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State of the Nation**Address 2007****Being Chinese is a personal decision and choice***Opinion and Editorial - February 12, 2008***Jennie S. Bev**, San Francisco

A recent statement by Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid, a much respected, loved and admired leading ulema and a former president of Indonesia, who said he is a descendant of princess Champa, whose son Tan Eng Hwan was known by his given Indonesian aristocrat name Raden Fatah, is a breath of fresh air for all people of Chinese descent in Indonesia, and those who believe in a multicultural society.

For once, a strong and charismatic religious leader of the majority has unabashedly and courageously broken the silence by being openly pluralistic and multiculturalistic. Gus Dur has set an example that being ethnic Chinese is not something to be embarrassed about nor to be feared; instead, it is to be acknowledged wholeheartedly.

Like Gus Dur, Barack Obama, a strong American politician who is on his way to becoming the first president of African descent, has also embraced his ethnicity with a lot of grace and composure. So has Eric Liu, a strong columnist, journalist, political analyst and a member of one of the most admired think tanks in Washington DC, who wrote the best-selling memoir *The Accidental Asian*. A rare personality of militant toughness and philosophical softness, Indonesian Army Brig. Gen. Tedy Jusuf is another exemplary case of a strong person with a multiculturalistic perspective.

While Gus Dur has probably lived his whole life not as a "typical" person of Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia, Obama, who has mixed blood of American Caucasian and native African, has consciously chosen to live in a black neighborhood in a Chicago suburb and to adopt the lifestyle of most African-Americans.

Liu, an American born whose parents were immigrants from Taiwan, has also consciously chosen to declare himself a Chinese, as stated in his memoir in bold letters.

Cited from his book, "Chinese civilization as transmitted to the Overseas Chinese depends, ultimately, on consent rather than descent. Chineseness isn't a mythical, more authentic way of being; it is just a decision to act Chinese."

Brig. Gen. Jusuf, whom I had the privilege of hosting during his recent visit to the United States, has shown how being a member of Chinese ethnicity is a lifelong pride that he will always treasure and is a fundamental cause of his cultural activism, which is reflected in his efforts to embody Tionghoa Indonesia as an ethnicity, as symbolized in one of the pavilions at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah.

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His achievements as a strong military leader and a member of a Indonesia-based think tank portray him as a rare blend of the so-called *wun* (intellectual) and *wu* (physical strength or martial arts) in Chinese philosophy, which is based on yin and yang. Above all, his admiration for Indonesia as his homeland has been echoed in his works and philosophical standings between the two cultures.

Embracing one's culture, particularly one that is often stereotyped as "less desirable" and, unfortunately, during the New Order under Soeharto was considered a "criminal act", as anything Chinese from written characters, publications, to bearing Chinese names was legally forbidden, might have felt like swallowing a bitter pill.

Today, people of Chinese ethnicity is enjoying more freedom in expressing their cultural traits, which is something to be grateful for. The new Citizenship Law of 2006 has also stated that those who were born in Indonesia automatically become "native" Indonesians, which sounds quite comforting de jure-wise.

With all those encouraging news, it is good timing for all Indonesians to return to our roots and embrace the missing pieces of ourselves with awareness that we are all part of the human race. After all, raciality is distinctiveness of one's race or ethnicity that makes the world more colorful and beautiful, which should be distinguished from racism, which is a belief that one's characteristics and abilities are determined by race. Raciality is something to be grateful for, while racism is something that we are learning to undo and unlearn throughout our lifetime.

Racism itself is an obsolete concept as the folks behind the Genographic Project, a joint effort between *National Geographic* and IBM, have been collecting DNA markers to create the largest database that would record human migration patterns and ancestral origins.

Eventually, this project will provide some evidence that all people from all races and ethnicities are related to one another, and that most likely every person on Earth possesses multiple DNA markers coming from multiple ethnicities. Eventually, it would prove that skin color is merely a small part of one's genetic makeup, not an identity for belonging to a certain class, which comes with privileges, in society.

However, one of my *Tracy Press* column readers said, "Being 'post-racial', as Martin Luther King, Jr. once beckoned that he dreamed someday his children will be judged by the content of their characters instead of by the color of their skin, might always be a utopia." He further said that he merely hopes for tolerance and acceptance for who he is, whose skin color is different from the rest of the population.

As a human being and a citizen of the world, I have embraced and acknowledged my three cultures consciously: Indonesian by birth place, Chinese by blood line and American by residence. I will always

introduce myself as such because I am not just one of them. I am all three and something greater. I have a dream that someday, the whole world will transcend as one.

The writer is a columnist and a social commentator. She is also known as the motivator and inspirator of the JiangZhe Sianghainese Indonesian Young Leaders Fraternity. She can be found at JennieSBev.com.

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