of appearance, culture, and economic levels from the ethnic Indonesian majority that they were a problem and needed to be assimilated (Lie & Bailey, 2017). Suharto also banned ethnic Chinese from enrolling in the armed forces, the civil service, and state-owned enterprises. Suharto also barred Chinese schools and newspapers, the use of Chinese characters, the teaching of Mandarin, celebrations of Chinese Lunar New Year, among others (Sai & Hoon, 2012).

Chinese Indonesians experienced greater liberty after the toppling of Suharto. Abdurrahman Wahid, who succeeded Suharto in 1999, overturned the dictator's anti-Chinese Indonesian policies, which allowed Chinese cultural practices to flourish (Fikri & Hasudungan, 2022). The progressive steps were further cemented by Megawati Sukarnoputri,

daughter of Sukarno and Indonesia's first female president succeeding Wahid. She made the Chinese New Year a national holiday in 2003. The newly acquired freedom marked a milestone for ethnic Chinese in Indonesia, affording them new opportunities to openly express their Chinese identity, resuscitate Mandarin-speaking media, and even engage more actively in politics (Chong, 2018).

Despite progress, Indonesian Chinese are still easy targets of prejudice, especially during election cycles. The 2017 Jakarta governor's election saw the burgeoning of misinformation targeting Chinese-Indonesian candidate Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, framing him as the extension of the *cukong,* a derogatory term for Chinese-Indonesian businessmen who work closely with those in power or the military (Yotes, 2019). The year before, on November 4, 2016, a group of vigilantes attempted to raid Ahok's house in Pluit, North Jakarta, a Chinese Indonesian neighbourhood enclave, demanding that the government arrest him for insulting Islam. They destroyed and looted some shops, and damaged houses owned by Chinese Indonesians on their way (Tempo, 2016).

Anti-China and anti-Chinese narratives were also rampant during the 2019 presidential elections, aiming at President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's alleged strong ties with China in disinformation on social media. Such narratives put Chinese-Indonesian communities in the crosshairs of Indonesian politics, as they were conflated with China and communism, hence a threat to Indonesian values (Anwar, 2019).

Current public perceptions of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia may have changed towards a positive attitude due to post-1998 reform (Hoon, 2006). However, this should be treated with caution. Recent studies show cultural stereotypes against ethnic Chinese in Indonesia persist; the indigenous population still views them as an economically successful, greedy, selfish, and exclusive group. The recent influx of Chinese workers to the country, because of Chinese capital inflow through the Belt and Road Initiative, has complicated public perceptions. During the early times of the pandemic, for instance, there was a legitimate fear of prejudice among Chinese Indonesians, which was caused by anti-Chinese rhetoric that conflated them with the workers from Mainland China (Sibarani et al., 2020). Despite such lingering stereotypes, more nuanced, less-racialised perceptions of Chinese Indonesians are gaining ground. Ethnic Chinese are undeniably more visible now than before in sociopolitical spheres; their presence is no longer considered an anathema (Herlijanto, 2017; Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020).

Integrated threat theory and prejudice

Prejudice is typically understood as negative attitudes or behaviours directed towards members of a different group (Allport, 1979). Prejudice involves not only the cognitive content but also the emotion or affect of intergroup and intercultural relations (Brewer & Kramer, 1985). Individuals' predisposition to prejudice is shaped by their personality traits, their bond with the group to whom they belong, and their perceived differences with the outgroup (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).

Stephan and Stephan's (2000) ITT has been widely used to explain intergroup relations between the dominant cultural group and the less-dominant group. It proposes negative attitudes or prejudice towards an outgroup can be explained through threats that are perceived or believed to exist by members of the ingroup (Croucher, 2017). ITT has been explored as a theoretical construct in numerous cultural, political, and

economic contexts. For example, Croucher (2013) found that members of dominant groups in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, when they feel threatened, are likely to perceive Muslim immigrants in their countries as not willing to assimilate. In another study, Eskelinen et al. (2022) revealed individuals who strongly associate themselves with both national and Christian identities in Australia, Finland, Germany, and Norway are more likely to perceive diversity as a threat and are less likely to support religious minority rights. Croucher et al. (2014) found highly religious Spaniards (Catholic) were more likely to perceive Muslim immigrants as a threat to Spanish culture. Stephan et al. (2000) found in the U.S. and Mexico that threat was present in both nations towards the other group. Vedder et al. in a 2016 study found Dutch participants scored higher on intergroup anxiety, negative outgroup attitudes, negative stereotypes, negative experiences, and lower on contact than Muslim participants. This study expands ITT by examining this theoretical construct in the intercultural Indonesian context.

Stephan and Stephan (1996) highlight the four primary threats that can give rise to prejudice: realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes. *Realistic threat* is defined as any perceived threat to the economic, physical, and political resources of the ingroup, and prejudice intensifies when there is a competition for limited resources, such as food, housing, employment, social benefits, public school admissions, and more in intergroup relations (González et al., 2008; Sherif, 1966; Stephan et al., 2000). Chinese Indonesians have historically been seen as a threat to the *Pribumi*'s ability to control the economy (Allard & Beo Da Costa, 2017). A 2017 Indonesia National Survey Project revealed the majority of *Pribumi* held the belief in the perceived economic dominance of the latter (Setijadi, 2017).

Symbolic Threat entails feeling(s) of "threats posed by the outgroup to any of the central values held by the ingroup" or threats to the ingroup's worldview (Stephan & Stephan, 2000, p. 26). Symbolic threat arises when there is a disparity of worldviews between the ingroup and outgroup, with the former holding a deep-seated belief in the righteousness of their values (Stephan et al., 2009). Historically, the nationalism and allegiance of Chinese Indonesians to Indonesia have been questioned. In addition, the Jokowi administration's close relationship with China and China's rise to power on the global stage have amplified suspicion of the growing influence of Chinese culture and values in Indonesia among the *Pribumi* elite (Herlijanto, 2016; Setijadi, 2016). In addition, religious differences often compounded ethnic tensions between *Pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians in the past. The anti-Ahok movement,[1] which saw Ahok, a Christian Chinese, as a threat to Islam – a faith embraced by the Indonesian majority, exemplified this intersectionality within the national context (Osman & Waikar, 2018). In addition, Chinese Christians in Indonesia face double marginalisation due to their ethnic and religious identities that are historically considered foreign in the eyes of Indonesian traditionalists (Hoon, 2012).

Stephan and Stephan (1985, 2000) argue *intergroup anxiety* happens during interaction between the ingroup and outgroup whose members feel personally threatened due to their worry about negative outcomes, such as embarrassment, rejection, or ridicule, in the interactive process. In ITT, intergroup anxiety is viewed as a predictor of intergroup attitudes that are hostile towards members of outgroups. Prejudice in this case is thought to be "a consequence of intergroup anxiety" (Stephan, Stephan et al., 1999, p. 623). While research on intergroup anxiety and prejudice is abundant, studies on this focus involving Chinese Indonesians and the native Indonesian population are scarce.

Negative stereotypes towards outgroups generate negative expectations and emotions towards them, and when this occurs, unpleasant or conflict-laden contacts are likely to be anticipated (Riek et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 1998). Within this premise, negative outgroup stereotypes are assumed to embody threats to ingroup members. Past studies support the link between negative stereotyping and prejudice; strong correlations between the two concepts have been found when the valence of the traits in the stereotypes are considered (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Stephan & Stephan, 1993). Long-standing negative stereotypes attached to Chinese Indonesians as a wealthy, economically avaricious, exclusive, and disloyal group have persisted (Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020; Setijadi, 2017).

Past studies have confirmed correlations between perceived threats and prejudice in intercultural relations between dominant and less-dominant groups. Stephen et al. (1998), in a study on prejudice towards immigrants in Spain and Israel, found all four threats acted as predictors of prejudicial attitudes. Croucher et al. (2021a) analyzed how prejudice towards Asians operated differently in the U.S., Italy, Spain, and New Zealand during the COVID-19 pandemic, finding the latter being the least prejudiced and having the lowest score on realistic threat. Stephan et al. (2002) found realistic and symbolic threats act as strong predictors of prejudice in a study involving White and African-American students in the U.S. González et al. (2008) discovered symbolic threats and stereotypes predict prejudice towards Muslims in the Netherlands. Tausch et al. (2009) examined prejudice in Hindu-Muslim relations in India. Their findings revealed Hindus (majority) perceive Muslims (minority) as a threat to their worldviews, and Muslims feel Hindus pose a threat to their well-being.

Antecedents of threats

The relationship between perceptions of threats and prejudice can be understood through "antecedents" of intergroup threats. Stephan and colleagues introduce several threat antecedents, history of intergroup conflicts, strength of ingroup identification, and perceived status differences (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001; Stephan et al., 2002). In ITT research, threat antecedents refer to variables that are related to intergroup threats, and the relationship among these variables appears to be reciprocal depending on situational factors (Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999). For example, heightened levels of intergroup conflict (antecedent) could lead to higher levels of realistic threat, while higher levels of realistic threat could also lead to decreased contact (antecedent) (Stephan et al., 2009; Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999).

In ITT, a *history and culture of intergroup antagonism* refers to conflicts that occurred in the past, not the current ones in which the groups are embroiled (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Such intergroup antagonism occupies a continuum, from covertly acknowledged, low-level conflicts to high conflicts involving direct physical/non-physical confrontations over scarce resources (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999). Low- and high-level conflicts between the Chinese Indonesians and the Indonesian locals have been recorded since the early arrivals of the Chinese in Indonesia in the sixteenth century (Carter, 2021; Heidhues, 2017; Kemasang, 1985; Suryadinata, 1971).

Ingroup identification is described as the extent to which individuals see themselves as part of members of a group and how personally significant such group membership holds to them (Tropp & Wright, 2001; Turner et al., 1987). In ITT, ingroup identification may affect the perception of threats towards the outgroup. It is expected that individuals who strongly identify themselves with their ingroup are less likely to relate to the outgroup and will feel threatened by the latter, and vice versa (Croucher, 2017; Riek et al., 2006). Since the fall of Suharto, along with the rise of China as a regional economic player, Chinese Indonesians are said to re-orient themselves towards China through associations, a phenomenon referred to as "(re)Sinification" or a "return" to Chinese culture (Hoon, 2004; Setijadi, 2016). Others argue they are becoming more assimilated, as evidenced by their increased involvement in politics (Hervandi, 2011; Ling, 2016).

In ITT, Stephan and Stephan (1985) propose *prior status differences* promote anxiety in intergroup interactions. On the one hand, high-status groups are apt to feel guilty about their privilege and view lower-status groups as inferior. On the other hand, low-status groups are worried about receiving disparaging treatment from high-status groups. Chinese Indonesians have indeed retained a unique hierarchical status in Indonesian society. Their perceived economic status is not commensurate with their efficacy in the Indonesian political arena, which has been under the control of native Indonesians.

Past studies have also confirmed the role of threat antecedents in affecting perceived threats. Among African and White American populations who are highly aware of the historical antagonism between the two groups, a history and culture of intergroup conflict operates as an antecedent that affects realistic threat, symbolic threat, and intergroup anxiety (Stephan et al., 2002). In a study examining the prejudice of native Israelis towards Russian immigrants, Bizman and Yinon (2001) found realistic threat is influenced by ingroup identification, revealing individuals who are high identifiers are likely to perceive more threats from the outgroup.

A study on Dutch and Muslim youths in the Netherlands reveals negative contact is related to negative attitudes and threats directed towards the outgroup (Vedder et al., 2016). Croucher (2017) highlights the natural disposition of two groups comparing their status and power hierarchy in society. Migrants, for example, will have less power than the dominant group of their host country, and they are more likely to be perceived as a threat when the degree of status inequalities becomes salient (Croucher, 2017). Since no research has specifically explored ITT in predicting threat towards Chinese Indonesians on a nationwide scale, this study then aims to propose the following research question.

RQ: To what extent do intergroup threats and threat antecedents predict Pribumi's prejudice toward ethnic Chinese in Indonesia?

Method

After receiving ethical approval, the primary researcher collected a nationally representative sample from Indonesia ($n = 611$) from September to mid-October 2023 using Survey Monkey where participants answered demographic questions and questionnaires.[2] The primary researcher who had previously worked and lived for many years in Indonesia reached out to acquaintances and initiated a snowball sampling survey.[3]

Such a sampling strategy is typically employed in intercultural/cross-cultural communication research. In addition, the primary researcher also ran the survey via Facebook and Instagram ads for six days to recruit more participants. Such a technique has been proven a feasible, rapid, and economical means to recruit a more representative sampling population (Forgasz et al., 2018; Shaver et al., 2019). Participants were given the opportunity to enter a raffle with a prize worth IDR 1.5 million (US$96.00) after answering the online survey. Full participant demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Measures

The survey included demographic questions and the following measures: Measure of Realistic Threat (Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999), Measure of Symbolic Threat (Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999), Measure of Intergroup Anxiety (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), Measure of Negative Stereotype (Stephan & Stephan, 1996), Measure of Prejudice (González et al., 2008); Measure of History of Intergroup of Conflicts (Curşeu et al., 2007; Stephan et al., 2002), Measure of Ingroup Identification (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Stephan et al., 2002), and Measure of Perceived Status Difference (Curşeu et al., 2007; Stephan et al., 2002). Researchers have explored these constructs in various cultural and national contexts, such as the U.S., Mexico, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Brazil, New Zealand, India, Russia, Singapore, and more (Croucher, 2013; Croucher et al., 2021a; Croucher et al., 2021b; Croucher et al., 2022; Ramsay & Pang, 2017; Stephan et al., 2000; Tausch et al., 2009).

The *measure of realistic threat* comprises eight statements reflecting social, economic, or political threats posed by the outgroup (Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999). Participants responded to such statements as "Chinese Indonesians get more from this country than they contribute" and "Chinese Indonesians are not displacing native Indonesian employees from their jobs." The response format features a 7-point scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Previous research has shown this measure to have high alpha reliabilities ranging from 0.80 to 0.90 and to hold a valid factor structure (Croucher et al., 2020; González et al., 2008).

The *measure of symbolic threat* consists of seven statements that capture perceived threats in relation to differences in values and beliefs (Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999). Such statements include "Chinese Indonesians should learn to conform to the rules and norms of Indonesian society" and "The presence of Chinese Indonesians will undermine the Indonesian culture." The feedback used a 7-level scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Past studies showed reliability scores between 0.85 and 0.90 (Croucher, 2013; Croucher et al., 2020; González et al., 2008).

The *measure of intergroup anxiety* features 12 items capturing degrees of different emotions, such as feeling certain or awkward, during intergroup interactions (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Each emotion is rated on a 10-point scale from *not at all* (1) to *extremely* (10) (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Past research has shown measure of intergroup anxiety to have high alpha reliabilities of 0.86 (Curşeu et al., 2007; Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

The *measure of stereotypes* captures 12 trait adjectives, such as dishonest, friendly arrogant, and violent (Stephan & Stephan, 1996). Each trait is rated using a percentage scale

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Variable	*n* (611)	*M*	*SD*
18–19 years of age	2 (.3%)		
20–29 years of age	165 (27%)		
30–39 years of age	205 (34%)		
40–49 years of age	136 (22%)		
50–59 years of age	74 (12%)		
60–69 years of age	25 (4%)		
70 years and older	4 (.7%)		
		37.8	11.2
Sex			
Female	376 (62%)		
Male	235 (38%)		
Ethnicity			
Javanese	327 (54%)		
Sundanese	103 (17%)		
Betawi	41 (6.7%)		
Batak	33 (5.4%)		
Melayu	21 (3.4%)		
Minangkabau	15 (2.5%)		
Bugis	10 (1.6%)		
Others	61 (10%)		
Highest educational level			
Senior high school	276 (45.2%)		
Bachelor's degree	198 (32.4%)		
Vocational degree	69 (11.3%)		
Master's degree	37 (6.1%)		
Junior high school	27 (4.4%)		
PhD 4 (.7%)			
Domicile			
West Java	218 (35.7%)		
Jakarta	178 (29.1%)		
East Java	61 (10%)		
Central Java	50 (8.2%)		
Sumatra	43 (7%)		
Sulawesi	16 (2.6%)		
Yogyakarta	15 (2.5%)		
Kalimantan	13 (2.1%)		
Bali	6 (1%)		
Others	11 (1.8%)		
Occupation			
Private sector	178 (29.1%)		
Housewives	150 (24.5%)		
Self-employed	93 (15.2%)		
Freelancer	77 (12.6%)		
Public sector	34 (5.6%)		
Student	8 (1.3%)		
Others	71 (11.6%)		
Monthly expenditure			
>$380	148 (24.2%)		
US$75–$380	323 (52.9%)		
$34–$74	94 (15.4%)		
<$34	46 (7.5%)		
Main source of news			
Social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok)	471 (77.1%)		
Online news and portals	72 (11.8%)		
Television	49 (8.01%)		
Internet blog	6 (1%)		
Others	13 (2.1%)		

from 0–10% (1) to 91–100% (10). For instance, if a participant believes 0–10% of Chinese Indonesians are "dishonest", they would mark "1", and so on. Alpha reliabilities from

past research indicated high values in the negative stereotype index, ranging from 0.83 to 0.86 (Curşeu et al., 2007; González et al., 2008).

The *measure of history of intergroup conflicts* comprises four items reflecting such statements as "Relations between native Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians have always been characterised by conflicts" and "Although sometimes it is not visible, there is an inter-ethnic battle going on in this country" (Stephan et al., 2002, p. 1246). Each item is rated on a 7-point scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Past studies have shown moderately high alpha reliabilities in this measure, ranging from 0.68 to 0.71 (Stephan et al., 2002).

The *measure of ingroup identification* features four items, reflecting such statements as "Overall, being a native Indonesian has very little to do with how I feel about myself" and/or "Being a native Indonesian is an important reflection of who I am" (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Stephan et al., 2002). Each item in this scale is rated on a 7-point scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Alpha reliabilities for this measure in past research range from 0.76 to 0.89 (González et al., 2008; Stephan et al., 2002).

The *measure of perceived status difference* is measured with five items reflecting such statements as "There is a great difference between the status of native Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians here in Indonesian society" and "Native Indonesians have more political power than Chinese Indonesians" (Stephan et al., 2002). Each item is rated on a 7-point scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (10) (Stephan et al., 2022). Alpha reliabilities from past research indicated moderately high values in this measure ranging from 0.61 to 0.79 (Curşeu et al., 2007; Stephan et al., 2002).[4]

The *measure of prejudice* consists of 12 items that reflect different emotional reactions, such as such as hostility, admiration, dislike, acceptance, superiority, and affection – towards the target group (Stephan et al., 2002). Each item is rated on a 10-point scale from *no … at all* (1) to extreme … (10). Past research has shown high alpha reliabilities from 0.82 to 0.91 in this measure (Stephan et al., 2000; Stephan et al., 2002).[5] See Table 2 for the correlations associated with the examined variables.

Results

The study uses a multiple regression to answer the research question. The multiple regression predicted prejudice. The following predictor variables were entered: Step (1) sex, age, ethnicity, city of domicile, source of news, Step (2) history of intergroup

Table 2. Correlations for study variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) Realistic threat	–					
(2) Symbolic threat	.66**	–				
(3) Intergroup anxiety	.57**	.50**	–			
(4) Negative stereotypes	.28**	.26**	.20**	–		
(5) History of conflict	.46**	.47**	.49**	.14**	–	
(6) Prejudice	.40**	.37**	.26**	.65**	*24**	–

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

conflicts, and Step (3) perceived threats (realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and stereotypes). Dummy variables were generated for ethnicity, city of domicile, and source of news, using Javanese, West Java, and social media, respectively, as the baseline categories.

In model 1, sex, age, ethnicity, city of domicile, and source of news were entered (R^2 = .03). In model 2, history of intergroup of conflicts was entered, showing a significant improvement over model 1 (R^2 = .09; R^2_{adj} = .07; ΔF = 45.31, $p < .001$). In model 3, realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and stereotype were entered. This model was a significant improvement over model 2 (R^2 = .48; R^2_{adj} = .39; ΔF = 111.60, $p < .001$). Hence, this study retains model 3 for final analysis. As shown in model 3 in Table 3, there are significant main effects on prejudice. As individuals identified as native Indonesian get older (b = .10, $p < .05$), their prejudice towards Chinese Indonesians increases. Also, native Indonesians who are aware of the history of conflicts (b = .10, $p < .05$) between the two groups are also more prejudiced against Chinese Indonesians. In addition, those who perceive Chinese Indonesians as a realistic threat (b = .20, $p < .001$) and associate them with (negative) stereotypes (b = .57, $p < .001$) are also more likely to hold prejudicial views towards them.

Demographic information, except age, did not predict prejudice in the final model. Sex (b = .04, p = .20) has no significant effects on prejudice. The same cases apply to ethnicities – Sundanese (b = .01, p = .98), Betawi (b = .01, p = .92), and other ethnicities (b = -.03, p = .38) – and one's domicile: Jakarta (b = .01, p = .73), Central Java (b = .02, p = .60), East Java (b = .04, p = .26), and others (b = .02, p = .63). Sources from which people acquire their news also do not predict prejudice: Internet/online news (b = -.01, p = .97), traditional media (b = .02, p = .73), and other media (b = .14, p = .73).

Table 3. Regression model for prejudice.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Regressor	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Intercept	4.83	.54	2.52	.63	−.96	.52
Sex	−.01	.21	.01	.20	.04	.15
Age	.08	.09	.14	.09	.10*	.07
Sunda	.03	.28	.03	.27	.01	.21
Betawi	.05	.40	.04	.38	.01	.29
Other ethnicities	−.07	.25	−.08	.24	−.03	.19
Jakarta	−.04	.24	−.05	.23	.01	.18
Central Java	−.05	.38	−.04	.36	.02	.28
East Java	.06	.35	.05	.34	.04	.26
Others	.01	.30	.01	.29	.02	.22
Internet/online news	−.05	.29	−.04	.28	−.01	.21
Traditional media	−.01	.34	.01	.33	.01	.25
Other media	.03	.78	.04	.075	.01	.57
History			.27**	.07	.08*	.06
Realistic threat					.21**	.07
Symbolic threat					.02	.08
Intergroup anxiety					−.01	.06
Stereotypes					.57**	.04
F	1.26		4.74***		32.56***	
ΔF	1.26		45.31**		111.60**	
R^2	.03		.09		.48	
R^2_{adj}	.00		.07		.47	

Note: *$p < .05$, **$p < .001$, ***$p < .0001$.

Discussion

According to Stephan and Stephan (1996), four types of threat, realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes, may give rise to prejudice. This study examines the extent to which threats predict prejudicial attitudes among native Indonesians (*Pribumi)* towards Chinese Indonesians. The results of this study offer implications for understanding prejudice.

Our research found the strongest predictor of prejudice was negative stereotyping. When individuals strongly associate Chinese Indonesians with negative stereotypes, they are increasingly prejudiced against them. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing negative stereotypes predict prejudice (Curşeu et al., 2007; González et al., 2008; Stephan et al., 2002). It also indicated stereotyping of Chinese Indonesians is deeply entrenched in the collective subconscious of the *Pribumi* public, which may have been due to Indonesia's long history of stereotyping this minority group (Anggraeni, 2017; Kuntjara & Hoon, 2020; Setijadi, 2017).[6]

A significant effect of realistic threat also predicted prejudice towards Chinese Indonesians. When Indonesians perceive Chinese Indonesians as a threat to their limited resources, such as jobs and housing, they are more likely to hold prejudicial views towards them. Past research on intergroup relations and prejudice conducted in the U.S., Europe, Africa, and East Asia has confirmed this relationship (see Nshom & Arzamastseva, 2021; Nshom & Croucher, 2017; Ramsay & Pang, 2017; Stephan & Stephan, 1996; Zárate et al., 2004). The perception of Chinese Indonesians as an economically dominant group, hence a threat to *Pribumi* power and wealth, may account for realistic threat being a significant predictor of prejudice. This perception is said to have arisen from a feeling of victimhood among the natives because of unfair treatment and economic discrimination that historically disadvantaged them (Bilven et al., 2022).

The study also revealed history of intergroup conflicts as a threat directly predicts prejudice. Stephan et al. (2002) found perceptions of past conflicts mediated the relationship between realistic threat and prejudice. Allport (1979) theorized that positive contact leads to reduced prejudice. This finding shows historical conflicts between Chinese Indonesians and the natives, have a direct effect on prejudice. The 1998 May Riots, which signified the bloodiest conflict in Chinese Indonesian history, exemplified this historical conflict, which might have led to negative feelings that could reverse the effects of optimal contact between the two groups (Croucher, 2016). This situation could subsequently result in prejudice.

As for demographics, age was the only significant predictor. The study found that as individuals age, their prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians increases. This is consistent with previous research (Danigelis & Cutler, 1991; Nshom & Croucher, 2014; Wilson, 1996). Gonsalkorale et al. (2009) explained older people's judgement and understanding of certain racial groups are contingent upon the time in which they grew up. In the Indonesian context, this is perhaps obvious, as older individuals witnessed and experienced (more) intergroup conflicts than their younger counterparts. Furthermore, past research has found prejudicial attitudes differ between males and females, some suggesting that being male is more susceptible to holding such attitudes than being female (Altemeyer, 1998; McFarland, 2010; Schweitzer et al., 2005). In this study, sex, however, is not a significant predictor of prejudice. Prior studies have also found variations in prejudicial

attitudes among race/ethnicity and geographic distribution (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001; Freng et al., 2022; Snellman & Ekehammar, 2005; Stephan et al., 2002). In this study, however, race/ethnicity and geographic distribution were not significant predictors. The absence of predictive power of sex, race/ethnicity, and one's domicile could be attributed to the complex historical, socioeconomic, and political factors that are entrenched in the *Pribumi*-Chinese Indonesian narratives. Sukma (2013, pp. 189–190) noted that Indonesians have historically viewed ethnic Chinese as a "separate *bangsa*" (race, nation) due to the latter's economically privileged position and their role as "henchmen" – dating back to the Dutch colonial period.

Two threat variables, symbolic threat and intergroup anxiety were not significant predictors of prejudice. This may be due to political changes after Suharto's fall in 1998, which allows for a safer environment for Chinese Indonesians to be more culturally expressive (Chong, 2018; Mubah & Anabarja, 2020), fostering increased cultural acceptance and acculturation over time. However, the conflation of Chinese Indonesians with China and its communist belief has been a common theme in the past, especially during political elections (Osman & Waikar, 2018; Yotes, 2019). Future studies, conducted during elections, may want to investigate this area.

Implications and future research

There is a long history of research on Chinese Indonesians, situating them in historical, post-colonial, socioeconomic, identity, and cultural frameworks (see Sai & Hoon, 2012). From a methodological perspective, research that empirically measures prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians on a nationwide scale has been scarce. Hence, the findings of this study add to our understanding, especially through a quantitative method, of how intergroup threats reinforce the relevance and impact of the Chinese Problems[7] in post-reform Indonesia, which heighten prejudice toward Chinese Indonesians.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings broaden the scope of ITT research to cover a new sociocultural and geographical setting, proposing further evidence of threats as predictors of prejudice outside the U.S./European context. A study by Ramsay and Pang (2017) on prejudice toward Chinese immigrants in Singapore distances itself from the Southeast Asian region, classifying the country as an East Asian nation, for economic growth and labour scarcity reasons comparable to Japan and South Korea. This study, sheds light on how threat perceptions operate in intergroup relations in a Southeast Asian country, where an ethnic Chinese community has had a presence for centuries. Future research should investigate the relationship between threats and prejudice towards ethnic Chinese communities in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Thailand, both of which, are home to the largest ethnic Chinese populations which make up around 14 million in total (Suryadinata, 2021). Stephan and Stephan (1996) suggested pinpointing the primary type of threat causing prejudice and applying the most fitting intervention to counter it is crucial. In the Indonesian context, the predominant type of threat is the stereotyping prescriptions of Chinese Indonesians. The Indonesian government, communities, and individuals must work towards dismantling such stereotypes to mitigate prejudice and prevent future intergroup conflicts.

In addition, ITT research has historically considered such variables as intergroup contact, history of intergroup conflicts, perceived status difference, and strength of ingroup identification as antecedents of threats that have reciprocal relationships with realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes (Stephan, Stephan, et al., 1999; Stephan, Ybarra, et al., 1999). This entails the threat antecedents, to an extent, impact threat perceptions, and vice versa. Future research may want to theoretically explore renaming the term "antecedents of threats' to "reciprocal variables' or another term to avoid a potential misnomer.

The results of this study also help us understand the role of threats within communication research, providing insights into how historical conflict-laden narratives and events have lasting impacts on and even shape prejudicial views in contemporary intergroup/intercultural relations. War, genocide, terrorism, and civil unrest, which act as signifiers of a history of intergroup antagonism, could lead ingroups to develop threat perceptions towards outgroups (Stephan et al., 2009). Such threats are often communicated as one group's gains or losses, hence shaping their perceptions and interactions with other groups. This study demonstrates that historical conflicts between *Pribumi* and Chinese Indonesians act as a direct predictor of prejudice towards the latter. In their recent research on the May 1998 riots, Himawan et al. (2022) found *Pribumi* mainly blamed the conflicts on external forces, including anti-Chinese prejudice and the government's scapegoating of Chinese Indonesians. The open discussion of the May 1998 riots was often discouraged, as the violent conflict is, to some extent, still considered a taboo topic, a collective memory that needs to be obscured. As a result, this has led to what Himawan et al. (2002, p. 244) termed as "strategic political murkiness" where rumour, reality, and secrecy collide.

This study has limitations. First, the reliance on self-reports in the survey may have downplayed the prejudicial views of the participants to meet social desirability expectations (Oetzel, 1998). Second, the study treats intergroup anxiety and stereotypes as threat variables. In the revised version of ITT, these variables are treated as subsets of both realistic and symbolic threat (Croucher, 2017). Future research should consider using this new revision to examine whether the two subsets have similar effects on prejudice in the context of *Pribumi*-Chinese Indonesian relations.

This study extended ITT and prejudice research to the study of intergroup and intercultural relations between native Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians. The findings revealed that, within the Indonesian setting, stereotyping, realistic threat, history of intergroup conflicts, and age predict prejudicial attitude towards Chinese Indonesians. The results corroborate and challenge certain aspects of the threat-prejudice hypothesis. It is imperative that future studies explore the relationship between threat and prejudice in countries with a history of Chinese migration to understand further the dynamics of prejudice.

Notes

1. The anti-Ahok movement was a movement in 2016/2017 organised by far-right Islamist groups — protesting Jakarta's former governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), who is of ethnic Chinese descent and a Christian, for insulting Islam. Demonstrators conflated

Ahok with the communist Chinese state and accused him of leading a Christian takeover in Indonesia. They perceived him as a threat to Islam.

2. The survey was translated from English to Bahasa Indonesia by a professional translator and rechecked by the primary researcher, who is a native bilingual speaker, for connotational and denotational issues. Then, the translator and the primary researcher worked together for a consensus to solve such issues.
3. In this quantitative study, the primary researcher shared the survey with his contacts in Indonesia who then shared it with their network of acquaintances.
4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to ensure validity of the constructs. CFA results for realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, negative stereotype, history of intergroup conflicts, strength of ingroup identification, and perceived status difference in Indonesia demonstrated acceptable fit: $\chi^2(303) = 662.08$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.95, GFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.44, PClose = 0.98. Realistic threat's deleted items = 4,6,7,8. Symbols threat's deleted items = 1,3,5,6. Intergroup anxiety's deleted items = 2,4,6,8,10,12. Negative stereotype's deleted items = 1,2,4,6,8,10,12. History of intergroup conflict's deleted item = 4. Ingroup identification's deleted item = 4. Perceived status difference's deleted items = 2, 4. Ingroup of identification and perceived status differences were found to be problematic and were subsequently dropped due to low factor loadings. A reliability test using Omega (ω) was also performed to assess the internal consistency of the scales. Six scales — realistic threat, symbolic threat, intergroup anxiety, negative stereotype, prejudice, and history of intergroup conflict — were retained, as they exhibit good internal consistency;[4] however, ingroup of identification and perceived status differences were found to be problematic and were subsequently dropped due to low factor loadings.
5. CFA results for prejudice in Indonesia also showed acceptable fit: $\chi^2(5) = 7.46$ $p < 0.189$, SRMR = 0.08, CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.28, PClose = 0.78. Deleted items = 1,3,5,7,9,10,11.
6. In the follow-up analysis of negative stereotypes, we discovered a direct relationship between negative stereotypes and prejudice without controlling for any other variables. The measures indicating a strong correlation with prejudice included being disrespectful and friendly, whereas being perceived as dirty showed the least strong correlation with prejudice. Ultimately, answering the question whether stereotypes of Chinese Indonesians have remained constant over time is challenging due to the lack of longitudinal studies on the topic.
7. The Suharto regime in the late 1970s even issued a set of regulations and policies aimed at solving the Chinese Problems — under the title *Guide to the Solution of the Chinese Problem in Indonesia* (Coppel, 2002). This solution entailed the banning of ethnic Chinese from enrolling in the armed forces, the civil service, and state-owned enterprises. Suharto also barred the existence of Chinese schools and newspapers, the use of Chinese characters, the teaching of Mandarin, celebrations of Chinese Lunar New Year, among others (Sai & Hoon, 2012; Storey, 2000).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability

Data available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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