

CHINESE MIGRANT WORKERS IN INDONESIA: A CONTESTED SECURITY ISSUE

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1 Introduction

Migration is currently one of the most sensitive topics on a global scale. Fear of a tidal deluge of transnational migration, with all its potential dangers, has compelled nations to increase border security (Ullah, Hasan, Mohamad, & Chatteraj, 2020). In previous decades, particularly during the Cold War, migration was absent from the state security discourse. On the other hand, the security threat to the state is founded on the Cold War constellation within the context of superpower rivalry (Ewing & Caballero-Anthony, 2020; Faist, 2006).

However, the Cold War's end has had a significant impact on international security discourse, especially on migration (Bello, 2020). This shift triggered an intense debate among international relations scholars concerning the post-Cold War international security landscape (Newman, 2010). Realism as a dominant theory was regarded as obsolete at the time, and it was superseded by post-Cold War theorists who focused on non-traditional security (Singh & Nunes, 2016). Nonetheless, the growth of non-traditional theorists began in the West, converging key ideas that dominated non-traditional security studies, namely the Copenhagen School and the Aberystwyth School, and later Critical Security Studies (CSS).

The marginalization of the role of non-state actors, as well as ideas from the Global South, was among the catalysts for the creation of this concept. Since then, international relations researchers all over the world have been interested in studying international migration and security as a non-traditional subject (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2020; Rolf, 2022). Indeed, non-state actors are becoming increasingly prominent in post-Cold

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War security discourse. The State is not the only referent object under threat; other non-state objects such as humanity, culture, and even the individual self are also under threat (J Huysmans, 2006).

The primary goal of the new post-Cold War non-traditional security paradigm is to safeguard societal security against various threats (Waever, 2008). Among these threats are those related to social issues such as culture, identity, and religion, which can be caused by migrants in particular. In fact, the existence of these risks in its different forms, including the threat posed by migration, made it possible for the government to reengage in security-related matters. The state contends it is obligated to implement a securitization policy against the threat posed by migrants, as proposed by the Copenhagen School. Under the guise of maintaining public peace and national stability, the European Union and North American countries were among the first to implement securitization policies, particularly against immigrants (Ghughunishvili, 2010; Jef Huysmans, 2000; Sitompul & Cipto, 2022). This indicates that, particularly in the context of securitization, the role of the state is once more dominating in post-Cold War non-traditional security theory.

Based on earlier studies, governments in Southeast Asia have successfully used securitization to deter immigration. Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are the three countries in the area that have actively rolled out securitization policies that target migrant labor in particular. The purpose behind each government's securitization strategy is different in the three distinct nations. For instance, the government of Malaysia is greatly concerned about unauthorized or illegal migrant laborers who may cause instability in the country's internal security. The government of Malaysia continues to enforce its securitization policy against migrant workers despite receiving worldwide criticism for issues with human rights violations (Arifianto, 2009; Dollah & Abdullah, 2018; Kudo, 2013; Mahalingam, 2022; Ullah, 2013).

Along the same line, Singapore is acutely conscious of the threat posed by migrant workers, particularly those operating illegally in the country. It was previously noted in the literature how migrant workers in Singapore were under tremendous pressure to work in that country because of the securitization policy and a legal system that was deemed very rigorous. The government consistently claims that the securitization policy was implemented to enforce the law, despite the fact that migrant workers are Singapore's economic backbone (Loong, 2018, 2022).

In the meantime, Thailand's government also implemented a policy of securitization for migrant laborers traditionally recruited from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. The security concerns posed by migrant laborers formed

the basis of Thailand's securitization strategy. Thailand's securitization strategy was established in response to security concerns brought on by foreign employees. A survey showed that the general public has highly unfavorable opinions against migrant labor and that this coincided with a stricter securitization policy (ILO & UN Women, 2021; Jirattikorn, 2015; McDuff, 2017).

Indeed, the securitization of migration by governments is widespread among academics, whereas the de-securitization of migration by governments is rare and relatively recent. In the Indonesian context, the government's paradoxical idea of securitization of migration may contribute to the body of knowledge on securitization theory and practices. Therefore, this article contends that the public's securitization of Chinese migrant workers has failed due to the government's massive counter-securitization campaign conducted through political apparatus, mainstream media, and social media influencers. The government conducted de-securitization to secure foreign direct investment from China and strengthen its economic ties. Thus, the following section will provide a brief of China's investments and the dynamics of Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia.

2 China's investments vis-à-vis Chinese migrant workers flow to Indonesia

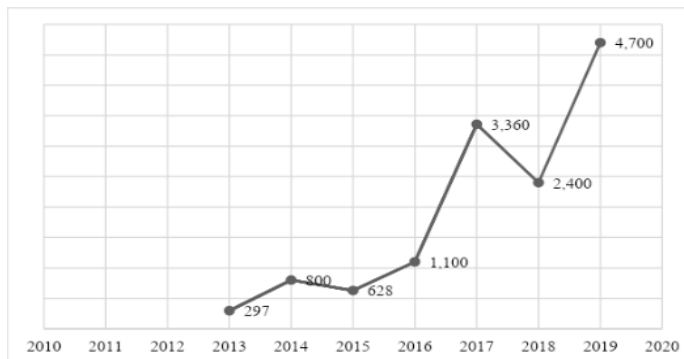
Indonesia has become increasingly focused on the issue of foreign workers, especially since President Joko Widodo took office in 2014 and initiated the Sea Toll project. Under the Sea Toll project, Jokowi – as he prefers to be known –, has made the most significant contribution to the country's infrastructure development ever in history. However, the electorate were not properly informed, particularly during the early part of the presidential campaign, that the investment that comes mainly from China's government also brings with it Chinese migrant workers. The presence of these Chinese workers has been increasingly publicly debated as the rate of Indonesian unemployment is high.

The speech of Chinese President Xi Jinping in front of the Indonesian parliament was seen as the beginning of the Indonesian government's engagement with the China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Southeast Asia (Wu & Zhang, 2013). Jokowi's candidacy greatly utilized the BRI project and took it as a primary campaign theme, renaming it the Sea Toll project during the 2014 presidential election campaign. This program is considered fundamental amidst the lack of elite political narratives around the importance of marine development that had led to its abandonment. What was later

known as the ‘global maritime fulcrum’ is considered a major breakthrough for Jokowi for fostering national economic growth (Anwar, 2018). Jokowi’s vision became more articulated during his presentation in Beijing at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit on 10 November 2014, a few weeks after his inauguration. In his speech, Jokowi stressed that Indonesia needed a lot of investment, especially in the infrastructure sector. Therefore, Jokowi openly invited investors to come to Indonesia. In his closing statement, Jokowi stated “We are waiting for you to invest in Indonesia” which became the focus of significant levels of discourse in Indonesia (Madkur, 2018).

After Jokowi’s speech in Beijing, the concept of the Sea Toll project became ever clearer. To achieve his vision, President Jokowi introduced a national development road map that would be delivered throughout his tenure called the National Medium Development Plan (2015-2019). Unfortunately, the government’s financial ability can only cover one-third of the total budget required. The government sought contributions from the private sector as stated by Jokowi in his speech at the Beijing APEC Summit. As a response, from time to time, the Chinese government offers the fantastic investment that President Jokowi wants (Figure 1), especially in the infrastructure sector (Badaruddin & Octavia, 2018). At the point of this initial investment, BRI’s ideas were in line with President Jokowi’s priority on infrastructure development (Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board, 2018).

Figure 1. Trend of Chinese Investment in Indonesia between 2013-2019 in Million USD.



Source: adopted from Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board (2020).

The influx of migrant workers is a direct outcome of Chinese

investment, according to Indonesian Minister of Manpower Hanif Dhakiri (Rachman, 2019). To support China's investment in Indonesia, the government issued a visa-free policy for Chinese people coming to Indonesia (Rahayu, 2017). The implementation of a visa-free policy also increases the number of tourist arrivals as well as migrant workers (Rosyidi, 2018). However, the Indonesian public voice is still suspicious towards Chinese migrant workers. They also believe that through tourist visas, Chinese migrant workers are, in fact, working in Indonesia (Negara & Suryadinata, 2018).

This article first outlines a review of the securitization concept as an analytical tool. Second, it will lay out the increase in numbers of migrant workers in Indonesia. Third, it will explore the public views in securitizing Chinese migrant workers. Fourth, it will examine the government's counter-securitization of the issues surrounding Chinese migrant workers. Five, it will focus on the determining factors behind the failure of securitization. It argues that there has been a failure of securitization of Chinese migrant workers by the public due to staunch counter-securitization carried out on a massive scale by the government through political apparatus, mainstream media, and social media influencers.

5 Theoretical framework

This article loosely adopts the securitization theory from the Copenhagen School (CS) which is directly linked to the research of Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and other scholars in the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI), Copenhagen, Denmark (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998). Buzan's concept of securitization departed from constructivism in International Relations (Balzacq, 2011). Buzan's argument believes that security issues generated from human construction are related to the use of language known as 'speech acts' (Buzan et al., 1998; Waever, 1995).

In general, securitization is the mechanism through which actors create security issues using 'speech acts' to persuade the audience that a specific topic is a threat. In essence, the key point of securitization is whether something in question is a security issue not because the issue objectively affects the state or other referent object. Instead, it becomes a security problem, as it is described as threatening the continuity of the referent object by securitizing actors. Obviously, the CS is not interested in whether a statement is factual or false; the most important facet is the 'truth effect' of the language when the audience can be convinced that there is a real threat to be dealt with.

As a result, according to this framework, all issues can be turned into

security problems through a speech act. However, understanding security as a speech act is problematic because one could then suggest that everything can be turned into and constructed as a security issue. However, to prevent everything from becoming a security issue, the CS argues that securitization is a specific form of ‘social praxis’ and an inter-subjective practice in which what counts as a security issue depends upon how securitizing actors frame the issue. A successful securitization is not decided by the actors alone, because it involves the crucial role of the audience. Only if the speakers and the audience reach a collective agreement that the issue is an existential threat, can it then be considered as a successful securitization, otherwise it is a failed securitization.

Securitization consist of key elements including a securitizing actor (who securitizes), speech acts (the methods of securitizing), existential threat (what the issues are), and referent object (for whom must the securitizing happen) (Buzan et al., 1998). Effective and successful securitization greatly relies on how the audiences accept and perceive the issues as a security threat (Roe, 2006). At the same time, securitizing actors were also challenged by de-securitization actors to a counter securitization process (Salter, 2008).

However, existing securitization theory is only complete when it includes the idea of desecuritization. For Waever “security should be seen as a negative, as a failure to deal with issues of normal politics” (Buzan et al., 1998; Waever, 1995). He proposes ideas that refute this securitization through what is known as desecuritization. The logic behind desecuritization is to take an issue out of “emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere” (Buzan et al., 1998). Despite the fact that the CS has not elaborated and defined clearly how the idea of desecuritization works (Collective, 2006), for several scholars, desecuritization refers to the process as “unmaking rather than the making of security problems” (J Huysmans, 2006).

Meanwhile, Roe argues that, to desecuritize an issue is not to return to normal politics, but simply to “undo the emergency politics” (Roe, 2006). Desecuritization typically takes place when the threat that led to securitization is perceived to have disappeared or become ‘non-existential’. The actor may also deliberately choose to refrain from describing certain issues in term of security, and instead try to handle them outside the sphere of ‘panic politics’. In this context, what has actually been done by the Indonesian government during the issue of the Chinese migrant workers is known as ‘counter-securitization’ (Stritzel & Chang, 2015). Counter securitization is also important in understanding this issue where other studies have shown that the framing effect will disappear when target audiences are exposed to

competing frames from equally credible sources (Krebs & Jackson, 2007). In addition, the securitization process is articulated as the following framework.

Figure 2. The successful securitization process of Copenhagen School



With this, the subsequent paragraphs discuss how the process of securitization and counter securitization of Chinese migrant workers has taken place. However, prior to examining this issue, the authors attempt to highlight the methodological aspect especially related to data collection.

6 Method

The authors conducted data mining mainly through online media to understand securitization and counter securitization of Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia. Utilizing NVivo software, the authors surveyed online media to map the issues surrounding Chinese migrant workers. Statistical data were mainly obtained from official agencies, whether government or private organizations. This study was also enriched through interviews with some informants of various backgrounds such as academics, public servants, Indonesian migrant workers abroad, as well as testimony from an Indonesian figure and local workers witnessing Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia.

7 Jokowi's championing of his policy of importing migrant workers

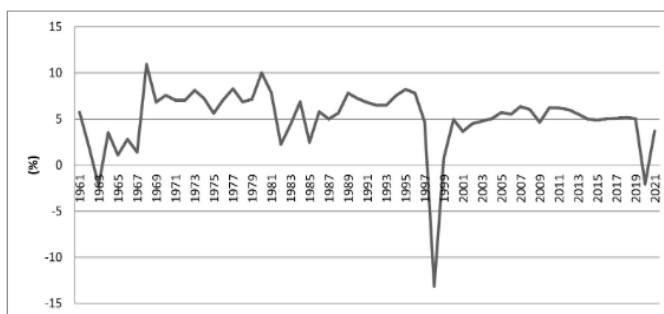
Indonesia's economic history since the independence era, until Jokowi led the country, is full of twists and turns. During the Sukarno era, political instability caused the economy to slump and fall apart. Severe inflation made commodities pricey, and living conditions worsened (Boediono, 2005). In fact, Indonesia's inflation rate approached 100 percent annually (Thee, 2012). Relations with the West, particularly the United States, are deteriorating, while relations with the Eastern bloc, principally China, have grown closer.

Simultaneously, US aid to Sukarno's government ceased, but aid for the army group in Indonesia surged (Maksum & Bustami, 2014). After the bloody coup in 1965, Sukarno stepped down and was replaced by Suhar-

to, who promised improved growth and welfare for the people (Paundralinga, 2023). Surprisingly, the 1965 coup drew China, which was accused of involvement in the tragedy, forcing Suharto to freeze relations between Jakarta and Beijing until the Cold War ended. In fact, the anti-Chinese attitude persists in Indonesia today as a result of the unpleasant memories of the past that are kept alive in society (Cribb & Coppel, 2009; Fitriani, 2021).

In general, the Indonesian economy under Suharto experienced a period of rapid development that led to the nation's emergence as a new industrial economy (NIE) in Asia (Thee, 2007). Nonetheless, numerous criticisms were leveled at the economic system of the Suharto era, which was deemed excessively liberal (Woo & Hong, 2010), as poverty persisted and social inequality widened (Booth, 2000; McCawley, 2013). However, at least the New Order government was successful in achieving high economic growth among developing nations. As shown in Figure 3 demonstrates that during the presidency of Suharto (1966-1998), economic development in Indonesia was relatively robust. Since 1966, Indonesia's economic growth has increased rapidly, only to decline drastically when the New Order fell in 1998 followed by a radical political transformation known as *reformasi* or reformation. Indeed, during the two extremely long regimes that ruled Indonesia, Sukarno, and Suharto, there was virtually no discussion of the influx of migrant workers in the country.

Figure 3. The trend of Indonesia's annual GDP growth (1961-2021)

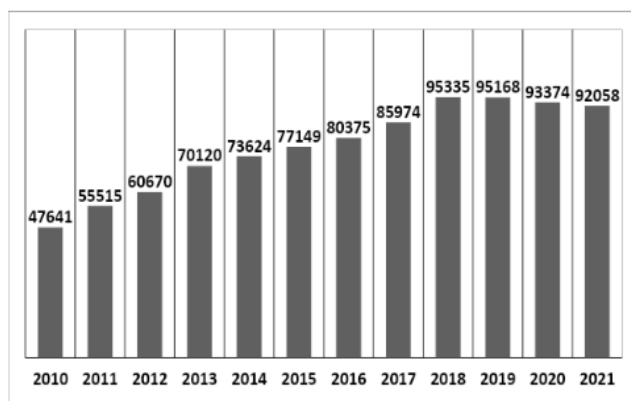


Source: The World Bank (2021)

Indonesia's economy has become more liberal in the post-Suharto era (Woo & Hong, 2010). However, the debate over foreign employees in Indonesia began during the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

Previous presidents who governed after Suharto, such as BJ Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Megawati, had no issues with foreign workers. Nevertheless, guidelines for managing migrant workers have been developed since the Megawati government passed Law No. 13/2003 on Employment. Meanwhile, the Indonesian government under President Yudhoyono issued two important regulations namely Law No. 97/2012 Concerning Traffic Control Retribution and Permit Extension Fees for Employing Foreign Workers and in 2014, Presidential Regulation No. 72/2014 Concerning Employment of Foreign Workers and Implementation of Education and Training for Associate Workers (Adha, Husni, & Suryani, 2017). Indeed, prior to Jokowi's government, discussions regarding foreign workers, including those from China, were scarce in the public and academic realm, even in mainstream media. In fact, the debate over the influx of foreign workers began during the Jokowi administration (Badaruddin & Octavia, 2017; Martias, 2021; Yitawati, 2018). Data from 2014 (Figure 4) when Jokowi started his term, indicate that Indonesia had shown a modest increase, but the number is still a significant challenge for Jokowi's administration.

Figure 4. Numbers of Foreign Workers in Indonesia



Source: Indonesian Ministry of Man Power as published by Lokadata (2021).

Figure 4 above shows that the number of foreign workers had reached 73,624 people by the end of 2014 when Jokowi officially became President of Indonesia. Throughout the following year, the number of foreign workers increased dramatically to 77,149 people, which was an increase of 59.00 percent, amidst growing criticism. In 2016, when the public positively assessed Jokowi's performance as Indonesia's leader, the number of foreign

employees increased by about 3,000 to 80,375. The arrival pattern of foreign workers continued to rise over the next two years, 2017 and 2018, but the numbers were modest compared to 2014 and 2015. For instance, in 2017, the number of foreign workers was 85,974, just over 5,000 more than 2016. Yet in 2018, in the middle of the presidential election campaign, the increase in the number of foreign workers nearly doubled to 95,335, a jump of 9,000 foreign workers. This trend shows a gradual acceleration towards the end of Joko Widodo's first-period term in 2018.

At the same time, the problem of foreign workers in Indonesia is becoming highly complex, since China's workers dominate the local-based job sectors. However, foreign workers in Indonesia do not come solely from China although China's laborers dominate much more of Indonesia's international labor market. In 2019 alone, the upward trend in Chinese migrant workers is 38%, higher than the two neighboring countries of Japan (25%) and Korea (17%) which are also both major investors in Indonesia. In addition, there were also Indian (12 %) and Malaysian (17%) employees present in Indonesia as a part of their respective investments. Data on the distribution of migrant workers in Indonesia by 2019 is presented below.

Table 1. The Country Origin of Foreign Workers in Indonesia

No.	Country	Number of migrant workers
1	China	42,822
2	Japan	10,610
3	South Korea	9,264
4	India	6,201
5	Philippines	4,672
6	Malaysia	3,801
7	US	2,118
8	Taiwan	2,025
9	UK	1,854
10	Australia	1,707
11	Others	11,500

Source: Indonesian Ministry of Manpower as published by Kusnandar (2022).

The information above shows that the numbers of foreign workers has grown during Jokowi's administration. The number of Chinese employees in Indonesia continues to be a controversial topic and a national issue that will be discussed in the next section.

8 Attempts to securitize Chinese migrants: the view from the public

The unemployment rate was high when Jokowi took office in 2014 as the new Indonesian president (Statistics of Indonesia, 2014) which caused public anger about the policy around Chinese migrant workers. In addition, the issues freely reported by national media online involving Chinese migrant workers clearly led to an increase in public awareness. The public discourse on Chinese migrant workers, fueled by media coverage, stated that many of them have been detained by immigration for various legal offences including being fake professional workers. Instead, the Chinese workers were employed in unskilled jobs. In October 2017, for example, the Indonesian coast guard detained as many as 46 people from Mainland China. They were all illegal and were working at a nearby construction company (Endi, 2017).

In the meantime, in Mojokerto, East Java, an issue arose when Chinese migrant workers reported receiving around IDR 6 million per month (USD 420) or nearly double that of local workers. The pay for local workers is around IDR 3 million per month according to the local minimum wage regulation (Government of East Java, 2016). Another issue is they could not even speak Bahasa Indonesia. This is a serious offense in law. This is because migrant workers must be able to communicate in Bahasa Indonesia according to East Java local regulation No. 8/2016 (Jajeli, 2016). An expert from Bandung, West Java, has observed and confirmed that all of these Chinese migrant workers cannot understand the Indonesian language. He revealed:

“I purposely hold and stop my trip during my travel to study and ask the Chinese workers at a factory in Serang, Banten Province. And it’s true that they can’t speak Indonesian. The company’s owners also tend to employ foreign workers, especially China, because of their success and they can work without interruption, and he said this is more productive compared to local workers” (Interview A, 2018).

This statement shows that Chinese migrant workers have obviously become a public concern. Employers’ preferences for Chinese migrant workers indicate that local workers were neglected compared to Chinese workers due to performance issues. At the same time, the problem also gained attention from Indonesian migrants abroad who felt humiliated since they needed jobs in their home country. Instead, an unofficial job exchange has taken place with jobs being given to Chinese migrant workers causing the Indonesian workers to leave to find work in other countries. An Indonesian worker abroad has expressed disapproval. He commented that: “At the time when Indonesians need more jobs, and choose to go abroad, Chinese migrant workers came in. I totally disagree. But, we cannot do anything” (Interview

B, 2018).

At the same time, his colleague, also an Indonesian worker gave an account of Chinese migrant workers' presence being a necessity. This is because, based on his observations, especially in Malaysia, Chinese investment often includes unskilled workers to speed up an infrastructure project. He argues that:

"I think this a common issue wherever Chinese investment areas were located; they usually brought the money as well as workers originally from there like in the Second Penang Bridge Project. But, after that they disappeared and returned to China. This needs strong supervision and control from the government. If, once the project is finished they still stay in Indonesia, it is a problem" (Interview C, 2018).

The issue of Chinese migrant workers has received mixed responses, including from the government officials themselves. In an interview a member of staff from a government office stated:

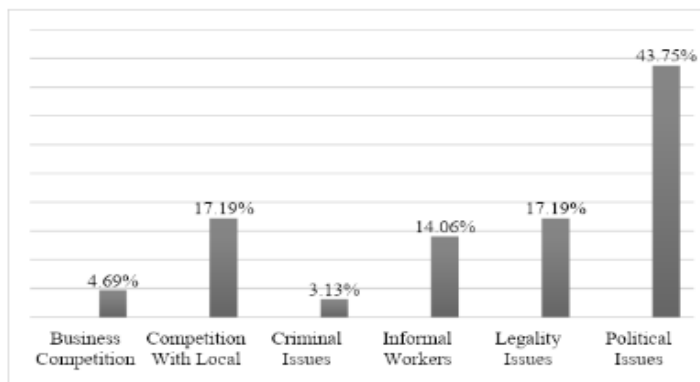
"In my view, this kind of government policy related to Chinese migrant workers is obviously not wise. Actually, our local laborers have the same skills as migrant workers. I have observed especially in the rural area in Eastern Indonesia, for instance, in East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, Merauke (Papua) there have been Chinese migrant workers. I saw at the airport, I knew them. I guessed, they will be employed in plantation and mining industries owned by big corporation" (Interview D, 2018).

This means that there are many who, despite being part of the government, openly disagree with the presence of Chinese migrant workers based on their experiences in the field. Furthermore, public views tend to be more negative since issues involving Chinese migrant workers are becoming increasingly significant. Through an online media survey, we found there were at least six major issues to explain why the public are seriously concerned about the threat posed by Chinese migrant workers. These issues involving Chinese migrant workers fall into six categories as follows: 1) political issues, 2) legal issues, 3) informal workers' issues, 4) issues of competition with local employees, 5) issues of market rivalry, and 6) criminal matters.

The data reveals that most of the threats that were posed by Chinese workers are related to political issues (43.75%), followed by two issues pertaining to legality and rivalry with local workers (17.19%). However, the percentage of Chinese migrant workers which is frequently affiliated with the

informal domestic sector, such as cleaning services, drivers, etc., is just 14.06 %. The last two issues that get a minor percentage are that Chinese workers are associated with business competition issues (4.69%) and are involved in criminal acts (3.13%) as presented in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Issues involving Chinese migrant workers



Source: online media survey

The above trend indicates that the public worries greatly about this situation. Since political issues received the highest percentage in the number of issues, this demonstrates that Chinese migrant workers are politically controversial, and the public wants the government to use their political will to change the policy surrounding them. For example, Ifan Seventeen an Indonesian artist who made a video that went viral after he witnessed a plane full of Chinese migrant workers during his trip to Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi stated:

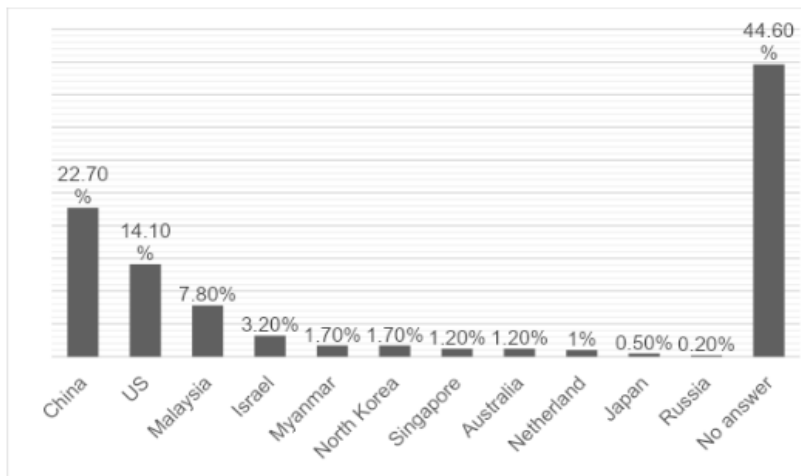
“At a time when Indonesia was still overloaded with human resources, there were still many unemployed, even we still sent many of our brothers to work betting lives in other countries, why do we have to enter labor from other countries ?!” (RMOL.ID, 2017).

This public concern was recognized by opposition groups since the issues became a provocative argument with which is possible to attack government and to attract potential voters. For instance, the opposition party insisted that:

“Chinese migrant workers receive special treatment while our workers are abandoned and even many are laid off. If so, we as people’s representatives will defend our people until we die. We will not let Indonesians be colonized in their own country” (Nainggolan, 2015).

Meanwhile, the issues surrounding Chinese migrant workers became profoundly influenced by public concern following news reports and investigations by national television. In a post on a well-established forum called “Indonesia lawyers club” in TVONE, the issues around Chinese migrant workers were deliberately channeled into the security issues. Former Minister of Justice and Human Rights as well as the State Secretary of Indonesia warned about the worst-case scenario surrounding the arrival of Chinese migrant workers. He has a suspicion that the Chinese workers’ migration to Indonesia allegedly involved a Beijing intelligence mission in relation to China’s conscription laws (TVonenews, 2018). The suspicion of Chinese interest in Indonesia, encouraged the public to recall what had occurred in the 1960s concerning the alleged involvement of the Chinese in national politics and the close relations with the Indonesian Communist Party (Zhou, 2014). As a result, the domination of Chinese migrant workers is narrated as a ‘threat’ not only to the local workers but also to the country’s sovereignty. These phenomena are in line with the survey that placed China as the most threatening country to Indonesia as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Indonesian perception of foreign threats



Source: Desnikia (2017)

Lastly, amid the Coronavirus outbreak, people in Southeast Sulawesi took part in a street protest to oppose the arrival of Chinese migrant workers. The protesters held a mass protest in front of the local House of Representatives (DPR, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat). They also blockaded the street which the workers would pass through. Due to the protesters ransacking the main building of the DPR, police violence and brutality erupted. Although, the protest gained public attention and became a trending topic on Twitter under the hashtag #TKAChina which refers to the Chinese workers, the government has stuck to its stance of allowing Chinese workers entry to Indonesia notably Southeast Sulawesi (Azanella, 2020).

Concerning the role of the public in raising awareness about the threat posed by Chinese migrant workers, this appears to contradict the basic assumptions of securitization theory. According to this approach, the public is positioned as an audience rather than a securitization actor (Buzan et al., 1998). The reality in Indonesian public discourse provides significant signs that the public is actively participating in the securitization of Chinese migrant workers despite the government's strong desire to counter this issue. In terms of the "referent object" aspect, the public perceives Chinese migrant laborers as a social, economic, and security threat. Nevertheless, opposition groups' involvement in the issue of Chinese migrant workers, which obviously has political motivations, cannot be avoided. In general, this section reveals that the public perceived Chinese migrant workers as a threat to the nation based on the following indicators. First, high unemployment in Indonesia. Second, a high number of issues involving Chinese migrant workers. And the third, negative perception of China is that they are a threat to national sovereignty. Henceforth, the following paragraphs evaluate the government of Indonesia's efforts to combat the securitization of Chinese migrant laborers.

9 Attempts to counter the issues around Chinese migrant workers: government views

Amid their ambition to bring more Chinese investment to Indonesia, the government has also attempted to counter the issues around Chinese migrant workers. The government is strongly convinced that the arrival of foreign workers especially from China is not a threat to Indonesian society. At the top level, President Jokowi for instance made the effort to convince voters of that:

"How could they want to come here with a smaller salary? I emphasize here so that rumors do not spread everywhere" (Ihsanuddin, 2016).

Jokowi's explanation seeks to emphasize to the public that Chinese migrant workers are not a problem and claims that they are just political rumors. Jokowi believes their arrival to Indonesia is not as big an issue as the media or public reports state. This is because the salary rate in Indonesia is not as high as they receive in their home country, China. Accordingly, it is impossible they would work in Indonesia which has a qualitatively low wage standard. He argues that the transfer of technology is the main reason behind the arrival of Chinese migrant workers. Jokowi's argument is backed by the Minister of Manpower and has totally refuted the issues related to the unskilled labor of Chinese migrant workers. He asserted that the problems arose during the placement process. According to Jokowi, there needs to be facilitators to communicate with local political structures and people during labor deployment. He states that:

“Well, unfortunately the facilitator is unable to provide an explanation to the local people so that it raises suspicion and impression as if the foreign workers are rough and illegal workers” (Fauzia, 2018).

In the inner circle of Jokowi's administration this policy to invite more Chinese migrant workers as part of an investment is fully supported. Indeed, the emotional statement from Jokowi's circle made public views became more resistant to, and upset with, government policy. The public tended to be disappointed and angry with the government's arrogant statement regarding the issue of Chinese workers. For instance, Jokowi's Coordinator Minister for Maritime Affairs Luhut Panjaitan was really emotional and refused any notion related to Chinese migrant workers. He stated that:

“There was a person I saw earlier in social media, he proudly accused there were 10 million Chinese working here, are we really crazy?” (Sukmana, 2018).

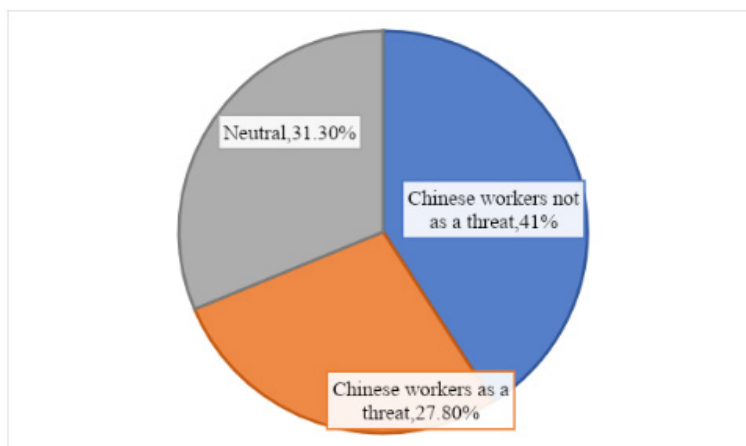
Further, Luhut also warned the public not to trust the transmitted video. He expected people to filter the news and to verify the facts for themselves. Concerning the public uproar around the video filming Chinese migrant workers, he defended them by stating that “Not all Chinese people are bastards, there were our people also are bastards too” (Tolok, 2020).

This statement indicated that the government has become frustrated and is not thinking about how to convince the public and to show understanding about the issues surrounding Chinese migrant workers. Instead, the government is using an authoritarian style of policy to handle uncontrolled

social media discourse, despite Indonesia being a democracy. For instance, Indonesian police arrested a street trader for hoax news dissemination in a case related to Chinese migrant workers (Sohuturon, 2019). In addition, Indonesian police headquarters in Southeast Sulawesi detained local people for spreading a viral video of Chinese migrant workers in Kendari airport (Budi, 2020). Government efforts to counter public discourse have shown that Chinese migrant workers are a problem and that this is an undeniable issue. Almost all government ministers, except the Ministry of Defense, strongly believe that Chinese migrant workers are not a threat to national sovereignty. Ministry of Law and Human Rights of Indonesia, for instance, argue that this is consequence of globalization. Yet, tight and preventive policies should be provided to ensure migrant workers remain under government surveillance (Ministry of Law and Human Rights, 2020). Mr Sofyan Djalil, another of Jokowi's ministers also commented that Indonesian people should not be so suspicious of Chinese migrant workers as they are actually an asset to the transfer of technology and they teach local workers to be more skillful (Kusumadewi & Armenia, 2015).

In further countering these issues reported by Indonesian workers, the government's position was bolstered by a polling result concerning the public perception of Chinese workers. A private survey company named Indo Barometer released a survey that showed only 27,8% of the respondents perceived Chinese workers as a threat. Conversely, 41% still believed that Chinese workers were not a threat, while the remaining (31.3%) chose a neutral answer.

Figura 7. Percepção dos indonésios sobre trabalhadores migrantes chineses



Source: Iqbal (2018)

Using social media influencers is common in Indonesia to build support for political agendas. This strategy has been used since early in Jokowi's presidential campaign (Irsyad, 2019). Specifically, Jokowi's social media teams were built as early as his contest for the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election against a Chinese-descendent, Basuki Purnama. Jokowi and his political teams are still using social media influencers to this date (Leiliyanti & Diyantari, 2016). Lastly, early in his second term of presidency, Jokowi called for all government civil servants to become influencers in order to disseminate the government's programs and achievements (Pratomo, 2019).

Partisan media companies also fully support Jokowi's program (Tapsell, 2019). For instance, *The Jakarta Post*, a well-known English newspaper in Indonesia and Jokowi's supporter, published an editorial column entitled "Editorial: We welcome foreign workers," which opined that Chinese migrant workers were employed due to their professionalism amid the local unskilled and low educated workforce (*The Jakarta Post*, 2018). Therefore, this paper arrives at the conclusion that the central government consistently refuses to acknowledge the issues and continues to convince the public that Chinese migrant workers are not a threat as it was publicly debated and apparently resolved. Moreover, the government, supported by mainstream media, forcefully persuaded Indonesians that the number of Chinese migrant workers was relatively small and not a threat. To achieve this result, they used private surveys and social media influencers as part of their strategy to counter the sentiment against Chinese migrant workers.

This section demonstrates that the Indonesian government is perceived as an anti-securitization actor. This also contradicts the fundamental assumptions of securitization theory, particularly with regard to the issue of immigration, which holds that the government tends to act as a securitization actor (Buzan et al., 1998) and not as an anti-securitization actor. The government seeks to mitigate the threat posed by Chinese foreign laborers, which has become a hot topic of discussion in Indonesian society, through his speech act. The government is attempting to refute that Chinese migrant laborers do not pose a threat to Indonesian society as part of its de-securitization strategy (Roe, 2006).

10 Failed securitization of Chinese migrant workers

Based on the discussion in the two previous sections there are two indicators of the failure of securitization of Chinese migrant workers. First, there has been no pause in the influx of Chinese migrant workers coming to

Indonesia. Even amid the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which was firstly found in Wuhan, China, migrant workers from China were consistently allowed to enter Indonesia particularly Southeast Sulawesi (Indonesian House of Representative, 2020). This policy, of course, became publicly controversial especially considering that the Indonesian government has firmly banned all flights to and from China (Costa & Suroyo, 2020).

Second, the Indonesian government strongly pushes the policy of importing Chinese migrant workers. The Indonesian government seems to be unable to search for an alternative solution and policy regarding Chinese migrant workers. The Indonesia-China joint venture infrastructure projects such as ports, airports, highways, power plants, etc., became the main reference for government decision making related to Chinese migrant workers. Local government is powerless to stop the policy of encouraging Chinese migrant workers. In the latest case, for instance, the Governor of Southeast Sulawesi, the epicenter of Chinese workers, was concerned that it was basically the prejudices of the people in the area that meant they did not want to accept the arrival of foreign workers (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

The above two indicators are arguably the result of the government's robust strategy to counter securitization of Chinese migrant workers. This strategy includes firstly, using government apparatus. From the highest level, namely president and ministers, all are given the consistent rhetoric that Chinese migrant workers are not a threat. Further, local authorities seem powerless over central government in this issue.

Secondly, the government is fully supported by mainstream media in countering the discourse surrounding Chinese migrant workers. This strategy includes the use of private surveys to convince the public about the lack of threat posed by Chinese workers. The results showed that the majority of respondents did not perceive Chinese workers as a threat (see Figure 7), but the details of the survey result uncovered a new fact: most of the respondents were Jokowi's supporters, approximately 53% (Iqbal, 2018). The survey also contradicted the other polls that confirmed that China is the most threatening country to Indonesia (see Figure 6).

Thirdly, the government is using social media influencers. As discussed in the previous section, Jokowi has been using social media influencers since the start of his campaign. In addition, Jokowi also strongly encourages civil servants to become influencers to disseminate government programs and success stories. In this context, they will influence social media discourse that shore up Jokowi's policy on Chinese migrant workers.

Finally, the securitization carried out by the public failed. Instead, the government is winning the battle to counter public discourse on Chinese

migrant workers. It means the public has to accept the reality that has been decided by the government, that Chinese migrant workers are not a threat.

The failure of securitization of Chinese migrant labor in Indonesia generates an intriguing theoretical examination. First, if a threat is politically damaging to the government, the government can implement a counter-securitization policy (Waever, 1995). Second, while experts claim that there are no specific parts of a desecuritization approach (Collective, 2006), the occurrence in Indonesia appears to demonstrate that in the digital world, deploying paid influencers on social media is capable of reducing security issues posed by the public. Third, there has been a shift in securitization actors, with the public emerging as a new securitization actor in Indonesia. This is consistent with Bigo (2006) criticism of the Copenhagen School, which holds that in the contemporary era, non-state actors must also be considered in securitization analyses as important actors (see Salter, 2008). In the Indonesian context, in addition to official desecuritization actors, there are non-state actors namely influencers and social media, to minimize the issues of Chinese migrant workers' threats.

11 Conclusion

In summary, this article has shown that Chinese migrant workers have become a huge national issue following investment from China that was welcomed by Jokowi. Unfortunately, this policy is at odds with the fact that unemployment has become a serious problem in Indonesia. Public discourse believes that Chinese migrant workers have entered Indonesia on a massive scale amid high unemployment rates among the locals. Migrant workers from China are employed in unskilled jobs. Their arrival, along with various cases, has apparently become a national threat. However, the government argued that foreign workers were only a small number, were professional workers only, and were not a threat to sovereignty.

Using the theory of securitization, this article found two contested security actors. First, the public as a negative securitizing actor which strongly attempts to define Chinese migrant workers as a threat. Second, the government as a counter-securitizing actor which sees Chinese migrant workers in a more positive light and defines them not as a threat.

In fact, securitization has failed as indicated by two parameters. First, the continuity of the inflow of Chinese migrant workers. Second, the government maintains its policy of allowing Chinese migrant workers to enter Indonesia amid mass protests and became a trending topic. Overall, this paper argues that the failure of securitization of Chinese migration

workers by the public was due to staunch counter-securitization carried out on a massive scale by government through political apparatus, mainstream media and social media influencers.

In light of the fact that this is preliminary research on Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia, this article acknowledges some limitations and offers suggestions. The data used is still arguably limited, although it is bolstered by primary data in the form of field interviews. This area of study will advance in the future if researchers concentrate on a variety of issues, such as conducting interviews with parties directly involved in the policy of importing Chinese migrant laborers and social media/network analysis. Interviews with local communities and employees who interact directly with Chinese migrant workers are necessary to gain a clear understanding of this issue. It is also feasible to analyze the issue of Chinese migrant workers through other lenses, such as the military, regional security, and international political competition, particularly between the United States and China. Other than that, research on the analysis of Chinese migrant laborers and social media remains essential. However, its reach must be broadened, for instance by analyzing Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms that are highly influential in public discourse regarding Chinese migrant laborers.

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ABSTRACT

The influx of Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia has become a contentious issue and is perceived publicly as a threat. Chinese migrant workers are accused of seizing local occupational employment amidst high local unemployment. The government has repeatedly told people that Chinese workers are not a threat. In fact, several issues involving Chinese workers have arisen, for example, related to residence permits, involvement in smuggling, involvement in crime, even suspicion that Chinese workers were members of security forces. This article examines two competing representations of Chinese migrant workers in Indonesia. First, a public representation which is negative and strongly attempts to securitize Chinese migrant workers. Second, the government representation that views Chinese migrant workers in a more positive light and that acts as a form of counter-securitization. The paper argues that the failure of securitization of Chinese migrant workers by the public is due to staunch counter-securitization carried out on a massive scale by the government through political apparatus, mainstream media, and social media influencers.

KEYWORDS

securitization, Chinese migrant workers, Indonesian, election.

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