

# Questioning Identity Politics in Multicultural Community: Evidence in Kota Tangerang (2009-2013)

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Keywords: *Akhlaqul Karimah* Symbol, Identity Politics, Politics of Multiculturalism

Abstract: The regional autonomy has opened more rooms for political identity. This study examines how majority and minority groups respond to dominant identity politics promoted in public space by a local government in the multicultural community. Examining Tangerang City as a case study, this study gathered data through interviews from 30 respondents consisting of religious leaders, colleg students, and government employees from various religious backgrounds along with observation and local policy analysis. This study shows how identity politics in a multicultural community is perceived difeerently by respondents in two main respondents. One, identity politics is positively perceived as it is a form of public education and supporting tools for the government to convey their messages. On the other hand, it invites injustice to those of minority groups. The identity politics used by local government showcases exclusivism and discrimination overlooking those of minorities. The identity politics practice undermines pluralism as a character of a place. It shows how government regressively accepts differences. This study reveals how the Indonesian community needs to be treated equally in public places to represent their rights as citizens as Indonesia's spirit of Multiculturalism. This study also suggest that the politics of multiculturalism can be an alternative to response the injustices and does not eliminate the goodness of identity politics practice.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Diversity is a dominant character of Indonesia as a nation, and is in the country's motto, 'Unity in Diversity' and Pancasila (Indonesia's five principles). Islam is the religion of the majority, but Indonesia has never become an Islamic state. The state form is based on the agreement on the founding fathers when formulating Pancasila as the national principles. However, attempts to include Islam in politics and public lives continue to persist. Regional autonomy in 1999 as transfer power from the central government to regional leaders provides more spaces for those of who in power to incorporate Islam, as identity politics, in many regions in Indonesia.

Moreover, identity politics practice is becoming a trend in many parts of Indonesia, the practice, however, triggers inequality and discrimination against minority groups. This study provides an overview that use interpretation and public opinion as a measuring tool to understand whether the identity politics practice can nurture the diversity. This research is a case study of Islamic Identity

Politics practice in Tangerang City during the government of Wahidin Halim period 2009-2013. Tangerang city with the nickname of a thousand industrial city is a gathering place of various religions and ethnicities. Tangerang City Government uses the word '*akhlaqul karimah*' (Respectful Behavior) which originated from Arabic as the motto and listed in Tangerang's local vision. The government implements *akhlaqul karimah* as a motto of the city into several forms. There is the policy, and the symbols of Islam spread out in city public space. The word *Allah* (God) and *Al Asmaul Husna* (The names of God) are used in many public signs in main roads. A mosque is used as the city icon for the city government next to the local government offices. *Akhlaqul Karimah* as well manifested in city regulation on Muslim dress code for students and government employee, no-alcohol and no prostitute regulation.

This study uses the symbolic interactionism approach with qualitative methods of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, field notes, and documentation. The use of this method is based on the reason for the depth and the

details of data obtained. It is important because the main source of data is from the results of the opinions, interpretations, attitudes, and actions of several important community groups. The Interviews were conducted with 30 respondents from 6 religious leaders -Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism- 18 religious activists of each religion (each consisting of 3 males and 3 female activists), 3 Muslim and non-Muslim students, and 3 government employees of Tangerang City Muslim and Non Muslim. Data collection took five months from March to July 2010. The number of respondents mentioned above is limited and certainly can not generalize and represent all the people of Tangerang. However, this research can capture the narrative or voice of people who have similar characteristics to the respondents, and the findings of research can be applied in similar contexts.

This study interpretes that the identity politics practice as an educative and progressive policy for the city of Tangerang. However, Arabization attached to the symbols in public spaces is interpreted as exclusive and discriminatory against minorities. Politics of multiculturalism can be an alternative policy in responding to the injustice of the identity politics practice and does not eliminate the positive side of the identity politics practice.

## 2 THE LITERATURE REVIEWS

The literature reviews is divided into two categories, the studies about implementation the identity politics and the studies about the implementetion of politics multiculturalism. The debate of implementation of politics multiculturalism can be found in Amy Gutmann (ed) (2017), *Multiculturalism: Examining The politics of Recognition*. (al, 2017) This book compares how the politics of multiculturalism define into some different ways by multiculturalist and libertarian scholars. The multiculturalist is represented by Charles Taylor who emphasizes that the politics of recognition is the most appropriate way for the state to response plurality. He shows how Canada is become a success country in applying the politics of recognition. While libertarian scholars are represented by K. Anthony Appiah, Jurgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockfeller, Michael Walzer and Susan Wolf. They emphasize neutrality is the best way for the state in responding the plurality. At least, the are five discussion which become the subject of debate between them. *First*, The concept good of life of society. *Second*, basic recognition of community equality. *Third*, public

sphere of plural society. *Fourth*, the best role of government in responding the diversity. *Five*, the life foundation that is applied in plural society.

The other literature is used by the authors is Bikhu Parekh (2017), with the title *Rethinking Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*. (Parekh, 2017) Parekh describe deeply about multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is not only about differences and identities, but involves things are embedded and supported in culture, such as how a group of people understand themselves through a set of beliefs and practices from culture. Multicultural society involves three types of cultural diversity, such as subcultural diversity, perspectival diversity and communal diversity. The implementation of politics of multiculturalism can be seen when Pareks takes an examples of multicultural society form from a few countries (England, France, Turkish, Canada, India, etc). The dialog amongst cultural groups is the key of successful of realizing multiculturalism in harmony.

Another study is Will Kymlicka (1996) in *Multicultural Citezenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Right*. (Kymlicka, 1996) Unlike the other contemporary libertarian, who consider the politics of recognition is contrary to the concept of liberalism. In his book, Kymlicka emphasizes that the concept of politics of recognition in line with principles of liberalism, such as individual freedom and social justice. This can be seen in the determination of three rights of minority groups that should be accomodated by the state, such as self-government rights for sub-state national groups, no discrimination rights for minority polyethnic groups, and special representation rights for minority groups in state legislature. For Kymlicka, citizenship rights are a central issue in the future of liberal traditions in all parts of the world.

There are studies examining identity politics in Indonesia. One of them is the study has been conducted by CSRC (*Center for The Study of Religion and Culture*) UIN Jakarta (2007) with the title *Syariat Islam dan HAM, Dampak Perda Syari'at terhadap Kebebasan Sipil, Hak-hak Perempuan, dan Non Muslim*. (S. Kamil, 2007) This study explores the impact of the implementation of politics islamic identity in six regions in Indonesia. There are Bireun Districts, Tasikmalaya Districts, Bulukumba Districts, Bima Districts, Indramayu Districts and Tangerang City. This study focuses on how the identity politics impact to the human rights (expression freedom right, religion freedom right and fear freedom right) of three groups, namely women, non-Muslims and civil liberties. This study shows that identity politics bring positive impacts to society, such as increasing piety and public security. Besides, the identity politics threaten the civil

liberties, women and non Muslims rights. The identity politics is also considered to be less procedurally democratic and it is only political agenda. The regulation of identity politics has invited intolerance and exclusiveness in society. Moreover, some law in identity politics frame also raise doubts in the community regarding the reflection of sincerity in worship, because worship affairs are imposed by the state.

The other study of contestation of identity politics also conducted by CSRC UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (2011). They concluded that the penetration of Islamic symbols in public space does not threaten democracy in Indonesia (N. Hasan, I. Abubakar, U. I. N. S. H. J. C., 2011). Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif (2011) also stressed that the practice of identity politics in Indonesia would not risk pluralism (Maarif, 2010). However, there has not been a study on the politics of multiculturalism as a response to the practice of identity politics. The study, therefore, will highlight how identity politics can create multiculturalist politics practice. The diverse community in Indonesia requires a policy that acknowledges the plurality. The government considers the identity politics as an accommodation towards the majority groups. On the other hand, identity politics leads to injustice against minority groups. The politics of multiculturalism is an alternative to response to the injustices and does not eliminate the goodness of identity politics practice.

### 3 THE EXISTENCE OF ISLAMIC SYMBOLS IN PUBLIC SPACES

The existence of *akhlaqul karimah* symbol in public spaces of Tangerang City invites two different responses, between those who support and refuse. There are three positive opinions posted by the respondents. First, the symbol of *akhlaqul karimah* is a form of education for the community. 13 respondents stated that the launching of *akhlaqul karimah* as Tangerang's local vision along with the Islamic symbols in the public space aims to create noble behavior amongst citizens. Six respondents from 13 respondents above assessed the performance of government employees positively. For example, government employees are no longer in public places during working hours, such as markets, restaurants, or malls. Four respondents also added that the government is capable of providing good examples to the public. For example, the government issued a ban on smoking regulations for government employees and students. Creating a positive image in the eyes of society is important as

a prerequisite for the realization of excellent service. Excellence public services will affect the supportive collective action of society to the government because awareness and volunteerism are not coercive (Yuningsih, 2004). Successful government programs bring progress to the performance of government employees are one of the things that people are looking forward to seeing.

Second, the symbol of *akhlaqul karimah* gives the religious image of Tangerang City. For eight respondents, the spread of *akhlaqul karimah* symbols in public spaces create an atmosphere city of Islamic nuances. This statement is based on the assumption that the symbol of *akhlaqul karimah* is a reminder of society to increase the piety. However, this assumption seems to require further research to prove it. Based on research CSRC UIN Jakarta (2011) on the implementation of Islamic Sharia in six cities in Indonesia, stated that the formalization of religious by the state resulted in compulsion and false obedience towards religious laws (S. Kamil, 2007). The symbolization of religion cannot be used as a benchmark for the piety of society so that the government is expected to be able to internalize religious values into the soul of society not only in the form of symbols.

Third, *akhlaqul karimah* as the motto of Tangerang City is a form of response to the social deviation. Local regulation No.7/2005 on alcohol bans and local regulation No.8/2005 on prostitution are two of the most popular policies in Tangerang society as a concrete action of the *akhlaqul karimah* symbol. Five respondents from Muslim and non-Muslim are optimistic toward the application of two regulations on alcohol and prostitution ban while the remaining respondents are skeptical. For those who feel optimistic, two regulations are a response to the anxiety of the people over the years. They feel that the atmosphere of Tangerang City is more secure after the implementation of these two regulations. For example, at night, sex workers are no longer seen on the main roads of Jl. TMP Taruna and Jl. Veteran. Respondents feel safe when walking after 10 PM.

Furthermore, these respondents demand a higher penalty sanction for the perpetrators of irregularities a more deterrent effect. The political conception of Islamic identity uses mechanism and completion as a defense for all the nation's crisis that works to cure all diseases caused by the multidimensional crisis that befall Indonesia (Z. Kamal). On the other hand, the expectations of the respondents on the effectiveness of the law are to prove the weakness of the police as the state apparatus in providing security to the community.

Skeptics -consisting of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents-, argue that the implementation of the prostitution law threatens ignites anxiety in civil society. For four respondents, the law application is not appropriate in industrialized societies such as Tangerang City. The implementation of the local regulation causes fears, in particular for women to go out at night. They worry about being suspected as prostitutes. This fear is based on the provisions in the regulations -paragraph 1 article 4- on which the referral to arrest on suspicion. The provision does not uphold the principle of the presumption of innocence which should be guaranteed by the legislation. The legislation stressed the importance of everyone's right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty legally in a court (Hak Asasi Manusia, 1999). It shows that the Tangerang City prohibition regulation issued a conflict with some law that was higher above it (Media Indonesia). For example, Law No.7/1984 on Ratification of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, Law No.39/1999 on Human Rights, Law No.112/2005 on Civil Rights convention and Law No.10/2004 on the Establishment of Legislation. Tangerang City is an industrial city, where most of the population is urban people who come from different regions. Women working late into the night are inevitable. Thus, the application of local regulations to the provisions of article 4, paragraph 1 is not appropriate.

The skeptics also assume that the concept of *akhlaqul karimah* does not bring significant change. The enforcement both regulations do not eliminate the practice of prostitution and liquor in Tangerang City, but it only creates an unclear definition to those of perpetrators. Even for three non-Muslim respondents from four respondents above added that the impact of the implementation of the law is repressive. Furthermore, respondents commented on how prostitute ban regulation is a catchphrase and is not the solution of the real problem. This assumption is supported by Rida Hesti Ratnasari (2009) in her thesis, that the implementation of regulation in Tangerang City has not been able to combat prostitution, as a practice of prostitution still operates in secret. The regulation does not make sex workers lose their jobs. They even practice prostitution outside the Tangerang City, such as Daan Mogot West Jakarta, Kampung Melayu, Teluk Naga and other borders (Ratnasari, 2009).

The interpretation controversy comes from the using of Arabic word in '*akhlaqul karimah*' symbol. First, those who do not have a problem with the Arabization symbols, and second those who disagree

of it. Seven respondents from Muslim religious leaders, Confucian and Hindu religious leaders, are unwilling to engage in controversy over the use of the language. For them, the use of Arabic with the majority language is intended for people to understand the meaning of symbols better. The most important thing is the substance not in the language used. Nor did the Confucian people question the language used in symbols, even assuming the Islamic language has acculturated them. The Islamic religious leaders even ask the government to continue to improve and spawn various other policies within the framework of *akhlaqul karimah*. The emergence of such views indicates the agreement and support to the government policy in applying the symbol of the majority religion. The above fact also implies the apologetic attitudes of some minority groups of a public understanding that majority groups have a larger portion to present their beliefs than any other group exclusively.

As for some other respondents, both Muslims and non-Muslims put forward the opposite interpretation. The use of the majority language in a city symbol indicates and causes opposite behaviors. First, the government is exclusive, 13 respondents stated that the symbol of the city by using the Arabic language indicates that the government only represents a particular religion (Islam) and does not consider other religions. They opt to replace *akhlaqul karimah* words with Indonesian term. For example, good manners or good behavior. They add that the application of Islamic symbolization to the public sphere raises the desire for minority groups to meet their religious needs, such as the permit for the construction of the Catholic church, where Tangerang City has only one Catholic church. As Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im pointed out, one of the dominant traits of religion is to be exclusive, where its adherents tend to negate other religious traditions (*shari'a*), assuming their religious traditions are superior (An-Na'im, 1996). Government exclusiveness causes minority groups to feel second class citizens. The use of symbolic language using Indonesian language creates a better public understanding of the meaning of symbols and does not cause ambiguity.

Secondly, six respondents from minority groups feel alienated and do not understand the meaning of symbols. This alienation causes them to be unable to define the meaning of symbols and to assume that the symbol of *akhlaqul karimah* is directed only to Muslims. The symbol of the city is a public agreement that should be understood meaning and usefulness by society (Charon, 2010). This fact

becomes important requirements in the existence of a symbol of the city. First, the meaning and representation of symbols are not well conveyed to some people. Second, the symbol of the city should be a profound meaning for the collective life of a society.

Third, the use of language majority in symbols is discriminatory, thus raising the assumption for four respondents that minority groups can not eradicate social problems in society. On the other hand, the assumption suggests that the Muslim group as the majority has a greater responsibility to provide good examples to other communities.

The disapproval of some of these people shows the form of silent violence. Eight respondents from 23 respondents who disagreed added that they did not dare to express their disapproval in public as they feel like a minority group. For them, they can only talk within their limited circles who they know have the same attitude or mumble to themselves. The attitude shown by these minorities leads to the government's tendency to be hegemonic. In a hegemonic perspective, the global culture that the government represents is singular. All cultural expressions including their symbolic expressions refer to the dominant expression (Ismail, 2012). Government exclusivism causes minority groups to have limited freedom because they accept and agree on something that the state elite persuades. Even the imposition of a system of symbolism and meaning towards other groups, so that its legitimate part is the symbol of violence (Jenkins).

Associated with the influence of symbols for 30 respondents, 21 respondents feel the influence, while the other nine respondents did not feel any significant change. For the first group, the *akhlakul karimah* symbol is more influential in the condition of Tangerang City as a whole than to themselves as citizens. Regarding policy, the government issued local ordinance (Perda) No.7/2005 on the Prohibition of Liquor, local ordinance (Perda) No.8/2005 on Prohibition of Prostitution, Regulation No. 5 Year 2010 on Non-Smoking Area, and other regulations on education, health, and religion. The government has also succeeded in increasing significant development and achievement in education, regional finance, environment, health, infrastructure, etc. The government is more open by providing communication media for the community through "Sms Walikota." Answers to community suggestions and criticism are published on a local daily every Monday. The government opens a line of communication through the official website of the Tangerang City Government. On the other hand, 9

of 30 respondents stated that the progress made by Tangerang City government indirectly succeeded in closing down the resistance that occurred in the counter against the phenomenon of Islamic symbolization. The government's hegemonic attitude is considered a price to be paid for the progress that has taken place in Tangerang City.

#### 4 POLITICS MULTICULTURALISM: ANSWERING PLURALITY CHALLENGES

The politics of multiculturalism emphasizes a policy that recognizes and accommodates diverse identities within a plural society. By nature, human beings are strongly related to their cultural identity, and human beings are culturally different. Two key words in the application of multicultural politics are recognition and accommodation. In the context of Tangerang City, the injustice of the practice of Islamic symbolization in the public sphere is proved by the disagreement of 23 people from 30 respondents to the use of Arabic in the city's motto and the symbols. They declared the government to be exclusive, discriminatory and some of them did not understand the meaning of symbols. In the multiculturalism, the government is not justified to legalize a concept of goodness possessed by one identity (al, 2017). Public spaces are an appropriate means for governments to reflect recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity. There is no doctrine or political ideology that can reflect the full truth about human life. Each of the individuals embedded in a particular culture that has differences in the concepts of kindness and also has limitations. Therefore, each culture requires another culture to better its understanding and broadens intellectual and moral horizons (Parekh, 2017). Realizing the dialogue can be mutually beneficial between cultures.

Dialogue is one way for governments to facilitate equality of identity groups. The research findings show that there is a demand of minority groups to be recognized and accommodated for their needs as identity groups. The value of the equality of society is not seen through uniformity, but equal treatment must be the basis of human differences. The same treatment only forms humans in one particular direction and is blind to differences (Parekh, 2017). Accommodation of cultural differences is a step towards achieving a tolerant and inclusive

democracy (Kymlicka, 1996). The government is required to identify and acknowledge the needs of identity group through dialogue and negotiation. Thus, the government can establish a flexible and sensitive policy based on the plurality.

Therefore, the practice of Islamic symbolization is a form of government accommodation to one majority group. One of the most important values in the politics of multiculturalism is the provision of accommodation to identity groups, especially minorities. (Kymlicka, 1996). The results showed that 26 people from 30 respondents stated that the presence of Islamic symbolization uses the public space as something educational towards the community. This statement shows the goodness of identity politics. In other words, the application of Islamic symbolization is a step toward the practice of further multicultural politics. The government can achieve equity if it can accommodate other cultural needs to other identity groups.

The needs of identity recognition in public sphere more demanding. Recognition is a basic need of humankind. For Kymlicka, the social justice can be applied by realizing three rights for the minority groups, such as self-government rights for sub-state national groups, no discrimination rights for minority polyethnic groups, and special representation rights for minority groups in state legislature. Citizenship rights are a central issue in the future of liberal traditions in all parts of the world. (Kymlicka, 1996) Canada is one of the country which can be mentioned as a success country in applying the politics multiculturalism. There are three groups as the main subject of the application of the politics of multiculturalism in Canada, including the national minority groups (sub-state national groups), such as the Quebec community, indigenous ethnic groups and immigrant groups. That three groups get special rights to fulfill the cultural aspirations they did not get before. For example, Quebec people get special autonomy to develop themselves in terms of managing their own government affairs -federalism-. The other accommodation for Quebec people is special representative rights to the state legislature. Likewise for indigenous groups, indigenous assimilation policies are changed into policies that can accommodate their cultural needs, such as territorial rights agreements, language rights, self-government rights, fishing rights, hunting rights and so on. As for immigrant groups, the Canadian government also provides accommodation as well as restrictions. Accommodation provided by the Canadian government includes, among other things,

anti-discrimination legal protection, a financing program. Likewise there are cultural boundaries given by the state to immigrants, such as the use of sharp weapons at religious ceremonies, wearing veils, voting rights in elections, and placing religious symbols on public institutions. The specific policies above are a way to improve their equality before the public. In addition to specific policies, the Canadian government implemented several provisions, such as the provision of religious schools -Catholic and Protestant-. Besides, Britain and France become the official languages of Canada by considering the position of the majority in their society. (Bertrand, 2011)

The key of politics multiculturalism practices in Canada is the flexibility and state's ability to adapt the identity differences. Canada's success should be exemplified by the government to be implemented in Tangerang City. For example, Muslim dress regulations for government employees and school children can still be applied as an accommodation for the needs of Muslim groups. Some respondents show a goodness *Akhlaqul Karimah* regulation. However, the Tangerang City government is also required to be flexible towards non-Muslims. The government needs to issue a written policy of dispensation or exemptions for non-Muslims and those who consider that Muslim dress is not part of belief. This kind of policy can prevent exclusivity and discrimination for minority groups.

Likewise with Regional Regulation No. 8/2005 concerning the Prohibition of Prostitution as the implementation of the *akhlaqul karimah*. There are words in that regulation considered as multiple interpretations and discriminatory. This case invited many critics and demands to replace the biased words with clearer and easier words. At this point, government flexibility is needed by replacing the words in the contents of the law that can be accepted by all circles. However, the practice of prostitution is a form of social deviation. Flexibility is the right way to implement Perda in a total manner based on justice. Flexibility also can be applied in implementation of Regulation No.7/2005 concerning Prohibition of Liquor. For example, Hindus who use alcoholic elements in upakara (ritual means) - as embodiments of Panca Tattwa - are given exceptions and legal protection during religious rituals. It will show that the government respects the sacredness of the cultural traditions of cultural group. As Bhikhu Parekh emphasized that the concepts of respect, equality and opportunity need to be interpreted in culturally sensitive behavior. Facilities, resources or a series of actions only become silent and passive

opportunities if they do not get cultural impetus or cultural knowledge. (Parekh, 2017)

Basically, the symbolization of Islam in the public sphere and its policies is a cultural expression of the majority. This needs to be respected with the note that the Tangerang City government issued a special policy aimed at other cultural groups as a form of government flexibility and sensitivity. The ability of the government to guarantee the plurality and differences is an important value in the policy of multiculturalism. Thus, the government can be fair to the majority and minority groups at once. As Parsudi Suparlan stated that the application of multiculturalism can be carried out if political decisions are able to guarantee equality of plurality. This is based on the concept of justice by eliminating stereotypes and prejudices in implementing policies and law enforcement. (Suparlan, 2008)

The Islamic symbols in the public sphere of Tangerang City basically has same meaning as other religions belief. Unfortunately, the arabization which attached in symbols invite suspicions, debates and at same time close the value of goodness which are contained of the symbols. The universalization of symbols in the city public space is the right step to eliminate public distrust to the government. The government has to rethink the characteristics of Tangerang City that can be felt, admittedly even proudly shared by every citizen. Thus, the government becomes a unifying agent of society that is friendly to the diversity in terms of tradition, religion and ethnicity.

In the broader context, Indonesia has the potential for the continuity of multicultural politics. The diversity of identity is something that has been interpreted appropriately by the motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Different State Remains One Purpose). Indonesia is also a country that adopts a multi-party system in the democracy. This system allows minority groups to have a party to voice their aspirations. Likewise, regional autonomization can serve as an opportunity for local governments to issue policies by the characteristics of their respective regional diversity.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The majority and minority groups interpret the identity politic practices in Tangerang City in several ways. First, a form of education for the community. Second, giving a religious impression to the community. Third, a form of government in responding to the positive social deviation. While

other respondents consider the policy is repressive, Arabization in symbols also raises both approval and scepticism from the respondents. For those who agree, the using of majority language in symbols is meant to make people understand more about symbols. While the sceptics considered that the government was exclusive and discriminatory, even some non-Muslim respondents did not understand the meaning of the symbols. This fact shows that there is the value of goodness as well as a weakness in the practice of identity politics. The identity politics is capable of bringing regional progress but against the plurality. Thus, the politics of multiculturalism can be used as a policy for local governments in responding to the good and the drawback of the practice of identity politics. This study aims to be a recommendation for local governments in making policies that are a plurality friendly, and contributing to other researchers who want to investigate the same study.

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