Josh Stenberg, *Minority Stages: Sino-Indonesian Performance and Public Display*.

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Studies on ethnic Chinese in the global diaspora have proliferated and are increasingly framed by multi-disciplinary inquiries that draw on history, anthropology, ethnology, ethnic studies, and related fields. The common thread of these inquiries is to understand the diverse efforts of Chinese identity-making and their entangled relationships with the host societies across vast geographies of Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe throughout history. In examining Chinese assimilation and integration, scholars have unintentionally navigated a binary position whereby one stream takes on a Sinocentric view that orients the ethnic Chinese to their homeland (PRC), while the other stresses the local and native belonging, leaving little space for in-betweenness or other approaches. Josh Stenberg's *Minority Stages* seeks to bridge the gap by addressing the agency and diversity of Sino-Indonesians whose 'Chineseness' was and has been constantly made and re-made locally, nationally, and regionally. Importantly, Stenberg is able to unpack the complexity of 'Chineseness' through a fresh angle—an under-explored yet particularly prevailing dimension in the everyday encounters of Sino-Indonesians, namely, performances. The Sino-Indonesian performances examined in this book incorporate both framed theatre and public displays of community activities and rituals and were treated as shifting self-representations in the changing socio-political circumstances of the Indonesian society. By doing so, Stenberg contributes a cultural history/study of Chinese Indonesians, which has been long overdue in the studies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia.

The book is organized by genre, and complemented by the author's meticulous sketches of each genre's history and its contemporary development in the Indonesian society. Chapter 1 gives a detailed historical account of the presence of Chinese *xiqu* in the Indies from the seventeenth century as part and parcel of the transnational theatre history instigated by Chinese migration flows to Southeast Asia. Chapter 2 functions as an expansion on the *xiqu* topic by focusing on the very popular and active Sino-Indonesian theatre *wayang*. Although they had Chinese origins, *wayang potehi* and *wayang kulit cina-Jawa* have developed hybrid genres and are increasingly identified as Indonesian cultural heritage. In Chapter 3, Stenberg uses his proficiency in reading Chinese language materials to uncover a rare history of the Chinese spoken theatre in Indonesia. The two leftist drama plays were set in evolving and distinct historical contexts, characterized respectively by the rise of global communism after WWII and PRC-oriented patriotic 'Chineseness' in the Sukarno era. Chapter 4

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focuses on the ways in which mainstream Indonesian commercial theatre integrated a popular Chinese narrative *Sampek Engtay* (Butterfly Lovers) into its national performative imaginary. Chapter 5 and 6 come together to speak to other non-theatrical “performative” dimension of Sino-Indonesian identity, specifically through community-sponsored cultural activities and ritual processions. In the contemporary milieu, Stenberg argues that there is an eminent revival of Chinese cultural expressions in voluntary and alumni associations, clans and temples in which patriotism to Indonesia, charity, and hybridity are emphasized along with the reassertion of ‘Chineseness’.

This book presents new interpretations of creolization/hybridization, a topic particularly pertinent to varied Chinese experiences in Southeast Asia. Extant scholarship has been preoccupied with the hybrid identity of distinct communities (the Straits Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, Peranakans in Indonesia and the Mestizos in the Philippines), whose ‘Chineseness’ was more or less diluted by localized expressions. However, Stenberg treats hybridity in a strikingly different way as he is mainly concerned with “genres and works that have a substantive connection and investment in the performance of Chineseness” (p. 7). For instance, from a thorough investigation of the four-hundred-year history of Chinese *xiqu* to puppetry evolved from Hokkien traditions, and commercial theatre featuring Chinese romances *Sampek Engtay* (Butterfly Lovers), he proves that hybridity is so ubiquitous and natural that it coexists, rather than conflicts, with the outward expressions of ‘Chineseness’ in their Sino-Indonesian identity. The Indonesian language, local folk songs, use of *gambang* and even the involvement of indigenous (*pribumi*) Indonesians are more and more commonly seen in Sino-Indonesian performances. Thus “Identification of the Chinese elements within an Indonesian work is a recognition of a vein of inspiration that enriches rather than detracts from an Indonesian theatre historiography” (p. 113). Above all, only by directly addressing the ‘Chineseness’ in the hybridized performances could we break away from the long-held stereotype that casts ethnic Chinese as alien, unassimilable strangers.

Additionally, the book highlights the persistence and resilience of ‘Chineseness’ in the face of continuous anti-Chinese sentiments and suppressions that had been forced upon them through state parameters. Sino-Indonesians, not only performers in the literal performances, but also participants and organizers of various Chinese community activities, self-consciously adopted flexible strategies in their performative articulations of ‘Chineseness’ vis-à-vis the nationalistic state and the majority of Indonesians. For example, they associated their performances with Indonesian political figures, showed efforts to embrace the state ideology of Pancasila during the New Order era and have appropriated the language of multiculturalism and transnationalism since the

Reformasi Era. Last but not least, the working of transnational pan-Chinese networks is a significant thread that runs through each case study. For all the performances covered, they shared a lineage in mainland China, were further disseminated via the connective nodes of Singapore and Taiwan, and finally to various parts of Indonesia. The regional circulations of theatre and performances greatly liberate the various permutations of Sino-Indonesian identities from strict territorial and national frameworks, allowing room for diverse interpretations of ethnicity. As Stenberg succinctly claims, “this study seeks to respect Chinese roots, Indonesian practice, and the position of such performance in a dynamic regional history” (p. 5).

Methodologically, Stenberg is remarkably versatile in collecting the multilingual primary and secondary sources, conducting oral interviews with theatre practitioners together with participant observations. The encompassing approaches have produced a valuable inter-disciplinary work that combines ethnography with cultural and historical analysis. Whereas he has done an exceptional job in consulting a wide range of source materials, the narrative, at certain points, unintentionally runs weighty with too many descriptive details. Nonetheless, his final methodological reflection is well grounded in a critical stance that elaborates every possible limitation of the work.

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